

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 14, 2025

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

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Acting Archivist of the United States
National Archives and Records Administration
700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20408

Dear Secretary Collins and Secretary Rubio:

We are writing to express our concern regarding the closure of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) Office of Equity Assurance (OEA). We received notice from affected employees that the office was shuttered in February following the issuance of President Trump's Executive Orders related to elimination of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) programs within the Federal government. OEA performed critical tasks and research to ensure no veteran is denied proper benefits.

Unequal treatment of veterans of different backgrounds is not a new occurrence or problem. For example, in 2023 the non-partisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) confirmed black veterans are ten percent less likely to have their mental health-related VA claims approved, compared to other veterans. The Biden administration did the right thing by evaluating why this occurs and taking steps to correct it. Black veterans suffering from mental health conditions related to their military service deserve our support, not to be discarded by those with a political agenda looking to dismantle VA. The liquidation of this office will make it harder for veterans to access their earned benefits. OEA also maintains an internal website that tracks its research efforts and data, which are critical to inform fact-based policy improvements. To have terminated this office and its functions under the guise of "eliminating DEI" demonstrates a lack of sincerity and seriousness about improving VA's provision of services to **all** veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors. You may attempt to cancel these veterans and their service but their bravery and sacrifice can never be erased.

We request VA immediately and permanently reinstate the authority, functionality, responsibilities, research, and personnel of OEA. The continued cessation of activities focused on researching and addressing the disparities that evidence clearly shows exist will undoubtedly impact veterans' access to their earned care and benefits. The restoration of OEA should occur without delay. Personnel assigned to OEA should not be subject to any planned or future Reductions in Force, and we request VA rescind and reverse its Specific Reduction in Force Notice sent to OEA employees on March 13, 2025. Further, we ask for a detailed update on the

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status of VA's work to address GAO's recommendations which as of March 14, 2025, remain open.

In the interim, as Ranking Members of the Committees of jurisdiction for the Department, we request you preserve all records related to disparities in the provision of benefits, services, and health care to veterans and to the dismantling of OEA. Further, this letter is a formal request to VA and the National Archives and Records Administration to preserve all stored communications, data, records, documents, reports, memoranda, correspondence, audio recordings, call logs, activity logs, audit trails, audit logs, notes from meetings, written agreements or other communication or any portion of any such communication, created, edited, modified, saved, or received by any former or current employee or contractor of VA regarding all matters pertaining to the dismantling of OEA and disparities in access to VA health care, services, and benefits, including for reasons of age, religion, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and geographic location. This request includes, but is not limited to, all stored communications, data, records, documents, reports, memoranda, correspondence, audio recordings, call logs, activity logs, audit trails, audit logs, notes from meetings, written agreements or other communication or any portion of any such communication, created, edited, modified, saved, or received by any current or former employee or contractor of the VBA Office of Equity Assurance, the Center for Minority Veterans, and the Center for Women Veterans.

We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Mark Takano
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Cc:

The Honorable Mike Bost, Chairman

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Chairman