July 15, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

One month ago, America’s physicians sent you an urgent request. The American Medical Association House of Delegates voted overwhelmingly to ask that you “take immediate action to provide timely access to health care for veterans utilizing the health care sector outside the Veterans Administration (VA) until the VA can provide health care in a timely manner.” Speaking on behalf of Texas Medical Association’s 47,000-plus physician and medical student members, I endorsed that action within hours. “Our veterans have stepped up and served our country, so physicians want to be able to step in and serve them,” I said. The very next day, the executive director of the AMA wrote to “strongly urge you to take immediate action.”

Mr. President, one month has gone by with no action by your administration and no response from you. Each passing day carries the real-life risk of death and avoidable morbidity for the men and women who have served our country so bravely. Although both houses of Congress are working on legislation to right this wrong, the latest reports indicate that it will be August before a bill reaches your desk. That is two more months — two more months of illness, disability, as well as physical and emotional suffering for veterans waiting for care.

Mr. President, this is an access-to-health-care crisis. This is an issue to which you have dedicated much of your presidency. You can extend your legacy to our veterans with the stroke of a pen. Only a presidential executive order can provide the immediate access to avoid these preventable tragedies. We request that the access to care under this executive order be immediate and free from bureaucratic delay. We request that this order include an effective and rapid payment system for the private-sector physicians who step up to provide care. We also request that this emergency intervention be continued until timely transition of care can safely be handed off to the VA.

Mr. President, this is a life-or-death issue for the physicians of Texas and the people of our state. Nearly 1.7 million veterans live in Texas — the second most of any state. To date, despite the VA’s well-known reputation for bureaucratic delays and isolation from community physicians, more than 300 TMA members have signed up for our registry of doctors willing to see veterans in their offices. And we are pleased that some VA officials in Texas have reached out to us already.

Mr. President, Texas physicians are here to serve. Our veterans need our help. Please take action, today. Any further delay is unconscionable.

Sincerely,

Austin I. King, MD
President

cc: Texas Congressional Delegation