

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4606

May 4, 2022

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

I write to express my opposition to your decision to require all Department of Veterans Affairs employees to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. I have grave concerns regarding how this mandate will impact veterans' care and affect VA employees with deeply held religious or medical objections to the COVID-19 vaccine. VA employees should not have to face losing their livelihoods over a personal medical decision – particularly when evidence shows that the COVID-19 vaccine does not prevent contraction or transmission of the virus. These vaccine mandates are unacceptable and antithetical to the freedoms the veterans you serve fought to defend.

As the Representative of thousands of veterans who reside in rural areas, I am particularly disturbed by the impact firing thousands of VA medical staff will have on veterans' access to care. As you know, 2.7 million veterans reside in rural areas and face unique challenges due to medical staff shortages and long distances to VA medical facilities.¹ I fear these vaccine mandates will not only exacerbate these issues but will also increase VA wait times for veterans across the country. This would be an unacceptable outcome. The VA should put veterans first – not partisan politics.

Additionally, I am deeply troubled by reports that the VA may not accept all employees' religious or medical vaccine exemption requests. A number of VA employees have contacted my office worried that they will have to choose between the job they love or following tenets of their faith. This is unacceptable and I request that you immediately grant all religious and medical exemption requests for the COVID-19 vaccine. As a country founded on religious liberty, there is no right more precious than this. Your Administration is bound by the Constitution to protect these rights.

Because of these concerns, I request you provide my office with the following information:

1. To date, how many VA employees have requested a religious or medical exemption for the COVID-19 vaccine? Please breakdown by Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN) and job title.
2. To date, how many religious or medical exemptions have been granted? Please breakdown by VISN and job title.

¹ <https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/index.asp>

3. To date, how many religious or medical exemptions have been denied? Please breakdown by VISN and job title.
4. If denied, what steps can VA employees take to appeal the decision?
5. To date, how many VA employees have been fired or reassigned for failure to comply with the COVID-19 vaccine requirement? Please breakdown by VISN and job title.
6. What matrix is VA using to evaluate religious and medical exemptions requests? Please provide all written guidance on this matter.
7. What is VA doing to ensure consistency across VISNs when evaluating and adjudicating COVID-19 vaccine exemption requests?
8. What is the total cost associated with separating or transferring VA employees who fail to comply with the COVID-19 vaccine mandate? Additionally, what is the total cost associated with replacing these vacancies with new hires?
9. Please provide an analysis of how veterans residing rural areas, as defined by the Rural-Urban Commuting Areas (RUCA), will be impacted by the loss of VA medical staff who fail to comply with the COVID-19 vaccine mandate.²
10. Please provide an analysis of how the loss of VA medical staff due to the COVID-19 vaccine mandate will impact VA wait times. Please breakdown by VISN.
11. Please provide copies of the “educational” or counseling materials given to VA employees who refuse the COVID-19 vaccine.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chip Roy', written over a horizontal line.

Chip Roy
Member of Congress

² <https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/ruralvets.asp#def>