

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 14, 2024

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

Dear Secretary McDonough:

We write to express our concern regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) implementation of the *MST Claims Coordination Act (Pub. L. 117-303)* (enacted Dec. 27, 2022). We are disappointed by both VA's delay in implementation of this law, and the lack of transparency with Congress about support for veterans filing disability compensation claims for military sexual trauma (MST).

As you know, the law required VA to implement, no later than June 27, 2024, a system in which the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) automatically notifies VHA when a veteran who has suffered from MST and enrolled in the VA healthcare system files a claim for disability compensation benefits for MST. The law requires the automatic notification to occur shortly before a veteran receives a decision with respect to their claim for compensation, or shortly before the veteran participates in a disability compensation examination, VA Board of Veterans' Appeals hearing, or any other event that VA determines to be relevant to their case. The law also requires VA to provide veterans information relating to MST, including information on VHA's MST coordinators, information on the Veterans Crisis Line, and how to make an appointment with a mental health care provider.

During a briefing last month, VA informed our committees that the automatic notification system will go live in January 2025 – five months late. VA also informed the committees that, in August 2022, VA implemented an interim mechanism for VBA to share data with VHA on a daily basis about veterans who have filed MST claims. However, when asked for specifics about this data and the extent to which it provides the information Congress required, VA officials claimed only that the data would encourage providers to offer additional support for veterans pursuing claims for compensation based on MST. It is our belief that these efforts fall far short of Congressional intent.

It should not take an act of Congress to compel VHA to do more for veterans who have suffered from MST. In the nearly two years since the *MST Claims Coordination Act* was signed into law, VHA should have formulated concrete policies and processes across the country to better serve veterans with a history of MST and who are enrolled in VA's healthcare system.

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Therefore, we request that you provide the following information no later than **December 13, 2024**:

1. A detailed plan for how VHA will improve its services using VBA's shared data on veterans who have filed claims based on MST, and provide these veterans with information required by law, including on VHA's MST coordinators, the Veterans Crisis Line, and resources for scheduling with mental health care providers.
2. A detailed explanation for how VA plans to measure the success of the MST claims coordination program implemented under the law and who will be tasked with overseeing this seamless coordination between VHA and VBA.
3. A detailed summary of any additional plans VHA and VBA are undertaking to increase outreach and collaboration among the two administrations to improve care and services for veterans with MST.

Thank you for your attention to this request. Should you have any questions regarding this request, please contact our respective committee's staffs.

Sincerely,



MIKE BOST
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans'
Affairs



JERRY MORAN
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans'
Affairs

cc: The Honorable Mark Takano, Ranking Member, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, The Honorable Jon Tester, Chairman, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs