

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

May 25, 2011

Hon. Eric Shinseki, Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

We are writing in support of the application by the Togus VA Medical Center (VAMC) for a Fisher House to provide lodging and support for the families of persons receiving care at the center in Augusta, Maine.

As you know, the Fisher House Foundation builds and donates housing facilities near military and veterans medical centers that provide no-cost places to stay for families of injured soldiers and veterans while their loved ones receive treatment. With 54 houses currently located in the United States and Germany, the Fisher House Foundation has served more than 142,000 families since its inception in 1990, saving them more than \$165 million in lodging and transportation costs. In 2010, Fisher Houses served approximately 12,000 families, saving them more than \$16 million. No family pays to stay at any Fisher House operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Fisher House Foundation reimburses the Fisher Houses located on military installations through private and public donations.

The Togus VAMC is currently served by Beals Hospitality House, which provides temporary housing for spouses of veterans undergoing in-patient care at Togus. Although Beals House is an important asset and source of support for veterans and families in their time of need, it is a small historic facility with only 3 rooms that is unable to meet the demand for housing, and cannot accommodate children, more than two members of a single family, or persons requiring handicap facilities. Sadly, the majority of families must seek accommodations elsewhere.

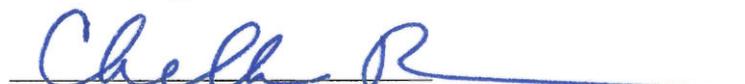
A Fisher House at Togus VAMC would be a valuable asset for the approximately 136,400 veterans of Maine and their families, and would continue the organization's proud legacy of providing lodging and support for America's military families when they need it most. Especially in a rural state such as Maine, where patients often travel more than four hours and hundreds of miles at great personal expense for care, it is essential that available housing facilities are able to respond to this need. We strongly urge you to consider Togus VA Medical Center's proposal, and look forward to working with you to continue to fulfill our obligation to our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,


OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
United States Senator


SUSAN M. COLLINS
United States Senator


MICHAEL MICHAUD
Member of Congress


CHELLIE PINGREE
Member of Congress