

United States Senate

March 19, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

Thank you for taking strong and proactive actions to protect veterans during the coronavirus pandemic that has gripped our nation. As the Department of Veterans Affairs carries out these important orders, I ask that you to also prioritize the care of veterans in Montana and across America who suffer from mental health challenges and may experience elevated stresses during this difficult time.

As you know, one of the primary ways we can all combat the spread of COVID-19 is by practicing social distancing: staying home as much as possible, avoiding large gatherings, and even skipping get-togethers with family and friends. While this is a good way of minimizing our exposure to those who may be sick, it can also be a lonely and isolating experience.

Sadly our veterans often face mental health challenges relating to their service. As we continue to combat suicide in their ranks and deliver innovative solutions like telehealth to address their needs, we must ensure that the social isolation we are all practicing does not erase the gains we have made in their treatment. I am especially concerned about veterans who live in highly rural states like Montana, where mental health treatment can be difficult to come by at times. I urge you to not let these critical services drop off while we attempt to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Thank you again for all the VA has done to reduce the spread of this terrible virus and treat those who have been afflicted with it. I appreciate your continued vigilance in your watch over our veterans' health and diligence in their care.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator