

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 28, 2019

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

The Honorable Patrick Shanahan
Acting Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Wilkie and Acting Secretary Shanahan:

On September 26, 2018, the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs issued a joint commitment to implement a single, seamlessly integrated Electronic Health Record (EHR) to support a lifetime of care for our servicemembers and veterans. This commitment included your promise to institute an organizational design that would prioritize VA and DOD accountability and effectiveness. We write to you concerned that our Committees have seen little progress made to make good on this pledge.

A decade ago, Congress tasked VA and DOD with creating a fully interoperable EHR and directed that an Interagency Program Office (IPO) be established to guide the Departments' efforts. However, the Government Accountability Office testified in a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee hearing on September 13, 2018, that the IPO has never been effectively positioned to serve as a single point of accountability as intended. Further, VA officials testified in that same hearing that the IPO acts as a facilitator without any authority over the Department. It is in this context that VA announced a joint VA/DOD governance structure was being developed, although few details were presented on this plan. Nearly four months later, the Departments still lack a single point of accountability. The absence of a joint oversight organization is unacceptable in a project of this scope and importance.

As was written in your joint statement for that hearing, "the importance, magnitude, and overall financial investment of our EHR modernization efforts demand the alignment of plans, strategies, and structure across the two Departments." We agree. And to that end, we respectfully request that you provide further information on the status and details of the strategy created by your Departments to execute your joint decision making, including details on the accountability mechanism, organizational structure, detailed implementation timeline, and your coordinated clinical and business workflows, operations, data management, and technology solutions. We urge you to ensure that your modernization teams are fully equipped to handle this task and that

you act with the utmost urgency to formalize the joint governance structure that will guide this process.

This effort to achieve true interoperability between VA and DOD health records will have a substantial impact on the quality of care that we provide to our servicemembers and veterans, and we will continue to do everything we can to oversee this process and provide you the resources you need. We look forward to working closely with both of your Departments to ensure that our servicemembers and veterans have access to a seamlessly interoperable EHR.

Sincerely,



JON TESTER
Ranking Member
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee



JACK REED
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee