

U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

364 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

February 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 today to express our serious concerns about the Trump Administration's recent executive orders and the detrimental impact they will have on the delivery of healthcare to our nation's veterans.

On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued an executive order that directed executive branch agencies to "immediately terminate all diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) programs."¹ This term is not defined in the executive order, but it seems the President intends to terminate any and all federal programs that exist to support any individuals who are not straight Caucasian males. Following President Trump's order, federal agencies began ending these initiatives and placing employees who worked on or were in any way associated with these programs on administrative leave, including at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which we know has already placed at least 60 employees on leave.²

We are increasingly concerned about the impact that shuttering initiatives that enhance access to care and services will have on veterans and VA employees. Prior to their abrupt cancellation under the Trump Administration, VA's initiatives focused on improving the accessibility of VA services for disabled veterans and those in underserved communities and helped identify and address gaps and disparities in healthcare, medical research, and access to VA benefits.

Despite your Administration's claims, these initiatives do not give any one group priority access to services at VA. Rather, these initiatives, in practice, allow VA to increase trust among, and improve outreach to, veterans affected by persistent inequality, including minority veterans, women veterans, LGBTQ+ veterans, and veterans with disabilities.

¹See Executive Order of President Donald J. Trump, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing" (January 20, 2025).

²Leo Shane. "VA places 60 staff on leave after shutting down DEI offices." Military Times, January 24, 2025.

Ending these programs and initiatives will damage VA's longstanding excellence in facilitating clinical research trials and producing world-class research. VA's ability to recruit a diverse group of individuals in its clinical trial and research programs has long ensured that the devices, treatments, and drugs that are developed as a result are effective and beneficial not only for all veterans, but all Americans, regardless of their race or gender. The chilling effect that penalizing diversity programs and removing personnel has created could significantly erode VA's reputation as the gold standard in research and healthcare, which I hope you agree must be avoided.

Additionally, many of the initiatives your Administration has shut down focused on delivering specialized healthcare and mental health support for minority veterans who may face unique challenges or trauma. Without these initiatives, veterans will not experience the benefits of having VA healthcare providers that share a similar background or culture and can provide the cultural competency that defines quality healthcare.

Further, healthcare providers have long understood that people and veterans of different races or ethnicities and individuals of different genders are impacted differently by diseases, illnesses, and conditions. Personalized care planning improves patient outcomes. Crucially, VA providers understand that factors like race and gender may increase individual veterans' risk of illnesses linked to toxic exposure and other aspects of their military service. In the past, VA has made a commitment to serve all veterans who have served our nation equitably and equally. Ending initiatives that allow VA to do that will only harm veterans.

Finally, ending accessibility initiatives will impair VA's ability to ensure disabled veterans with visual, hearing, mobility, and cognitive impairments are not limited in their ability to get the care and resources they need. Crucially, this includes ensuring veterans – especially those who wear the scars and life-long impacts of their sacrifices in defense of our nation – can have true access to the system that we promised would serve them.

Combined with the Acting Secretary's recent decision to abruptly and irresponsibly terminate the employment of the Directors of the Center for Women Veterans and the Center for Minority Veterans, these actions seriously call into question the Trump Administration's commitment to properly serving our nation's veterans. In light of these concerns, we request that you provide answers to the following questions:

1. Will VA research and clinical practice guidelines regarding disparities in diseases, care, or benefits access among different demographics be altered or terminated as a result of President Trump's Executive Orders?
2. What changes, if any, have already been made or do you intend to make to the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Office of Health Equity, in terms of its functions, staffing levels, roles, and responsibilities?

3. How will you ensure that VHA's Office of Health Equity can continue to fulfill its mission, in light of the cancellation of DEIA initiatives and any intended changes as described in response to the question above?
4. Will any ongoing VA research into health disparities, conducted either through the Office of Research and Development or the Office of Health Equity, be impacted as a result of President Trump's Executive Orders?
5. Have you taken any specific personnel or organizational actions regarding the VA Office of Research and Development's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative Work Group? Please explain why the Work Group's website is no longer available to the public.
6. What other VA websites have been altered or made inaccessible due to mentions of DEIA initiatives or your administration's review for compliance with the President's Executive Orders? Please provide a complete, unredacted list.

We ask that you provide written responses to the above questions no later than **February 12, 2025**. Additionally, we request that you provide a briefing for Committee staff no later than **February 14, 2025**. Should you have any questions about this request, you may contact Ms. Alexis MacDonald (alexis.macdonald@mail.house.gov) and Ms. Abbie Killian (abbie.killian@mail.house.gov).

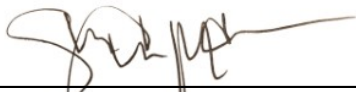
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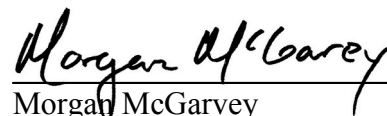
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Julia Brownley
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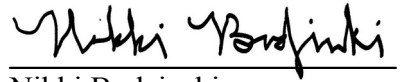
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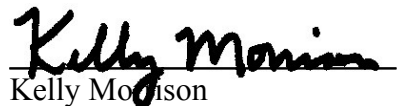
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