

December 2, 2021

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
United States Senate
332 Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Sanders:

On behalf of our 162,000 dentist members, the American Dental Association (ADA) would like to express our support and thank you for the amendment, S.A. 4815, that you proposed to H.R. 4350, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2022. The ADA is committed to advancing oral health equity for veterans by breaking down barriers to care. The ADA believes your amendment would address these access barriers.

As you know, S.A. 4815 would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure that a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) dental clinic be located in each state, and that the clinic serve the oral health needs of the veterans within the state where the clinic is located. Currently, there is a VA dental clinic in all but one state: Vermont. Thus, this amendment would ensure that Vermont's veterans have access to a dedicated, in-state VA dental clinic.

This amendment directly breaks down geographic barriers facing Vermont veterans, many of whom may live in rural communities. Oral health is a significant public health issue for individuals living in rural communities, including Veterans, due to disparities associated with access and use of dental services. The geographic barriers facing veterans may take many forms, including lack of transportation and limited access to dental providers. Limited availability of dental services also contributes to oral health disparities by reducing access to dental care.

Caring for the oral health of our nation's veterans is of great importance to the members of the ADA. The ADA commends you for your leadership in addressing oral health equity for the veterans of Vermont through offering this amendment to the FY 2022 NDAA. ADA also encourages other members of Congress to support the inclusion of your amendment as they consider passage of the NDAA.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff on this amendment. Please contact Megan Mortimer at mortimerm@ada.org or (202) 701-9593 to facilitate further discussion.

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Sincerely,

Cesar R. Sabates, D.D.S.
President

Raymond A. Cohlma, D.D.S.
Executive Director

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