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Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO • 815 16th Street, NW • Washington, DC 20006

Phone: 202-508-3705 • Fax: 202-508-3706 • Email: jhart@metaltrades.org • www.metaltrades.org

May 21, 2018

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 17 affiliated International Unions of the Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO, I am writing to express our opposition to the VA Mission Act (S.2372), and its expressed purpose that would allow the VA Secretary new authority to privatize and close facilities throughout the VA health care system.

While we support the expansion of the Caregiver Program to all veterans disabled in past and present conflicts, we view the bill's expansion of the VA Choice program as a giant misstep toward privatization and also oppose provisions that would diminish the role of Congress in making key decisions about the VA's infrastructure.

Primary care is the core of the VA's integrated health system, and it should remain in the VA, with only limited exceptions and tight eligibility requirements. While we agree that there may be good reason and necessity to go outside the VA to deliver minor or preliminary medical services, private providers should be held to the same standards of quality and accountability as their VA counterparts and treated with the same oversight and regulations as all government contractors.

The Metal Trades also believes that evaluation of the VA's infrastructure should be left in the hands of our elected representatives rather than the proposed BRAC Commission as such a commission will only serve to hinder and prevent safeguarding the VA medical system.

Congress should be investing more in the VA, not privatizing and downsizing it.

Sincerely,

James Hart
President
Metal Trades Department