



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

August 8, 2025

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Blumenthal:

Thank you for your June 6, 2025, co-signed letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding the Department's inclusion on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) High Risk List (HRL). For nearly 10 years, VA has been on this HRL. It is time for things to change. Reforms are needed, and the days of asking for exponentially more money and more employees in a failed attempt to fix the issues are over. To start, VA assessed staff levels and will reduce overall staff by 30,000 by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2025 through normal attrition, voluntary resignations, retirements, and the Federal hiring freeze.

While reforms at VA are ongoing, we have made significant progress to address key areas that put VA on the GAO HRL. We have made significant progress in modernizing disability claims. In FY 2025, VA processed over 2 million disability claims and are on pace to surpass last year's record by more than 14%. We have grown our automation capacity with claims processing to better serve Veterans—since 2021 we increased automation by 28%. VA continues to refine the capacity and backlog modeling to ensure we have adequate and appropriate staff to meet the claims demand.

We are improving health care and doing things differently. Our goal is to increase productivity, eliminate waste and bureaucracy, increase efficiency, and improve health care and benefits to Veterans. We are addressing longstanding problems that have led to poor results for Veterans, including health care wait times that increased under the last Administration. This includes enhancing oversight and accountability at VA through an oversight model, which identifies ongoing risks and issues. We have bolstered and streamlined educational development—issuing the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Knowledge Validation Memorandum to streamline mandatory courses. We have made it easier for Veterans to access community care, removing a required secondary referral. VA is accelerating the deployment of its integrated electronic health record system, after the program was nearly dormant for almost 2 years under the Biden Administration.

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal

In addition, we are improving acquisition management. All VA senior officials and executive leadership are committed to modernizing and transforming VA acquisition management. We are reviewing all 76,000 of our active contracts to ensure accountability and verify that each contract benefits Veterans and is a good use of taxpayers' money.

In addition, VHA made the following significant advancements in other areas:

- **Budget and Capacity:** VHA is actively working to reallocate resources to align activities with leadership's strategic mission and priority goals. VHA streamlined the process for comparing activation costs at medical facilities and issuing a policy directive on authorized purchases.
- **Data and Tool Advancements:** VHA encouraged the development of data tools and dashboards by supporting the new quarterly Monitoring, Surveillance, and Reporting, and updated National Annual Review functions to ensure training complies with national training standards and policies. Many tools have also assisted with information technology initiatives, such as the Office of Information and Technology Process Asset Library and Office of Information and Technology Agile Center of Excellence Dashboards.
- **Oversight and Accountability:** By implementing an Oversight Model with overlapping and interconnected layers, VHA is establishing a comprehensive system that prospectively identifies and addresses risks and issues, considers broader perspectives in decision-making, incorporates systemic checks and balances, increases accountability, and enables adaptability. The model also conveys the value of independent and objective oversight occurring both internal and external to VA health care. Additionally, to further enhance capacity and promote a culture of "tone at the top," leadership is actively working to reallocate resources considering budget constraints to ensure optimal alignment to support key priorities.

Finally, VA continues to collaborate with GAO related to demonstrating progress on the approved VA Acquisition Management Action Plan, ensuring full transparency during collaboration sessions. VA enterprise governance has provided a unified vision focused on integrating the lifecycles of the mission support lines of business. This change resulted in collaboration across the enterprise to address GAO's HRL.

Page 3.

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal

I am committed to improving VA. We are off to a good start but there is much more to do, and I look forward to working with you on these efforts. Representative Takano has been sent a separate response.

Thank you for your continued support of the Nation's Veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. A. Collins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Douglas A. Collins