Coalition of New York Elected Officials in Support of the Manhattan VA Hospital

September 15, 2003

The Honorable Anthony Principi
Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Principi,

We are writing to express our strong opposition to any reduction in services at the VA Hospital in Manhattan (the "Manhattan VA Hospital"). The CARES Commission report recommends studying the possibility of transferring all acute care to the Brooklyn VA Hospital in Bay Ridge, consolidating certain outpatient treatment at other remote facilities and maintaining the remaining outpatient services at the existing or a new site. Veterans are concerned that these shifts will result in the closure of Manhattan VA Hospital and a reduction in their quality of care.

Situated in the corridor known as "Bedpan Alley", the Manhattan VA Hospital is truly a crucial component of the VISN3 (Veteran Integrated Service Network 3, which is comprised of the New York/New Jersey Veterans Health Care Network). It is centrally located and easily accessible for thousands of veterans who travel to the Manhattan VA Hospital from throughout the region, some coming from as far away as New Jersey, Pennsylvania and upstate New York.

Because of its proximity to world class hospitals, the Manhattan VA Hospital has been able to enter into affiliation agreements that enhance the quality of care for patients. The Manhattan VA Hospital has been designated a center of excellence in six tertiary care specialties – cardiac surgery, neurosurgery, cardiac-vascular surgery, comprehensive rehabilitation services, HIV/AIDS care and dialysis. Further, the Manhattan VA Hospital offers other specialty programs that are renowned for quality and innovation, including programs relating to treatment of amputees. We are advised that few physicians or medical professionals associated with the Manhattan VA Hospital's affiliates would be willing or able to transfer to a different facility in the VISN3 network. Accordingly, it would be hard for those facilities to match the quality of care available at the Manhattan VA Hospital.

If the proposed plan to reduce services in Manhattan is implemented, thousands of veterans living in our districts would find it considerably harder to access care. Many veterans, particularly those who are disabled, find the Brooklyn VA Hospital inaccessible. Moreover, with more than 1.3 million veterans in the New York Metropolitan region, and 100,000 veterans waiting six months for appointments at VA medical facilities nationwide, it makes no sense to transfer patients from the Manhattan VA Hospital.

The timing of this proposal is particularly strange. With American troops engaged in active conflicts around the world, it makes no sense to reduce services at a hospital where many veterans receive critical medical care. In fact, the Manhattan VA Hospital has already treated

soldiers evacuated from Iraq. Eliminating services at this facility would be tantamount to turning our backs on veterans at precisely the time when they need the facility most.

Our nation made a commitment to provide high quality care to veterans who bravely served our country. Shifting care from the Manhattan VA Hospital would seriously undermine health care for veterans in this region. Accordingly, we urge you to drop any plans to transfer acute or tertiary care from the Manhattan VA Hospital on 23rd Street.

Very truly yours,

CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress

JERROLD L. NADLER
Member of Congress

NYDIA VELAZQUEZ
Member of Congress

BETSY GOTBAUM
Public Advocate

A. GIFFORD MILLER
Speaker of the City Council

LIZ KRUEGER
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RICHARD N. GOTTFRIED
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State Assemblyman

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SCOTT STRINGER
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