

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 30, 2018

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

Congratulations on your confirmation as the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs. We look forward to working with you to ensure that our veterans promptly receive the benefits they have earned through their service to our nation. To ensure the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can fulfill its important mission, it is vital that its work force is properly trained, led, and accountable. To that end we call your attention to the recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report titled, "*Actions Needed to Address Employee Misconduct Process and Ensure Accountability*" and urge the VA to immediately implement the recommendations outlined in that report. The GAO reviewed a representative sample of 544 misconduct cases from 2009-2015 and examined a non-generalizable sample of whistleblower disclosures from 2010-2014. The GAO's investigation uncovered serious issues with the VA's record-keeping, its protection of whistleblowers, and its handling of allegations of misconduct, waste, fraud, and abuse.

In the cases reviewed, the GAO found that some VA officials who were found guilty of misconduct received a lesser punishment than recommended or no punishment at all; whistleblowers were 10 times more likely to receive disciplinary action the year they spoke up than their peers; 66 percent of the employees who filed formal whistleblower complaints did not work for the VA the following year; and some employees investigated complaints against themselves.

It is clear that to date the VA has failed to protect whistleblowers and hold senior VA officials accountable for misconduct. These problems are not new, and we have heard similar complaints from VA employees, veterans, and their loved ones for years. This type of turmoil is completely unacceptable for an agency tasked with managing the federal government's most solemn and important responsibilities: caring for the brave men and women who were injured or traumatized defending our nation.

The VA must cultivate a culture of trust and openness, and empower employees to report waste, fraud, abuse, and misconduct. That is why we urge the VA to immediately implement the GAO's recommendations. These recommendations include ensuring that the VA maintains

reliable record-keeping and documentation for its misconduct investigations; the VA follows its own rules and procedures for investigating and adjudicating misconduct investigations; and all recommended adverse actions against guilty employees are recorded and implemented. The recommendations also call for independent review and oversight of senior official misconduct to ensure these officials are held accountable for their actions.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important and serious matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



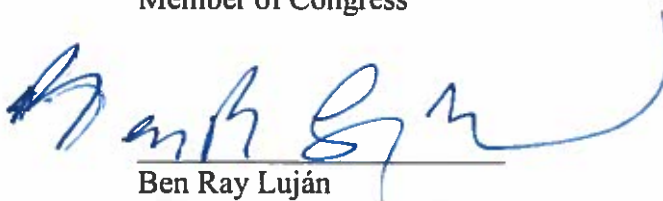
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