Denis McDonough Secretary of Veterans Affairs

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20500

Subject: Urgent Request for Re-evaluation of VA Community Care Network Fee Schedule Dear Secretary McDonough,

I am writing to you as an audiologist who provides hearing health care to veterans through the Veteran Affairs Community Care Network (VACCN) in Texas. The VACCN program was created to service veterans in their community when their nearest VA cannot furnish care within designated access standards (28 days for specialty care) or the patient’s average drive time to their specific VA Medical Facility is 60 minutes or longer. All veterans benefit from the Community Care Network, but veterans who reside in rural areas of Texas experience even greater benefits from the Community Care Program.

At the initial inception of the Community Care Program, reimbursement was fair. In 2023, the VA reduced reimbursement by an average of 30%. While a significant reduction, the new rates were still manageable enough to allow most audiologists to continue providing hearing healthcare services to our nation’s heroes.

The 2024 reimbursement rates, as published on 1/24/2024, indicate another reduction by an average of 30%. The 60% reduction over the past two years has made the rates below most audiologist’s “break-even” point. To continue providing hearing healthcare to our nation’s heroes, reimbursement *must* be adequate to cover overhead costs and the Audiologist’s time spent providing direct patient care. With these significantly reduced reimbursement rates, many audiology practices won't be able to continue working with the Community Care Program. If this occurs, this will not only be a disservice to veterans, but it will also add an increased strain and

appointment wait time at all of the VA Medical Center’s Audiology clinics nationwide.

For reference, many veterans across Texas report that their VA’s soonest availability for an appointment is 7-8 weeks. Through the VACCN, Community Care audiologists can likely have veterans evaluated and fit with life-changing hearing devices before their initial appointment with their local VA Medical Center. In addition, many Texas veterans live several hours from the nearest VA Medical Center. Traveling this distance multiple times a year is neither safe nor feasible for many veterans.

The significant reduction in reimbursement will make it difficult for private practitioners like me to afford to continue serving our nation’s heroes in this capacity. Ultimately, veterans will suffer as they will not have convenient and timely access to exceptional hearing health care.

My request is simple and fair: please reinstate the 2023 reimbursement rates with an additional 3.2% increase to account for inflation, as the Social Security Administration reported. Of note, audiologists nationwide who currently provide VACCN hearing healthcare services determined and agreed upon this request.

If you have any questions, please reach out to me directly. My office phone number is (555) 555-5555, and my direct email address is [name@mailto.com.](mailto:name@mailto.com)

Sincerely,

First Last, Au.D. Doctor of Audiology