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Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
Kern County Administrative Center
1115 Truxtun Avenue, 5th Floor
Bakersfield, California 93301
Telephone (661) 868-3585
TTY Relay 800-735-2929

July 20, 2026

The Honorable Alex Padilla
United States Senate
Hart Senate Office Building, 331
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Schiff
United States Senate
Hart Senate Office Building, 112
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Support for H.R. 8469 – Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2027 – Section 260, Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Bakersfield, CA

Dear Senator Padilla and Senator Schiff,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to convey the deep concern of our community regarding the long-delayed Bakersfield Veterans Affairs Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), and to express our strong support for H.R. 8469 – the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2027, particularly Section 260, which would finally require the Department of Veterans Affairs to begin construction on this long-promised facility no later than September 30, 2027.

The Urgent Problem

In 2009, Congress approved fourteen new VA clinics nationwide. Today, the Bakersfield clinic remains the only one still undelivered, despite the clear need and full federal authorization. Our veterans continue to rely on an outdated facility on Westwind Drive whose lease has already expired. As a result, the VA is forced to pay roughly \$400,000 per month under a holdover clause, an extraordinary waste of federal resources that benefits only the private landlord, not the veterans the facility is meant to serve.

The planned 40,000-square-foot CBOC at 5512 Knudsen Drive would expand primary care, dental care, and specialty services, all critical offerings that would prevent local veterans from traveling long distances, including to Los Angeles, for basic treatment.

Years of Litigation and Obstruction

For more than a decade, progress has been stalled by aggressive litigation largely driven by entities affiliated with the owners of the current Westwind Drive facility. These groups have repeatedly filed lawsuits under CEQA, NEPA, and the Endangered Species Act, claiming environmental harm to the Bakersfield kit fox. Local officials and veteran advocates have repeatedly raised alarm that these

lawsuits amount to “green mail” or the strategic use of environmental laws to slow federal construction and maintain a profitable, expired lease.

Environmental Clearance and Recent Breakthroughs

In April 2025, the VA released its Final Environmental Assessment concluding that the Knudsen Drive site poses no significant environmental impacts. Notably, the report found that failing to build the clinic generates greater regional air quality impacts, because local veterans are forced to drive long distances for care.

In July 2025, a Kern County Superior Court judge ruled in favor of the City of Bakersfield, affirming that the city’s air quality analysis fully complied with CEQA and allowing the project to proceed, though opponents may still pursue appeals.

Why Section 260 Is Essential

Despite environmental clearance, judicial validation, and congressional authorization, the project remains stalled. Section 260 of H.R. 8469 is the first measure that would impose an unequivocal requirement on the VA: construction must begin no later than September 30, 2027. This statutory deadline is critical to ensure that bureaucratic indecision and litigation tactics can no longer obstruct delivery of a facility that has already been delayed for almost two decades.

Broader Importance of H.R. 8469 to Kern County

Kern County is home to a large and proud population of veterans, service members, and military families supported by major installations such as Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake and Edwards Air Force Base. Federal investments provided through this appropriations bill strengthen the infrastructure, modernization, and quality of life on these bases and in the surrounding communities.

H.R. 8469 also includes critical support for:

- Military construction and modernization
- VA medical care, mental health services, and housing assistance
- Veteran homelessness initiatives
- VA Community Care programs
- Mental health and suicide-prevention funding

These investments are especially vital in rural and underserved regions like ours, where access to VA facilities and services is often limited and where the delay of the Bakersfield CBOC has had severe and lasting impacts.

The record is clear, the Bakersfield VA clinic has undergone thorough environmental review, survived years of litigation, and has full congressional authorization. Every month of delay costs taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars while local veterans continue to wait for the care Congress promised them in 2009. Section 260 offers the only practical path to ensuring this facility is finally built.

On behalf of Kern County and our military community, we respectfully urge swift passage of H.R. 8469 with the inclusion of Section 260. Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to our veterans and service members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Phillip Peters", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Phillip Peters, Chairman
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, Kern House Delegation
Jose Lopez, Kern County Veterans Services Director
Townsend Public Affairs