

NFFE News



NFFE-IAM and Senator Cory Booker Join Forces to Sound Alarm on New Jersey VA Medical Centers

June 19, 2020

Washington, D.C. – Just a few days after Union representatives met with the office of U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) about the unacceptable COVID-19 situation among patients and staff, particularly at the East Orange VA Health Care System (HCS), Senator Booker [publicly](#) called on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to develop a plan to address increasing COVID-19 fatalities, policies related to patient care, inadequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), and adherence to social distancing guidelines at VA facilities.



The East Orange VA Medical Center struggles with keeping both veterans and employees safe from COVID-19.

In his [letter](#) to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, Senator Booker noted that more employees have died of COVID-19 at the New Jersey VA HCS than at any other health care system in the nation. He also urged Secretary Wilkie to fully disclose documentation that details the Department’s PPE supply, noting that inadequate access to PPE increases the rate of viral transmission to staff, while also endangering employees with preexisting medical conditions.

NFFE Union representatives urged Senator Booker’s office to call on the New Jersey VA HCS to specifically provide retention pay for the facility’s staff, who go to work each day as essential worker heroes to serve our nation’s veterans. The VA is authorized to provide a retention incentive to these employees, either in installments after completion of a specified period of service or in a single lump sum payment. VA facilities in other areas of the country have offered such retention pay to VA employees, but the New Jersey VA HCS has refused, even though the New Jersey VA HCS has been hit hardest with COVID-19 among VA health care facilities across the country.

“NFFE applauds Senator Booker’s quick and public action on behalf of VA patients and employees in New Jersey,” said NFFE National President Randy Erwin. “We continue to urge the VA to do the right thing and provide retention pay for employees of the New Jersey VA HCS, and we will continue to work with Senator Booker and other allies in Congress to make that happen. These VA employees are heroes working in one of the most dangerous areas of the country. They should be compensated as such.”

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