

Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission Hearing

Statement of Thomas R. Wagner, Director, Albuquerque VA Regional Office, September 18, 2003

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the CARES Program as it relates to the Albuquerque VA Regional Office.

The Veterans Benefits Administration is fully supportive of the goals of the CARES Program and will continue to collaborate with the Veterans Health Administration in identifying and prioritizing co-location opportunities. VBA believes that careful analysis and coordination are essential as opportunities are identified and thoroughly developed to ensure that there is no adverse impact on our abilities to provide compassionate and timely services to veterans and their beneficiaries.

As you are aware, through the CARES planning process and the VBA and VHA joint co-location efforts, five goals were established to evaluate potential co-location opportunities. These are:

- Improve Service to Veterans
- Improve Operational Efficiency
- Reduce Net Costs
- Maximize use of VA Assets and
- Improve Employee Working Conditions

Utilizing these evaluative criteria, co-location projects benefit VA as a whole by achieving operational efficiencies through state-of-the art facilities. Co-location provides one stop shopping, enhanced communication between claims examiners and physicians, and redesigned division work areas to increase and enhance workflow, accuracy, and timeliness. In addition, operational costs can be reduced by eliminating the payment of annual GSA rent and by integrating various operational functions. Furthermore, co-located facilities incorporate improvements to the overall work environment for visitors and employees with improved lighting, noise abatement, temperature control, health and safety features, and accessible accommodations for handicapped veterans.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you or the members of the Commission may have.