

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 6, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20420

Secretary Collins:

We write with concern about reports that the Veterans Affairs (VA) Phoenix Health Care System plans to lay off 15% of its staff—around 800 employees—including providers and support staff as part of VA’s planned reduction in force. This will lead to delays in care that will hurt Arizona veterans and erode their trust in their care.

According to an Office of Inspector General (OIG) report published last August,¹ the VA Phoenix Health Care System was already facing severe occupational staffing shortages in primary care, mental health, radiology, nursing, and health technician professions. It was also facing severe occupational staffing shortages in nine non-clinical support positions that allow providers to more quickly turn over rooms and appropriately assist veterans. Because of these staffing shortages, the average wait time for new patients at most Phoenix-area VA facilities is above the standard of 20 days for primary care and mental health appointments.

The efforts to cut providers and support staff is an egregious affront to the trust that the VA Phoenix Health Care System has been building since 2014, when numerous veterans were found to have died while waiting for appointments to be scheduled. The VA Congressional Liaison wrote to us that the “initial planning goal is to reduce VA employment levels to 2019 numbers” because “even though the Biden Administration astronomically grew the department’s budget and number of employees, VA wait times and backlogs increased.” This utterly fails to take into account the over 400,000 veterans who are now enrolled in VA health care—including over 9,000 Arizonans²—and 6.1 million veterans who have been screened for toxic exposure due to the landmark PACT Act.

Our veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors deserve the highest standard of care. VA routinely provides that—but only if there are providers and support staff to see them. We urge you to reevaluate your reduction in force plans and request that you answer the following questions by April 30:

¹ <https://www.vaoig.gov/reports/national-healthcare-review/oig-determination-veterans-health-administrations-severe-0>

² <https://department.va.gov/pactdata/interactive-dashboard/>

1. How many employees and contractors of the VA Phoenix Health Care System do you plan to terminate as part of the VA directive to lay off 15% of VA staff?
2. How many clinical staff at the VA Phoenix Health Care System do you plan to terminate, by occupational series?
3. How many non-clinical staff do you plan to terminate at the VA Phoenix Health Care System, by occupational series?
4. What is your timeline for laying off such employees and contractors?
5. Within two weeks, please provide a time to brief the signatories below on your detailed plan on how, in light of its planned reduction in force, the VA Phoenix Health Care System will maintain a high standard of care, reduce appointment wait times, and overcome severe staffing shortages.

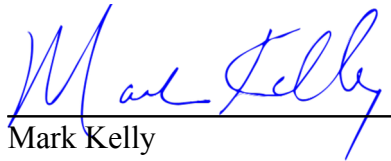
Sincerely,



Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress