

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

**Of**

**Vietnam Veterans of America  
New York State Council**

**Submitted by**

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President  
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Syracuse, NY**

**Before the**

**CARES Commission**

**Regarding**

**Draft National CARES Plans**

**Presented At**

**MARX Hotel and Conference Center  
VISN 2  
Syracuse, NY**

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**Good afternoon, my name is Gordie Lane; I am the President of the Central New York Chapter 103 for Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) New York State Council. Thank you Chairman Alvarez and your colleagues for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Draft National Cares Plan for the delivery of health care to veterans who utilize VISN 2 in Syracuse, New York for care and treatment.**

**The original concept for assessing the real-estate holdings and plans for the disposition of "excess properties of the Department of Veteran Affairs makes sense, but only if it is done properly. No one wants to see monies being wasted; monies that could be better spent on rendering real health care to veterans. There is no question that the VA has so many buildings at various facilities that are expendable.**

**Chapter 103 of Vietnam Veterans (VVA), New York State Council believes that this process has strayed from its original intent, and we have grave misgivings about the proposed market plan before you, for VISN 2. We feel that veterans should not be moved. We have been shoved around long enough and we feel here in VISN 2, that the closing of the Canandaigua VAMC is the time and place to make a long over due stand. We have had too much lip service over the years between the VA and Congress as to what is in the best interest of the veteran. You see Mr. Alvarez, between the VA and the Congress is the veteran.**

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People who walk down the center of the street get run over. And we feel run over. Make no mistake about it, we are at the end of our rope over our government telling us what is best for us.

Let me give you two examples of what was best for our veterans. The Millennium Bill. We were told by congress the VA and all their staff that this Millennium Bill was the greatest thing that ever happened for the Veteran. On paper, it was a great Bill, but the White House at the time did not think that the Millennium Bill needed to be funded. This put the VA and the veteran in a bad spot. The Veteran knew about the Bill, but the VA could not follow the law. That reminds me of a time when the Gunny (I was a Marine) at morning muster put me that I was on an LP (Listening Post) that night. He told us not to worry, if anything happens we will get you back into the compound. Of course, we knew just what that meant; you were on your own. That was what the Millennium Bill was, on it's own. The second example was the great Montgomery GI Bill. This Bill stripped us of the entitlements we once had. With a swish of a pen, Congress destroyed the best entitlement that this country ever had to help our countries service men and women re-build their lives after serving their country. The only thing that was on that scale was the Marshall Plan. These two things helped re-build this country after World War II. Trust me Mr. Alvarez, this CARES Deal is all about trust. When veterans entered the service to their country, they were promised good quality health care for

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the rest of their lives. I was eighteen years old when I was told that, and raised my right hand and promised to defend our country. They did not tell me that somewhere along the way that congress could just throw it away. Don't anyone here ever forget the terrible betrayal that our government did to us in our own best interest. To many veterans the closing of the Canandaigua VAMC would just be another of the same.

Having said that, if Canandaigua is closed there are certain things that will occur. Some say, and not veterans, that the Rochester area veterans would have at least 16,000 veterans disrupted and displaced. 10,000 to 12,000 of these veterans are outpatients. There will have to be a facility constructed or leased to handle these veterans and the staff. In addition, of course don't forget the parking wherever you go. How about public transportation? Is it readily available to transport veterans and their families? Oh yes, what about the veterans family? What are we to do about them? If the nursing home has to close then the veterans will have to go to community based nursing homes. Veterans want to be with veterans and it takes a special kind of person to deal with older veterans. If you do not have that in mind, then the whole thing will implode. What about the over flow from the nursing home that community based nursing homes can't cover? They then would be sent to Bath. Then Bath would have to handle the over flow from Canandaigua. That in turn would cause problems with

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re-locating veterans to some place else. Oh yes, please take a look at a New York State map before you leave town and see for yourself how far Bath is from Canandaigua. If you do not think that in this master plan we are not going to lose some veterans along the way, then none of us should be here. Our older veterans deserve better treatment. And as long as there is a VVA we will make sure your don't forget that they are very special people. They are our fathers, grandfathers, brothers, sisters, grandmothers, aunts, uncles and friends. They have taken care of us all these years and have bore many hardships and they will always be very special to us. They have earned our respect and gratitude and we will in VVA always remind you of that. They are not just a number.

Let us talk about the Syracuse VAMC if Canandaigua closes. The Syracuse VAMC is in the top 5% of the VAMC's across this great country. There are many reasons for this. However, right now we are talking about CARES. Believe me I would love to talk to you about not only Syracuse, but about the whole VISN. We are the best and we know why. The rest of the VA does not have a clue. Syracuse could never handle the overflow from Cananidaigua without MAJOR monies being spent, not to mention the patient, staff, security, and of course parking. Syracuse has no room to grow. Bricks and mortar will have to be laid to accommodate the Spinal Cord Injury Research Center. I am told that this will have to be a three

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or four story building and of course a parking lot. Do not forget security. They will have to move an entire ward out of the seventh floor to make room for 14 beds that will be coming from Cananidaigua. The outpatients from the seventh floor will have to move to another location outside of the hospital to another building some where. Will that location be close to or on public transportation? No one knows. How far will this outpatient re-location be from the hospital? Will there be parking available? Where is the mental health staff going to come from? Are you thinking that they will follow the job? I hope they will follow their job.

Lets talk a little bit about the employees at Cananidaigua. No, let us talk a lot about them. When the VA decides to make a move like this, the only thing they look at is the numbers. We veterans have jobs and families like everyone else. When the people that run the VA do not care their own people the veterans take notice. After all the USG has never been warm and fuzzy with its employees. We are concerned about the morale and well being of the employees. It takes years of building trust for vets to trust the VA. If the trust has been established, then you need to give that great deliberation before you throw it out the window. I personally have spoken to many employees and I know that you do not live here in New York. However, if you did, you would know that we can not afford to keep losing jobs. The economy in Cananidaigua will be crushed, school disrupted, families broken up and separated, spouses

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**jobs lost, and in short, there is not anything good about a forced move. These are highly skilled jobs. Another thing to consider is that when the time comes for the move, many of your employees might consider retiring. That may be good for the VA, but when you consider how hard it is to replace these skilled employees, given that the VA has out dated hiring practices the VA, and the veterans can not win. It is a game you have lost before you began. All New Yorkers lose.**

**Mr.Chairman, the proposed National Draft CARES Plan entitled VISN 2 Special Disability Program Planning Initiatives DID NOT include PTSD, Substance Abuse and Traumatic Brain Injuries. VVA founding principle is "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another", we do not want this commission to abandon these programs which are so vital to the VA for the care and treatment of the brave military men and women who are returning home from the war in Iraq and those who served this country in past wars.**

**In conclusion, we feel that decisions made within the context of the proposed Draft National CARES Plan will effectively close beds, cut staffing, compromise services, and damage the VA's ability to respond to emerging needs of veterans. We believe that this effort, no matter how well intended, will in many instances prove to be counterproductive and ultimately costly to rectify.**