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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

335 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

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July 10, 2015

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
 Secretary
 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
 Washington, DC 2042

Dear Secretary McDonald,

We write today to express our deep concern about the current state of the Los Angeles VA Regional Office (LA VARO). We have received word from a highly credible source that documents needed for processing veterans claims were inappropriately placed in shred bins. The fact that this allegation has been substantiated leads us to believe that veterans' claims documents likely have been destroyed inappropriately.

As you know, such misconduct could have a devastating impact on the affected veterans and their families, resulting in the loss of critical information and adversely affecting the adjudication of veteran claims, leading to a loss of VA benefits and essential healthcare. Simply put, this is unacceptable.

Sadly, the inappropriate destruction of veterans' claims documentation has been an issue for the Department for several years. In 2008, the VA Office of Inspector General (VA OIG) substantiated that, across the nation, documents were being inappropriately placed in shred bins in a systemic manner. In November 2008, VBA officials "put new controls in place to help ensure applications for benefits and other official documentation were not improperly destroyed." You can imagine our surprise and concern that we again face this issue nearly seven years later, and that California veterans may remain affected.

As such, we request that the shredding of any and all documents at the LA VARO cease immediately, that you deploy a leadership team to the Regional Office, evaluate the situation, and ensure proper protections and controls are put into place.

Additionally, we would like to meet with you and the California Congressional Delegation served by the LA VARO to discuss the extent of the shredding, who has been affected, and what remedies are being implemented. As we are both members of the Subcommittee of jurisdiction, we would also like to visit the facility and meet with the leadership team on station, as well as representatives from the Western Area office, to discuss the actions being taken to fix these problems. We ask that this visit occur during the congressional recess in August. Furthermore, we have written to the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee to request a hearing on the state of the LA VARO.

Finally, we have received reports that the station suffers from leadership challenges and underperforms most other VAROs across the country. Nearly half of the office's workload is sent to other stations for processing, and the station has one of the lowest quality metrics in the country. This means the Los

Angeles VARO erroneously adjudicates veterans' claims more often than nearly all other VA Regional Offices.

California veterans deserve better. We must take every action to ensure that California veterans do not lose benefits or go without crucial health services merely because of where they live. We appreciate your strong leadership and commitment to improving the VA for all American veterans, and we look forward to working with you and your team to make a better, stronger, and more efficient VA Regional Office in Los Angeles.

Sincerely,



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress