

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 9, 2022

The Honorable Kathleen Hicks
Deputy Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hicks,

We write to express our concerns to the Department of Defense's (DoD) restructuring plans for the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard's (PNSY) Naval Branch Health Clinic, which provides health services to more than 2,000 active-duty service members, military retirees, and their families.

In a July 2022 report submitted to Congress, PNSY's outpatient clinic is included in a list of military medical treatment facilities being identified by DoD as part of a military health care restructuring effort that may impact 155,000 patients nationwide. According to the report, the Department plans to limit access to the PNSY facility to only active-duty service members, as part of a larger Department-wide effort to realign services at military treatment facilities to focus on combat casualty care. This plan may force as many as 1,715 individuals – more than half of the clinic's patients – who rely on its services to seek health care elsewhere.

DoD states it will implement its strategy while not “diminishing quality and access” to health care for those impacted by the restructuring; however, DoD's own assessment of health care accessibility for PNSY patients raises serious doubts about the veracity of this claim. Based on the data provided by the Department, 49% of primary care providers in the TRICARE network within 30 miles of the PNSY clinic would not be able to absorb new patients. For the limited number of providers that can provide care, DoD estimates they will expect an average of 132 new patients per provider. Of those providers, only 1% have stated they have appointment availability for new patients within 1 week as well as 1 month. Furthermore, the Department assessed a “High” risk score for the TRICARE network surrounding PNSY, indicating that the network cannot afford losing any providers given these data points.

The assessment makes clear that the plan for the PNSY clinic – a \$30 million facility completed just last year – could undermine health care accessibility. Many of our constituents live in rural communities and experience difficulties accessing public transportation. New providers will be overwhelmed with new patients and the lack of appointment availability will only further delay health care for those who have already been told to seek care elsewhere. The health care infrastructure simply isn't in place to support this decision.

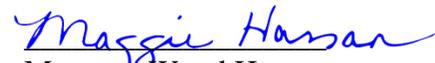
The PNSY outpatient clinic is the foundation for convenient, quality health care for thousands of active-duty servicemembers' families, military retirees, and military retiree families. Therefore,

we urgently request a briefing from the Department within the next 30 days to discuss its implementation plans for the PNSY outpatient clinic, the methodology and findings of its network assessment, its strategy to communicate to stakeholders and impacted patients in our communities, impact to the TRICARE network in the New England region, how this plan will impact the readiness of military forces, and the impact on the readiness of military medical providers at PNSY. Thank you for your attention to this important matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Chris Pappas
Member of Congress


Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator


Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator


Angus S. King Jr.
United States Senator


Susan M. Collins
United States Senator


Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress


Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress


Jared Golden
Member of Congress