



October 1, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

On behalf of the more than 131,000 PAs (physician assistants) throughout the United States and more than 2,200 PAs currently employed full-time by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the American Academy of PAs (AAPA) thanks you for your leadership in improving healthcare services for veterans. We also appreciate your efforts to ensure the VA's PA workforce can practice to the top of the profession's education, training and experience in providing high quality care to veterans.

Thank you for taking the time in January of this year to meet with me and senior leaders from AAPA to discuss granting full practice authority to PAs practicing at the VA. AAPA is gratified that since then you communicated via a letter to Congressman Jack Bergman that the "VA fully supports the idea of giving PAs full practice authority that would enable Veterans Health Administration PAs to practice medicine as licensed independent practitioners." The letter also importantly notes granting such status to PAs would "increase Veterans' access to care" as well as decrease burdens across the VA enterprise resulting from PAs not having full practice authority.

AAPA along with the Veterans Affairs PA Association (VAPAA) would like to request another meeting with you to discuss how our two organizations can work with leadership at the VA to expeditiously implement full practice authority for PAs practicing at the VA and to remove other barriers hindering PA practice, recruitment, and retention.

AAPA has supported efforts by President Trump to improve healthcare for Americans by strengthening patient choice and competition. We appreciated the opportunity we were given to interact with the Administration while it was developing the report, "[Reforming America's Health Care System Through Choice and Competition](#)," which was issued last December. The report recommended that states "consider changes to their scope-of-practice statutes to allow all healthcare providers to practice to the top of their license, utilizing their full skill set." The report also urged policymakers to consider "eliminating requirements for rigid collaborative practice and supervision agreements" between physicians and PAs.

As states seek to address their healthcare workforce needs, many are pursuing legislative changes to modernize PA practice. In 2019, state legislatures in North Dakota and West Virginia significantly reformed their state PA practice acts. North Dakota eliminated the requirement for a PA have a written agreement with a physician to practice in most healthcare settings, and West Virginia

eliminated the requirement that PAs who work in hospitals have practice agreements with specific physicians.

In July of this year, the Indian Health Service (IHS) made significant updates to its Indian Health Service Manual which modernize PA practice within the agency, changes that will improve access to care for patients. The updates at IHS included removing requirements for supervision of PAs and specifying PAs “exercise autonomous decision-making and take full responsibility for the patient care they provide.”

Given advancements in PA practice that already have occurred at the state and federal levels, which will improve patient access to care, we believe now is the time for the VA to take the next step in improving access and provider choice for veterans by implementing full practice authority for PAs.

We would also like to discuss the VA’s progress in implementing competitive pay legislation enacted in August 2017 which Congress intended to help the VA recruit and retain PAs. Many PAs practicing at the VA are paid at levels that do not come close to matching what they could earn in the private sector and are lower than what other healthcare professions receive for performing the same role within the VA. While this critical law has been on the books for over two years, the VA has not yet implemented it. AAPA urges the VA to implement competitive pay for PAs as quickly as possible.

AAPA stands ready to assist the VA in implementing full practice authority for PAs and updating policies to help recruit and retain PAs which are necessary for the VA to live up to its mission to honor America’s Veterans by providing exceptional healthcare that improves their health and well-being.

AAPA respectfully requests to meet with you to discuss how AAPA and VAPAA can continue to work with you and your team at the VA. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out to Tate Heuer, AAPA Vice President, Federal Advocacy, at 571-319-4338 or at theuer@aapa.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Mittman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David E. Mittman, PA, DFAAPA
President and Chair of the Board