

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 3, 2017

The Honorable David Shulkin
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, Northwest
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

We are writing to express our continuing concerns with the Department of Veterans Affairs' Health Eligibility Center. Given that a veteran's experience with VA health care oftentimes begins with applying for enrollment at the Health Eligibility Center, we are distressed by continued reports of problems that may result in a delay in enrollment and subsequently health care, and a less than optimal first VA health care experience.

While we are encouraged by the actions the Department has taken, including an extensive case management effort and an option for telephone enrollment, to address the nearly one million health care application backlog in 2014, much work remains to be done to address continuing issues with enrollment.

We support the one-year period given in the Equitable Relief letters that were mailed by the Health Eligibility Center to veterans with pending applications in March 2016, to allow them to provide necessary information to complete their enrollment. However, we are concerned about the recent allegations about a coding error that has potentially led to veterans receiving incorrect information about what type of information is needed to complete their application.

We understand the Department has reviewed this matter and appreciate that VA flagged this issue for the inspector general. However, given the enormity of the impact on veterans, we urge you to take additional steps to further ensure veterans receive every opportunity to complete their applications and that those applications are not improperly closed due to VA error.

To that end, we recommend that VA send an additional letter to those veterans who were potentially impacted by the coding error, clarifying what additional information is needed. Given the wide-spread reporting of this matter, we believe that a clarifying letter will provide veterans with some peace of mind on what is actually still needed to complete their enrollment. We also recommend that VA extend the deadline for these veterans to provide the remaining information until one year after the additional letters are sent and after the inspector general's review is complete, rather than March 2017. This will allow VA time to send the letter and

veterans to gather information and respond accordingly. Finally, we urge you not to close any of the potentially impacted veteran applications until after these steps can be achieved.

Thank you for your attention to this request. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Johnny Isakson
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs



Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs



Phil Roe
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans Affairs



Tim Walz
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans Affairs