

United States Senate

January 8, 2024

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

I recently hosted a field hearing in Florida through the Senate Special Committee on Aging entitled "Issues Facing Veterans: Access to Care, Services, and Economic Opportunity." This hearing brought to light the critical issue of inconsistent rules across Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities regarding service animal access.

During this hearing, representatives from the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) and K9 Partners for Patriots highlighted the challenges veterans face due to the varying policies across different VA facilities regarding service animal entry. It is evident that the lack of uniformity negatively impacts our veterans, hindering their access to care and services.

Federal facilities, including VA facilities, while exempt from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), must adhere to the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA), which requires all buildings financed with federal funds and used by the public to be fully accessible and usable by handicapped individuals. It is crucial that we ensure veterans with disabilities have the ability to bring their service animals with them when entering these facilities. Service animals play a vital role in supporting veterans' mental health and aiding those with physical disabilities in navigating their surroundings safely and independently. Recognizing the unique bond between veterans and their service animals, it is only fitting that we extend every effort to accommodate their needs.

I urge the VA to quickly establish clear and consistent guidelines for service animal access across all facilities. Doing so will demonstrate our commitment to supporting the overall health and well-being of our veterans. This is not just a matter of convenience, it is a matter of ensuring that those who have sacrificed for our nation are afforded the dignity, respect and safety they deserve.

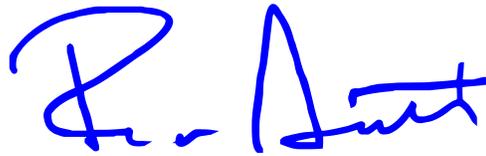
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I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your prompt action addressing the concerns raised during the field hearing. Thank you for your dedication to serving our veterans, and I am hopeful that we can work together to implement positive change for those who have served our country with honor and distinction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rick Scott". The signature is stylized with a large initial "R" and a prominent "S".

Rick Scott

United States Senator