



**MEMO**

Date: December 15, 2015

To: Senator Margaret O'Brien, Chair  
Members, Senate Veterans, Military Affairs, and Homeland Security Committee

From: Gwen MacKenzie, Senior VP Ascension Health & Michigan Market Executive *Gwen MacKenzie*  
Elizabeth Aderholdt, VP Ascension Health & President Mid-Michigan Market & President of St. Mary's of Michigan, Saginaw *Elizabeth L. Aderholdt*

RE: Support for House Concurrent Resolution 7

Ascension Michigan is part of Ascension, the largest nonprofit and Catholic health system in the United States (U.S.) including 129 hospitals and more than 30 senior living facilities in 24 states and the District of Columbia. Ascension Michigan wholeheartedly supports HCR 7, a resolution urging the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the United States Congress to create a pilot program in Michigan instituting a flexible Veterans Choice Card system. It is our contention that this pilot program would build upon the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 to provide even greater access to health services for Michigan's Veteran population. Two specific examples that would leverage the Veterans Choice Card System include the Ascension Veteran's Choice Program and the Genesys Health System Presumptive Illness Demonstration Program:

**Ascension Veteran's Choice Program:**

Ascension recently finalized its registration with Health Net Federal Services, federal health benefit administrators to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, enabling Ascension health systems across the country to become health service providers for veterans through the recently enacted Veteran's Choice program. One illustrative example in Michigan is Genesys Health System and its 160 aligned Genesys Physician Hospital Organization (GPHO) physician offices which are fully vetted and prepared to provide care options to veterans who wish to engage GPHO services through the Veterans Choice program in the Genesee county region. In this process, any veteran who lives more than 40 miles from their primary medical home, or who has had to wait over 30 days for service can opt to use their VA benefits to receive care through Genesys Health System. HCR 7 will support a pilot program in Michigan to expand the types of VA facilities for which the 40 mile criteria applies, and address administrative hurdles in the current program.

Ascension Michigan health systems in addition to Genesys - St. John Providence, Borgess Health, St. Mary's of Michigan and St. Joseph Health System - are also dedicating themselves to partnering with the VA system to provide care for those who have risked their lives and given so much to ensure our freedom. We are proud to be able to provide these services and support HCR 7 and any other means that might be employed by the Michigan Legislature and/or the State of Michigan to prioritize and build new and better support for Michigan Veterans.

### **Genesys Health System Presumptive Illness Demonstration Program:**

Genesys Health System is supporting Veterans in the Genesee County region through an innovative Presumptive Illness Demonstration Program for Vietnam Veterans. Presumptive illnesses are assumed when veterans with similar experiences have higher rates of certain types of illnesses that are presumed to have been caused by military service. For Vietnam Veterans, there are a variety of health conditions that the VA presumes were caused by exposure to Agent Orange. This pilot will seek to identify and connect Vietnam Veterans with their health and pension benefits which they so richly deserve, but for which they may not be fully aware. In this project Genesys has partnered with 160 community physicians in its Genesys Physician Hospital Organization, as well as the Genesee County Office of Veterans Affairs, Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency, Michigan State University School of Public Health, University of Michigan - Flint and Ascension Health/Accretive Health to design and implement a County-wide systemic strategy to: **Identify Veterans** at all points of entry into Genesys Health System; **Provide an on-site Navigator** who can assess Veterans and their families to determine eligibility for services and provide real-time education and enrollment for programs, services and financial benefits; **Align identification of Veterans and services** as allowable with Genesys PHO's 160 Primary Care Physicians; and **Promote messaging** aimed at Veterans and providers to clarify what services and where services can be accessed and the enrollment process.

Additionally, Genesys Health Foundation, with support from the GPHO is actively fundraising to provide needed dollars to improve veteran's access to services and programming for our community. In Michigan alone, over \$800 Million dollars in greatly needed veteran's benefits go unclaimed each year for lack of programs like the Genesys Presumptive Illness Project. This demonstration will establish a replicable model leveraging the Ascension Health capacity to embed the technology and process across its five Michigan Ministries to similarly engage their veteran's population.

Ascension Michigan fully supports the HCR 7 Resolution and encourages the consideration of the Senate Veterans, Military Affairs, and Homeland Security Committee to seek its approval.