



TREASURY DEPARTMENT
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG, PA 17120

STACY GARRITY
TREASURER

October 5, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear President Biden and Secretary McDonough:

I write to you as Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, but more importantly as a veteran concerned for the wellbeing of those who have served before, alongside, and after me – many of whom are being treated very much like prisoners of war at a Veterans Administration medical facility near your hometown in northeastern Pennsylvania.

President Biden recently told Americans that the pandemic was “over,” yet hundreds of men and women who put their lives on the line for the United States and are living at the VA Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, are still being prevented from seeing their families except for painfully brief periods of time. They have been isolated by a cold, uncaring bureaucracy – and you can change that.

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center serves 18 counties in Pennsylvania and one in New York. Many of the counties are very rural, and many families have to travel four hours – one way – to get to the VA. Under current rules, they must make a formal appointment to see their family members, and they are only allowed to visit for very limited periods of time. On top of that, residents have not been allowed to take part in any outings since March 2020, more than 30 months ago – and extreme limits have been placed on the ability of volunteers to visit patients at the facility.

Significant media attention has been focused on the outrageous and indefensible policies at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. After a large “Free Our Veterans” rally, organized by Nicole Guest, a Navy veteran who has volunteered at the VA for nine years, took place at the facility, some restrictions were loosened, but the changes were little more than superficial. The visiting policies remain outrageously restrictive.

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In the best of times, our ailing and elderly heroes struggle to maintain their connection with the wider world and to hold on to their dignity as time takes its toll. They shouldn't be forced to spend their golden years in a bureaucratic form of solitary confinement.

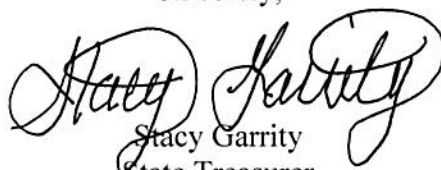
Importantly, this treatment of our bravest men and women stands in stark contrast to the situation at nursing homes and state-run facilities. In fact, it directly contradicts official guidance from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which regulates nursing facilities. That guidance says, in very clear language, that "visitation must be permitted at all times with very limited and rare exceptions, in accordance with residents' rights."

As a veteran who served three tours overseas, I know the importance of family. I know that family is always on your mind. The heroes at the Wilkes-Barre facility deserve to spend time with their families and loved ones, they deserve comradery with each other, and they deserve visits from gracious and generous volunteers to lift their spirits.

My brothers and sisters in service at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center have suffered for two and a half years. In too many cases, their spirits have been crushed and they have been robbed of hope.

It's an unfortunate fact that this situation could have been avoided. But you have the power to change it going forward. I urge you to take immediate action to end these unconscionable policies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacy Garrity". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large loops.

Stacy Garrity
State Treasurer

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

cc: The Honorable Robert P. Casey, Jr.
The Honorable Patrick J. Toomey
The Honorable Matt Cartwright
The Honorable Fred Keller
The Honorable Conor Lamb
The Honorable Dan Meuser
The Honorable Joe Sempolinski
The Honorable Claudia Tenney
The Honorable Susan Wild