

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN  
8TH DISTRICT, MARYLAND

COMMITTEE ON  
WAYS AND MEANS

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND  
GOVERNMENT REFORM

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515

1707 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-5341

DISTRICT OFFICES:  
51 MONROE STREET, #507  
ROCKVILLE, MD 20850  
(301) 424-3501

SUITE C-201  
6475 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVENUE  
HYATTSVILLE, MD 20783  
(301) 891-6982

[www.vanhollen.house.gov](http://www.vanhollen.house.gov)

January 28, 2008

Rear Admiral Richard R. Jeffries  
Medical Corps, U.S. Navy  
Commander, National Naval Medical Center  
8901 Wisconsin Avenue  
Bethesda, Maryland 20889

Re: Draft Environmental Impact Statement for BRAC Action

Dear Admiral Jeffries:

I submit the following comments in response to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement ("DEIS") on the proposed expansion of the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) as required by the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1990, as amended. This BRAC action intends to relocate many of the services of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) from Washington, D.C. to the NNMC campus in Bethesda, Maryland.

As I noted by letter in December 2006 requesting extension of the scoping period, the challenges in combining the operations of the WRAMC and the NNMC are substantial. Nonetheless, with the requisite cooperation of the various governmental agencies involved, this project can provide important benefits to our community and to our country. Most critically, it will create a world-class campus for delivery of the finest medical services available for treating our returning servicemen and women. In doing so, it will also increase the opportunities for collaboration between NNMC and its neighboring medical institutions – the National Institutes of Health, Suburban Hospital, and the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, a collaboration that benefits all who live within metropolitan Washington, D.C.

While I support its objectives, I believe it is imperative that the challenges created by this BRAC project are addressed in ways that both meet the objectives of the military and are consistent with the needs and requirements of the community in which it is located.

Since the release of the DEIS on December 14, 2007, Montgomery County officials, agencies, community and neighborhood organizations, and numerous

individuals have worked tirelessly to identify specific concerns with the substance of the DEIS and to highlight areas of deficiency in its methodology and analysis. They have undertaken this process with great thoughtfulness and seriousness of purpose and have systematically and exhaustively identified significant flaws in the DEIS and issues requiring additional study.

I share the community and Montgomery County's concerns in these many areas. Certainly, the increase in traffic that this merger will cause is at the top of every list of significant impacts and requires extensive mitigation. Unfortunately, the DEIS does not recommend mitigations sufficient to allay these well-justified concerns. Moreover, other legitimate concerns raised by the stakeholders – including those relating to parking, noise and air quality, enhancements for bicycle and pedestrian safety and accessibility, lodging for visitors and families, use of shuttle bus service, parking for construction workers, campus environmental issues, “green” building design, and base access, among many others – must be addressed with greater specificity in the final EIS.

I would like to call attention to three specific issues on which the final EIS must also focus attention:

1. The Department of Defense should take greater responsibility for the road improvements required to ensure that its mission can be achieved. It would be unfair for the federal government – in pursuit of the economic efficiencies and military objectives that drive the BRAC process – to shift entirely to local and state governments the significant financial burden that flows directly from this consolidation. While the State and County are responsible for funding improvements that were needed prior to this BRAC action, it would be inequitable to require them to fund mitigations made necessary only because of this consolidation. For example, in addition to the intersection and other improvements that are recommended in Montgomery County's submission, I urge the Department of Defense to implement measures that will ensure accessibility from the Medical Center metro to the NNMCM campus. In enabling employees, visitors and families of the wounded to access the base more efficiently, this improved access will serve an important military need.

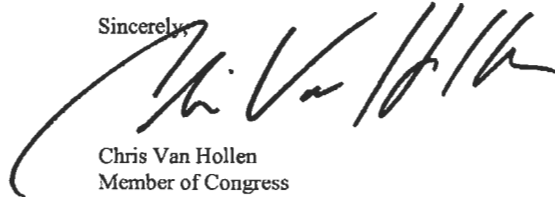
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2. The consolidation of WRAMC and NNMCM is part of the country's national defense efforts, and road improvements are essential to ensuring adequate access to the installation. I urge the Navy to include in the final EIS a recommendation that the base commander initiate the process, as required, to make this project eligible for Defense Access Road (“DAR”) Program funding. Given the facility's importance in treating our wounded servicemen and women, the roads involved are, without question, “important to our national defense” and, consequently, improvements should be funded, at least in part, through the DAR Program.
3. NNMCM should establish a Community Liaison Council to foster communication between the facility and its neighbors throughout the construction period and continuing through the transition to the new Walter Reed National Military

Medical Center. The local neighborhood associations have expressed their commitment to work with NNMC to ensure that this consolidation is successful and meets the military's objectives. Creating a mechanism for facilitating ongoing communication will enable the community to be informed of actions that would affect the community in the upcoming months and to share and resolve concerns in a forum that invites cooperation.

This BRAC action has the unique feature of being undertaken in an urban, highly developed and congested area. In light of this status, I urge the Departments of Defense, Army and Navy to take all appropriate actions to mitigate the anticipated impacts on the community of this consolidation. In so doing, the federal government will create its world-class medical facility in a community that is welcoming and cooperative and will play a critical part in ensuring the success of this expanded facility.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Van Hollen", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Chris Van Hollen  
Member of Congress