

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

October 28, 2019

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

We want to thank you for your diligent attention to the needs of veterans across the country and especially those in Oklahoma. Based on the conversations that we have had with you, it is clear that you understand the need for improved accessibility to care in Oklahoma, both at our VA facilities and in our communities. We were also appreciative to hear that you are going to prioritize the Tulsa Inpatient Facility and the Muskogee Behavioral Health Facility on your Fiscal Year 2021 Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) List, with necessary funding levels of \$120M and \$29M respectively requested.

The Tulsa Inpatient Facility was listed as your number sixty-two priority in Fiscal Year 2020 and had zero dollars requested on the SCIP. Without funding requested in your budget, Congress is unable to appropriate money for the project. The application submitted by Oklahoma State University (OSU) to the VA to be accepted as a participant in the VA's CHIP-IN Program would provide a true public-private partnership, granting greater access to medical care and an increase in quality to our veterans in Oklahoma. We firmly believe that VA's utilization of the CHIP-IN program, especially with this Tulsa project, will allow for VA and the community to share services and best practices, while also providing veterans increased access to the healthcare needs of their choice without growing the VA bureaucracy and wasting taxpayer dollars.

OSU's proposal would provide a new, state-of-the-art veteran's hospital facility in Tulsa. This would allow better access for veterans and their families and, in collaboration with the OSU Medical Center, provide increased medical services and improved quality of care. Of the over 115,000 veterans in the northeast region of Oklahoma, 68,000 are not readily served by a nearby VA hospital who would be well served by a new hospital in Tulsa.

In terms of care, the new hospital in Tulsa would benefit tremendously by its geographic proximity to, and partnership with, the OSU Medical Center. OSU, as a university hospital, will have the capability to add 50 medical residents to the new VA hospital. As a result, wait times will decrease for veterans to receive needed medical care and medical treatment will be more progressive. A VA hospital in Tulsa near the OSU Medical Center, one of the largest in the country, means new facilities that can benefit from shared resources like catheterization labs and other diagnostics, already located at the university's medical center, as well as the potential to recruit and retain a higher level of physician specialists. More residents and prestigious physician specialists mean higher quality medical treatment with shorter wait times.

OSU, in partnership with the state of Oklahoma, the City of Tulsa, The Anne and Henry Zarrow Foundation, and other private benefactors, has put forward a strong proposal for the VA CHIP-IN Program. This proposal is a true public-private partnership that will allow for accelerated construction by building the hospital in less than one-third of the typical VA schedule, direct proper site selection, and ensure the highest quality of medical care for Oklahoma veterans in need.

An important part of this plan is the opportunity to expand the behavioral health and substance abuse mission at the Muskogee facility. By transitioning the inpatient facility to Tulsa, VA can then transform the existing facility in Muskogee into a much needed Behavioral Health Center. As we have discussed with you at length, mental health and substance misuse care are areas of healthcare that need to be improved upon not only at VA but across the country. With this in mind, Muskogee could serve as a regional care center of excellence for our veterans.

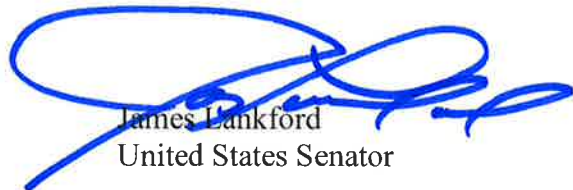
We were glad to hear you echo our same level of support for these two projects. At all levels of the VA, we have heard nothing but support for these projects and the use of the CHIP-IN authority. This opportunity is a much more efficient way for all of us to achieve our common goal of ensuring that those who have served so bravely are afforded the proper levels of care in a timely and efficient manner.

As we discussed, we enthusiastically urge you to give personal attention to prioritizing the Tulsa Inpatient Facility and the Muskogee Behavioral Health Facility by prioritizing these projects with adequate levels of funding. Should you or any member of your staff have any questions at all, please contact Don Archer, of Senator Inhofe's staff, at 202-224-1447 or [don\\_archer@inhofe.senate.gov](mailto:don_archer@inhofe.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



James M. Inhofe  
United States Senator



James Lankford  
United States Senator



Markwayne Mullin  
Member of Congress



Kevin Hern  
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CC:

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