

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 5, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to you with great concern regarding the impact of President Trump's recent executive orders on the Veterans Crisis Line's (VCL) mission to provide critical, lifesaving support to veterans. Any change to VCL's capacity to answer the call of veterans at their time of need is unacceptable, and we fear your administration's actions are already causing harm.

Over the past two weeks, at the direction of the Office of Personnel Management, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has fired more than 2,400 federal employees, some of whom are dedicated professionals who provided direct support for responders at the VCL. This includes social service assistants (SSA) who engage local law enforcement for welfare checks, arrange transport to VA facilities, and contact emergency dispatch when needed; training staff that ensure VCL employees are able to support veterans who call in; management analysts responsible for assessing the effectiveness of VCL operations; and technology staff who ensure VCL responders have functioning equipment. You have thus far claimed your termination of at least 2,400 employees across VA will have "no impact on direct veteran care," but we are suspicious about the veracity of such a statement given the crucial role these individuals play in the operation of the VCL.

Further, those critical federal workers who remain employed at the VCL are facing heightened uncertainty regarding their work status following the President's Executive Order mandating a return to in-person work.¹ In preparation for predicted increased call volume due to the rollout of the new nationwide streamlined suicide prevention number and the ability to contact VCL using 988 press 1 in July 2022, VA and VCL leadership took action to hire additional VCL responders and support staff to handle it. Many of these employees were hired under remote work agreements. Such remote work agreements have allowed for the hiring of a highly skilled and diverse workforce that might not be located near one of the VCL's five physical hubs—in Atlanta, Georgia; Canandaigua, New York; Topeka, Kansas; Waco, Texas; and Hot Springs, Arkansas. This includes military spouses who cannot choose their spouse's next duty station and disabled veterans who may need to live close to caregivers or specialized healthcare providers.

Even more concerning, some VCL employees who have already reported back to the office found that the VCL's physical locations were not yet ready for occupancy. It is unclear whether existing physical facilities at the VCL's five hubs or other VA facilities even have sufficient capacity to accommodate all returning employees.

¹See [Executive Order of President Donald J. Trump](#), "Return to In-Person Work" (January 20, 2025) and [joint memorandum](#) of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "Agency Return to Office Implementation Plans" (January 27, 2025).

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If all of this wasn't enough, as recently as Friday, February 28, 2025, media outlets reported that VA was rescinding VCL job offers for dozens of individuals, including licensed clinical social workers.² The reason given for the withdrawal of these job offers is that VCL does not have sufficient office space for new employees. The story has since been updated to reflect a statement from VA that this was due to an administrative error on its part. However, it is not clear how many individuals received this message in error, leading to confusion and potentially delayed start dates for these new hires. Even for employees exempt from the hiring freeze, these executive orders have created chaos, confusion, and delays that our veterans can't afford.

These reckless, abrupt actions against the VCL are coming at a time when veterans, who make up one third of the federal employee workforce, are facing more uncertainty than ever. Research indicates that individuals facing job and income loss are at higher risk of suicidal ideation.³ Many veterans have been caught up in the recent firings and are facing difficult situations as they try to figure out how to provide for themselves and their families. This is no time to be jeopardizing VCL operations, and the carelessness with which VA has been carrying out President Trump's orders is placing the VCL at risk.

Finally, we are concerned about the effects of the "Department of Government Efficiency" Cost Efficiency Initiative executive order, signed on February 26, 2025.⁴ As you know, 988 functions as a grant and cooperative agreement between the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health, the non-profit organization that operates the 988 crisis line. Due to the broad nature of the executive order, we have serious concerns that SAMHSA's grant to administer the 988 suicide crisis line could be impacted, and this would therefore affect functionality for the VCL as well.

The VCL's work is crucial to the veterans it supports. As Members of Congress and individuals who have committed to serving our veterans as they served our nation, we cannot allow any interruption to the 24/7 support that the VCL provides. We urge you to take immediate action to ensure the essential operations of the Veterans Crisis Line are not disrupted by layoffs, unnecessary attrition, or other executive orders. We also implore you to reinstate VCL employees in any position who have been terminated since January 20, 2025, exempt all VCL employees from any further rounds of terminations or reductions in force, exempt VCL employees from VA's return-to-office requirements, and reinstate job offers that have been rescinded for any VCL positions since January 20, 2025.

