

MILWAUKEE AREA LABOR COUNCIL

American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations

SERVING MILWAUKEE, OZAUKEE AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 29, 2019 Contact: Pam Fendt, President
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Labor council raises concerns About VA health care changes

The Milwaukee Area Labor Council has serious concerns about the new Mission Act being implemented by the Veterans Administration and “the detrimental effects it could have on Wisconsin’s veterans,” the Labor Council’s President said Wednesday.

“Our Council counts numerous veterans from all branches of the armed forces among its members, and we have been meeting with members of Veterans for Peace Local Chapter 102 and other concerned stakeholders about the implementation of the Accountability Act and the upcoming Mission Act,” Labor Council President Pam Fendt said at a town hall meeting at the VA Medical Center to discuss the new program..

The act will expand the use of private medical care for veterans at the expense of the VA, which already provides excellent health care, she said.

Mark Foreman, who was a Navy corpsman serving with Marines in Vietnam, was seriously wounded and disabled, and has been receiving VA care for 50 years, he said. “It is the best care a veteran could get anywhere, and I fear the Mission Act will undermine the VA system and hurt the quality of care,” he said.

“Outsourcing VA healthcare to the private sector will deplete Veterans Health Administration (VHA) budgets, and essentially turn VHA into an insurance company rather than a primary health care provider,” said Fendt.

Arbitrary drive time and wait time rules are being used to implement the Mission Act. There is no guarantee that wait times and distance to care will be improved by the Act, nor that care will be of the same quality.” It would seem then, that the goal is privatization of care rather than improved care,” Fendt said.

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"I'm here to speak up for veterans. Any reduction of services at the Milwaukee VA Hospital in Milwaukee would be misguided. It could hurt the veterans we are here to support, and it would hurt the staff members -- workers we want to protect, stated Bob Zillman, a retired union member.

"VA employees have pioneered groundbreaking treatments for traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injuries, post-traumatic stress, and conditions more common with veterans than the general population. Outsourcing VA healthcare under the proposed regulations will reduce patient volume at the VHA and undermine the special expertise of VHA healthcare," Fendt said.

The Milwaukee Area Labor Council has heard a number of stories of harassment and termination of workers, especially those active in their unions, she said. "It is not our wish to put Milwaukee in a bad light, however, there are some serious issues to address at the Milwaukee VA. We call on leadership to support our veterans and those who care for them."

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