

**STATEMENT OF
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ASSISTANT SECRETARY
OFFICE OF OPERATIONS, SECURITY, AND PREPAREDNESS (OSP)
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
ON
PROTECTING THOSE WHO SERVED: A REVIEW OF VA POLICE OPERATIONS
MAY 13, 2026**

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide an overview of the VA Police force and our plan to improve how it serves and protects Veterans, families, caregivers, survivors, visitors, and VA employees. I am accompanied by Mark Engelbaum, Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration; Patrick Hernandez, Director of Security and Law Enforcement; and Chad Allan, Chief of Police, Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center.

VA Police officers proudly provide security and Federal law enforcement services for the largest integrated health care system in the country. However, when the second Donald J. Trump Administration took office in 2025, we found a fractured force that was plagued with problems that had been highlighted for years by VA's Office of Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

Here are some of the most serious problems we faced:

For years, the VA Police were managed by individual VA medical facilities and reported to medical center personnel instead of senior law enforcement professionals. Without a unified chain of command, VA Police suffered from inconsistent policing standards and a lack of discipline and accountability. In some VA facilities, police were

being used for non-police missions, including serving as valets to park cars. This system increased safety risks for everyone at VA.

This basic structural problem also made it very difficult to retain and promote seasoned officers, because VA Police officers only reported to the facility and were not part of a larger law enforcement structure that could support their advancement. As a result, VA lost many senior officers to other law enforcement agencies.

This is a complex issue, but here is what happened:

- VA Police positions were not properly classified in accordance with Federal standards.
- The threat of lower grades and less pay created an even deeper crisis for the VA Police force, as it became far less competitive compared to what other law enforcement agencies could offer.

President Trump charged Secretary of Veterans Affairs Douglas Collins with putting Veterans first, and Secretary Collins is moving out aggressively to do so. Here is what we have done:

We recognized in 2025 that VA Police need a unified chain of command. We are completing a reorganization that includes actions such as the establishment of an Assistant Secretary position over OSP. This means at VA, we finally have law enforcement leaders in charge of VA Police. As a result:

- We can enforce standards and discipline across all facilities.
- We can improve training and professional development across the Department.
- VA Police have a direct line to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to discuss emerging issues.
- We can create stability and opportunities for a long-term career at VA for our police officers.

We are also fixing the issues with VA Police position classifications. Here is what we've done:

- We conducted a detailed review of duties and responsibilities in accordance with current classification standards. This has provided increased competitiveness for the force, such as in entry-level positions.
- With the restructure, we have been able to develop a model that allows for greater career progression within VA.
- We are participating in the Office of Personnel Management's initiative to revise the 40+ year-old classification standard.
- These steps will make it easier to recruit and retain quality officers because VA will be more competitive.

These critical changes put the VA Police on a better footing to address emerging challenges, including those highlighted in a March 2026 GAO report that outlined a range of security challenges at VA facilities. We believe our efforts to stop the downward spiral of staff reductions and ineffectiveness will allow us to meet those challenges.

I have personally visited 13 VA facilities and police units in the short time I have been in this position. I have seen firsthand the improvements we need to make, but I can also tell you we are making tremendous strides that are putting us on the right path. Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss the importance of security to the VA system that millions of Veterans rely on for care and benefits. We look forward to your questions.