Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

December 9, 2016

The Honorable David J. Shulkin
Under Secretary for Health
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Dr. Shulkin,

We are writing to express our concerns regarding several, long-unfilled vacancies at two Vet Centers in the State of Maine. The Readjustment Counseling Service provides a variety of social and psychological services to veterans, and due to the current staffing vacancies at Vet Centers in Caribou and Portland, veterans are not receiving the level and consistency of care they deserve. This has unfortunately been a persistent problem, and we urge the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to act quickly to fill vacancies with qualified staff to ensure our veterans can access the quality care they have earned. We also ask that you provide us with a hiring timeline for filling these vacancies.

With one of the highest number per capita of veterans in the country, Maine has five Vet Centers. Of the five Vet Centers in Maine, the two in Caribou and Portland have had inadequate staff levels for months:

- Caribou, Maine: The Caribou Vet Center is tasked with serving the needs of Veterans throughout Aroostook County. While the Center is authorized to have five employees, it has had multiple vacancies for some time. This lack of availability of consistent counseling is a disservice to the Veterans in Northern Maine.

- Portland, Maine: The Portland Vet Center is authorized to have a staff of six, but currently has a staff of four and lacks administrative staff. As such, we understand that current staff may be covering both their jobs addressing mental health needs, as well as taking on the additional responsibilities of basic administrative duties.

We understand that the Veterans Health Administration's Regional Counseling Service is in the process of overhauling the human resources processes related to Vet Centers, and we support this effort to optimize the hiring practices. Nevertheless, the vacancies in Caribou and Portland have been open for far too long and need to be filled as soon as possible. Our veterans selflessly served the United States and their communities, and as such, they deserve access to the highest

level of care when they return home. We urge you to fill these positions as soon as possible so that no veteran is denied the care they deserve. If you have any questions about this request, please contact us directly or have your staff contact William Ellis (King) at 202-224-5344 or Mike Wakefield (Collins) at 202-224-3913.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Bruce Poliquin
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20420