In addition, we also request that you provide answers to the following questions:

1. How many VCL employees have been terminated since January 20, 2025? Please provide a comprehensive list of all employees terminated, including those that provide support to VCL responders, along with their occupations and dates of their termination.

²Jory Heckman, [VA reverses course after putting some Veterans Crisis Line hires on hold](#), Federal News Network (February 28, 2025).

³Namkee Choi, C. Nathan Marti, and Bryan Y. Choi, [Job Loss, Financial Strain, and Housing Problems as Suicide Precipitants: Associations with Other Life Stressors](#), SSM Population Health (Sept. 2022).

⁴See [Executive Order of President Donald J. Trump](#), "Implementing the President's 'Department of Government Efficiency' Cost Efficiency Initiative" (February 26, 2025).

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2. How many VCL employees that were terminated since January 20, 2025, have been reinstated? Please provide a comprehensive list of all reinstated VCL employees, the dates of their terminations and reinstatements, and explanations for why they were reinstated. Please also explain the process by which they have been reinstated.
3. Of those VCL employees that remain terminated, what appeal opportunities exist for them?
4. Has the VCL seen an increase in contact volume since January 20, 2025? Please provide monthly VCL data since September 30, 2024, to include call volume and answering speed, text message volume, and online chat volume. Please also provide the monthly number of VCL employees on board and the number of vacancies, by occupation.
5. What is the capacity of VCL's five existing hubs (in Atlanta, Georgia; Canandaigua, New York; Topeka, Kansas; Waco, Texas; and Hot Springs, Arkansas) to accommodate all VCL responders and employees? Are all of these locations in sufficient condition for VCL employees to report, or will renovation or reconfiguration be necessary?
6. If you intend for VCL employees to comply with the return to office order, how does VA plan to ensure VCL responders have sufficient workspace and equipment (such as noise-cancelling headsets) so they can deliver quality services to veterans in crisis?
7. In instances where facilities do not have sufficient space to ensure a separate work area for VCL employees, how will VA take steps to ensure the privacy of veteran callers?
8. How many job offers for incoming VCL staff has VA rescinded since January 20, 2025? Please provide a comprehensive list of all offers that have been rescinded, by occupation.
9. How many rescinded job offers for incoming VCL staff have been reinstated since January 20, 2025? Please provide a comprehensive list of all reinstated offers, by occupation.
10. What steps have you taken to coordinate with your counterpart at the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that SAMHSA's grant to administer the 988 suicide crisis line, and therefore VCL, will not be affected by the president's February 26th executive order?

We ask that you provide written responses to the above questions no later than **March 12, 2025**. Additionally, we request that you provide a briefing for Committee staff no later than **March 14, 2025**. Should you have any questions about this request, you may contact my office.

Our veterans cannot afford inaction on this matter.

Sincerely,



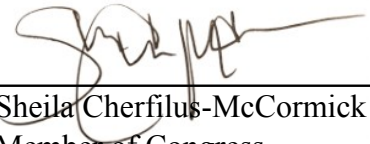
Mark Takano
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans'
Affairs



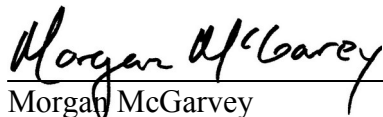
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



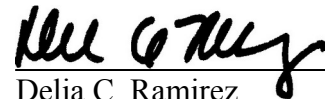
Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



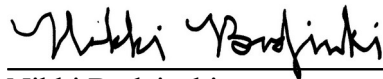
Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress



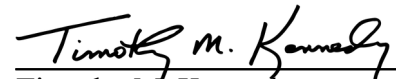
Morgan McGarvey
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Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress



Timothy M. Kennedy
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Maxine Dexter
Member of Congress



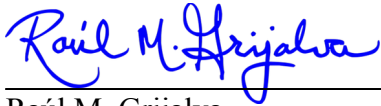
Herbert C. Conaway, Jr.
Member of Congress



