

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 28, 2016

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

I am writing about efforts by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to divest excess property in Lincoln, Nebraska, and make these locations more useful for veterans in the area.

The 60-acre Lincoln campus extended use lease (EUL) has two major objectives: help eliminate veteran homelessness and divest the VA of excess property. The EUL plan calls for Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing from the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs to be used for veterans in need. Commercial development of this property will focus on the social and medical needs of veterans.

The Lincoln VA campus is anchored by a former hospital building, currently being used as a VA clinic, constructed in the 1920s. The upkeep of this building and property is clearly a burden on the VA's maintenance budget. The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 authorized a new clinic in Lincoln, but the law did not expressly direct this new facility to be located on the Lincoln VA campus. If the clinic is built elsewhere in Lincoln, the Lincoln VA campus will be placed in caretaker status and require up to \$1 million per year in maintenance costs. Unless the EUL is completed very soon, and the new clinic is slated to go on the Lincoln VA campus, the VA will incur these annual costs until the campus can be removed from the VA's property book. This issue has reached a stage of crisis, and it requires your immediate attention.

The attached letter was sent by the Seniors Foundation, America First Real Estate Group, and Sampson Construction. As you can see from this letter, the EUL negotiations, which have been occurring since December 2011, have been suspended due to new requirements that were only recently brought to the attention of the letter's authors. In December 2015, the prospective developers learned they must meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design silver standards. This new requirement is problematic for two reasons. First, this mandate, which was not discussed at any point during the ongoing negotiations, adds considerable costs to the project. Second, the veteran-focused nature of this development necessitates the new VA clinic be

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located on the Lincoln campus. The project cannot move forward unless the EUL contains a provision allowing the lease to be dissolved if the VA elects to place the clinic elsewhere in the Lincoln area.

I have been following and supporting this project since its inception. I am requesting a meeting with you and your staff before February 12, 2016. Due to the time-sensitive nature of this issue, I would also request that your senior management team meet face-to-face with the Seniors Foundation, America First Real Estate Group, and Sampson Construction before February 29, 2016.

Please contact Liz Ruth at 202-224-5421 or liz_ruth@fischer.senate.gov to schedule a time to meet and resolve this important matter. Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Deb Fischer
United States Senator