

U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

B-234 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

March 30, 2021

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to bring to your attention a serious problem within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding its investigations.

A recent Office of Special Counsel (OSC) report on the White River Junction Veterans Affairs Medical Center (White River Junction, Vermont) found that the findings of the Department's reports on disclosures of wrongdoing "do not appear reasonable."¹ OSC's review found that the Department had a willingness to resolve issues in favor of the agency despite evidence to the contrary, disregarded sworn testimony and eyewitness accounts, and made conclusions that were at odds with the available evidence. Even when VA did substantiate allegations, the agency did not conduct additional review until requested by OSC.

Additionally, not only did VA perform an unsatisfactory investigation, it impugned the character of an employee who had been the victim of violent behavior by a supervisor. This is an issue that goes to the heart of trust and equity at the Department and it is essential that VA prevent future instances of poor investigations and inappropriate action against an employee.

I request a staff-level briefing on this issue by April 30, 2021. The briefing should include how the Department plans to improve procedures to prevent similar investigative and reporting failures, as well as what steps have been taken at the White River Junction VAMC, specifically, to correct the situation.

I thank you for your commitments to making VA safe and welcoming. I look forward to learning how you plan to address these issues. Please contact Daria Berstell, Professional Staff

¹ Special Counsel Henry Kerner, letter to The President Re: OSC File Nos. DI-19-0294, DI-19-0833, DI-19-1271, and DI-1876, March 4, 2021, https://osc.gov/Documents/Public%20Files/FY21/DI-19-0294,%200833,%201271,%201876/DI-19-0294%20DI-19-0833%20DI-19-1271%20and%20DI-19-1876%20Letter%20to%20the%20President_Redacted.pdf.

The Honorable Denis McDonough

March 30, 2021

Page 2

Member for the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, at daria.berstell@mail.house.gov, and Kat Cosgrove, Senior Legislative Assistant for Rep. Chris Pappas, at kat.cosgrove@mail.house.gov, with any questions.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Pappas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris Pappas

Chairman

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations