

**STATEMENT OF
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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
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Good morning, Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing and to discuss the design and construction projects at the Jefferson Barracks and John Cochran campuses of the VA St. Louis Health Care System (St. Louis HCS).

Our mission is to honor American's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being. The St. Louis HCS is a dual affiliated, full-service health care facility providing inpatient and outpatient care in medicine, surgery, psychiatry, neurology, and rehabilitation, and many other subspecialty areas. It is a two-division facility that serves Veterans and their families in east central Missouri and southwestern Illinois. The John Cochran Division, named after the late Missouri congressman, is located in midtown St. Louis and comprises the medical center's operative surgical capabilities, the ambulatory care unit, intensive care units, outpatient specialty clinics, and emergency department.

Improving Access

One of the top priorities for the Department has been improving access to care and the St. Louis HCS has taken that to heart. While more work remains to be done, both the VA and the St. Louis HCS has made real progress. During Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, St. Louis HCS hired 385 staff, including 36 Physicians, four Physician Assistants, 93 Nurses, and 252 other critical occupations. VA St Louis currently has a 9% vacancy

rate. In order to leverage limited space and enhance convenience for Veterans, we have extended clinic hours at five locations and hold Saturday clinics at two locations. Additionally, we have increased the delivery of care by telephone and secure messaging to better use provider time, improve access, and meet Veteran care needs without their traveling for a scheduled appointment.

VA’s Real Property Portfolio

Before I talk specifically about the facilities in St. Louis, it is important to mention the state of VA’s Capital Portfolio overall, and Department’s capital investment planning process. VA currently owns 6,227 buildings; 35,193 acres; and over 153 million square feet (SF). VA also has 1,951 leases with over 23 million SF. A building design life is 40 years; however, the average age of VA’s facilities is 57 years old. Approximately 40% of VA’s buildings are considered historic. Due to the age of facilities and changes in healthcare requirements, many of these buildings are inadequate for modern healthcare and should be replaced. Some of VA’s medical facilities also have significant critical safety and seismic issues that remain to be addressed. The 2017 VA Long Range Capital Plan showed that VA had a construction requirement of between \$41 and \$50 billion. The 2017 VA capital programs funding request in the FY 2017 President’s Budget was \$1.9 billion for major and minor construction and non-recurring maintenance (NRM) programs.

Major	528,110
Minor	372,069
NRM	1,057,473
Total	1,957,652

The Department prioritizes its capital investments each year, through the Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) process. Only the highest priority projects are included in the budget request. Projects not included in the budget request must re-compete the following year.

Jefferson Barracks Division Major Construction Project

The Jefferson Barracks Division is a multi-building complex overlooking the Mississippi River in south St. Louis County. It provides psychiatric treatment, spinal cord injury treatment, a nursing home care unit, geriatric health care, rehabilitation services, and a rehabilitation domiciliary program for homeless Veterans. VA is currently pursuing a major construction project that will further enable us to better serve Veterans' health care needs for decades to come. The Jefferson Barracks Division project is one of the major construction projects that is currently on VA's Active development list. The active development list consists of 21 major construction projects that the Department is actively working on and planning to request funds in a future budget.

Our Jefferson Barracks Major Project is a joint VHA and NCA venture and will construct a total of five new buildings. The project will relocate primary care, mental health and specialty care out of its current 1920's building into a modern environment and allow for the needed expansion of services. It will construct a new patient aquatic and rehab therapy building, to replace the existing facilities which have to frequently shut down during the hottest days of the summer due to the lack of adequate air conditioning. The project also replaces the existing central boiler/chiller plant and underground utilities -- some dating back to the 1920s -- that are failing and causing negative impacts on campus operations. In 2010, the campus suffered a total loss of all

power approximately nine days. Just prior to that, the campus lost air conditioning during the heat of the summer, causing relocation of patients to other campuses. Lastly, the project will replace an obsolete campus fire alarm system, will construct a new support building, will provide 800 net new patient parking spaces, and will construct facilities to relocate engineering shops and a consolidated warehouse.

Upon completion, the total project will decrease the amount of infrastructure maintained and operated by VHA through demolition of energy inefficient and underutilized buildings. It will also provide approximately 30 acres to the NCA for expansion of the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery. Without this additional land, the cemetery would be closed to burials within several years. The total project cost is \$366.5 million, which was approved as a VA major project in 2004. The project was partially funded in 2007, was designed in 2008, started construction in 2010 and is scheduled to be completed in 2020. This project is 52% complete with no cost over runs.

Since this project was first conceived, scoped, and preliminarily designed, our method of delivering Primary Care has changed significantly. VA's current model of utilizing Patient Care Aligned Teams (PACTs) were not in place in 2004. This organizational arrangement, whereby a provider, a nurse, a licensed practical nurse, and a clerk all cohesively work together as a team to manage a panel of Veterans, utilizes space in a much different way than the previous Primary Care model that existed during the design phase. However, due to close coordination between the local medical facility and the Office of Construction, necessary space adjustments to the new building have been made without significant cost increases, construction delays or both.

John Cochran Division Major Construction Project

The John Cochran Major Project was funded for design in 2010. The project would construct a new inpatient bed tower and allow for the expansion of specialty care clinics. The total project cost was estimated at \$433.4 million. In 2015 each major construction project (including those that had available funding) was reevaluated and rescored through SCIP to ensure the project's requirements were still valid and the project remained a high priority for the Department. The St. Louis JC project did not score high enough to be included in FY 2015 and 2016 budget request, and therefore it is not being actively developed by the Department at this time. The project is eligible to be reconsidered in SCIP and considered for funding in a future budget.

Conclusion

In closing, each day, we move toward our goal of improving and streamlining our processes in order to provide exceptional care that Veterans have earned and deserve. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today. I would be pleased to respond to questions from you and Members of the Committee.