

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0803

November 23, 2015

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

As a retired Navy captain and the former commander-in-chief of the Delaware National Guard, I understand well the obligation we have as Americans to honor our nation's veterans. I visited the Veterans Hospital near Wilmington, Delaware within a few weeks after enrolling in graduate school at the University of Delaware in September 1973 to find out what services were available to me as a veteran of the Vietnam War. The hospital, built shortly after the end of WWII, was not one that Delaware or its veterans could be proud of. For more than thirty years – as a U.S. Representative, Governor, and U.S. Senator – I have worked to strengthen our Veterans Affairs (VA) system to enable it to better serve our veterans and to enable the VA to provide the excellent health care and benefits that veterans deserve.

I take the reports of misconduct at the VA very seriously, as I'm sure that you do, and I believe appropriate action should be taken to hold accountable those responsible and address the incidents that led to these serious issues. As I'm sure you know, a recently-published VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) report^[1] has alleged that senior VA employees acted improperly by orchestrating job openings, steering themselves into the new positions at higher salaries than their predecessors, and reaping large payments to relocate and begin employment in these new jobs. These are serious allegations, which led to the VA OIG making criminal referrals to the U.S. Attorney's Office regarding the actions of two VA officials. As the Senior Senator from Delaware and a veteran, I ask your assistance in helping me to understand what procedures are in place to prevent further abuse of taxpayer dollars in both the federal employment and relocation processes at the VA.

Specifically, according to the OIG report, Diana Rubens arranged her own re-assignment from her post as Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations in Washington, D.C. to that of Director of the Philadelphia and Wilmington VA Regional Offices in June 2014. During her transition to her new position, Ms. Rubens allegedly billed the VA \$274,019 for her move to Philadelphia and to arrange for new housing. Additionally, the OIG found that Kimberly Graves, working in concert with Ms. Rubens, left her position as the Director of the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) Eastern Area Office in Philadelphia last October to become director of the regional office in St. Paul, MN. She charged the VA \$129,467 for her moving expenses.

^[1] U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of the Inspector General, Veterans Benefits Administration Administrative Investigation: Inappropriate Use of Position and Misuse of Relocation Program and Incentives, 15-02997-526, <http://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-15-02997-526.pdf>.

The OIG's allegations that these two VA officials appear to have orchestrated transfers as a means to bill the federal government hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars – if true – is deeply troubling. The VA OIG's report raises significant questions about how these types of situations are supposed to be handled. Accordingly, I ask:

1. What safeguards are in place to prevent this type of manipulation of the federal employment process from occurring at the VA?
 - a. Were these procedures followed in the cases of Ms. Rubens and Ms. Graves? If not, why not?
 - b. What could have caused existing safeguards to fail in the VBA?
 - c. Are there additional processes and procedures that could be put into place to prevent future abuses of the federal employment process?

2. Please describe what procedures exist at the VA to identify exorbitant relocation costs and prevent them from being reimbursed. Specifically:
 - a. Were these procedures followed in the cases of Ms. Rubens and Ms. Graves? If not, why not?
 - b. What could have caused existing safeguards to fail in the VBA?
 - c. Are there best practices or additional safeguards that the VA should implement to prevent reimbursement of relocation overpayments and recoup fraudulent relocation overpayments?

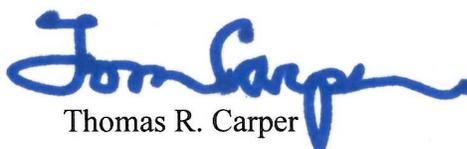
We need to remain vigilant to ensure that the Department of Veterans Affairs is providing access to comprehensive, quality care for veterans throughout our country. We have a responsibility to ensure that they receive the help and benefits that they have earned, and that includes appropriate use of taxpayer resources provided to the VA. Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs must continue to work together to address these issues and improve the care our veterans receive.

If you have any questions concerning this request, please feel free to contact me or ask the members of your staff to contact [REDACTED] of my staff at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] at [REDACTED].

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter. I look forward to receiving your response.

With best personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,


Thomas R. Carper