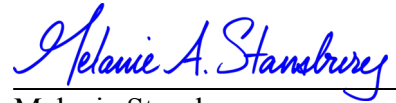
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Shontel M. Brown
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Raúl M. Grijalva
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Melanie Stansbury
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Josh Gottheimer
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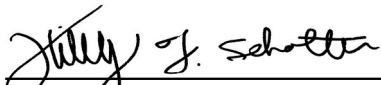
Gwen S. Moore
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Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress



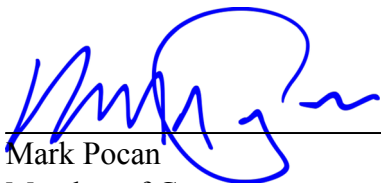
James P. McGovern
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Hillary J. Scholten
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Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



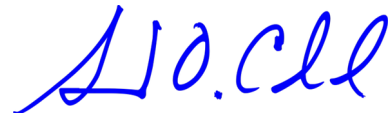
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Josh Riley
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Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



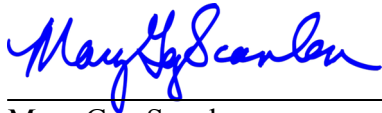
Salud Carbajal
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Wesley Bell
Member of Congress



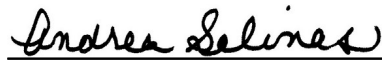
Joseph D. Morelle
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Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress



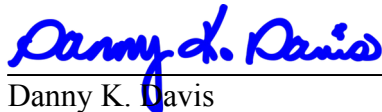
Lauren Underwood
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Andrea Salinas
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Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress



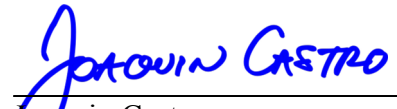
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Norma J. Torres
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Seth Moulton
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Joaquin Castro
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Pramila Jayapal
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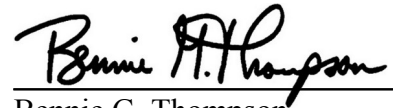
Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



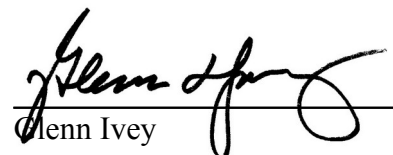
Raul Ruiz, M.D.
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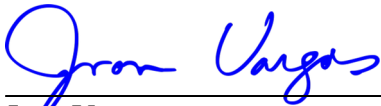
Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Bennie G. Thompson
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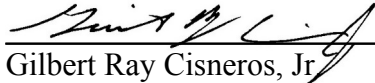
Glenn Ivey
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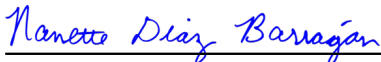
Juan Vargas
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Jim Costa
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Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.
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Nanette Diaz Barragán
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Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
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Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
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Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



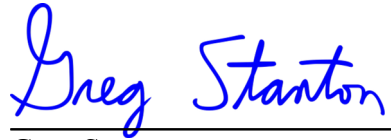
Eric Sorensen
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Emilia Strong Sykes
Member of Congress



Sarah McBride
Member of Congress



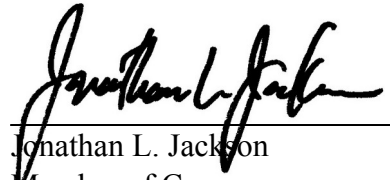
Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



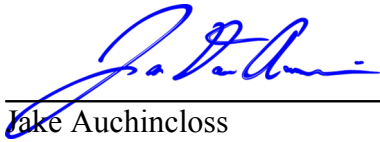
Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



Cleo Fields
Member of Congress



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



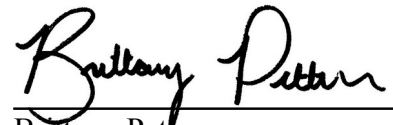
Jake Auchincloss
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Becca Balint
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JM Tokuda
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Brittany Pettersen
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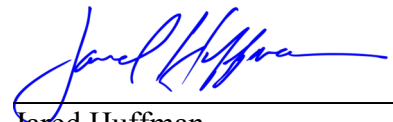
Vicente Gonzalez
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Dina Titus
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Robin L. Kelly
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Jared Huffman
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Julie Johnson
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Scott H. Peters
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