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November 14, 2023

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

On November 6, 2023, I requested the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a thorough audit of the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) after an alarming report from VA's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and subsequent credible whistleblower disclosures of gross mismanagement creating a danger to the health and safety of veterans nationwide. GAO committed to quickly begin this work.

As described in the enclosed letter to GAO, according to multiple whistleblowers, VCL responders are currently transferring veterans determined to present complex needs to an indefinite waiting list for eventual contact from a special unit. Despite a statutory requirement for the VCL "to be staffed by appropriately trained mental health personnel and available at all times," this special unit of responders for "Callers With Complex Needs" is allegedly severely understaffed and undertrained. Worse yet, a break in record retention is reportedly resulting in a complete loss of communication with veterans who are disconnected while waiting on hold in this queue.

The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 requires that all departments "shall furnish to the Comptroller General such information regarding the powers, duties, activities, organization, financial transactions, and methods of business of their respective offices as he may... require." I am reminding the Department of this statutory responsibility as the September 14, 2023 VA OIG report found VCL leadership provided advice and incorrect information to VCL staff prior to interviews with the OIG, which may have served to "compromise the accuracy and integrity of information provided." Such interference is a flagrant violation of federal employees' duty to cooperate with investigations under the Inspector General Act of 1978.

The OIG report and subsequent whistleblower allegations raise grave concerns for the health and safety of our veterans. My expectation is you will take immediate action to guarantee VA's full cooperation with the oversight by Congress and the investigation by GAO. I also expect you and every leader within VA to make certain that whistleblowers raising these concerns are protected from any retaliation. Failure to do so could continue the endangerment our most vulnerable veterans and their families when they come to the VCL in need of urgent VA assistance.

Without hesitation, I expect you to address all critical deficiencies in the Veterans Crisis Line and take appropriate personnel actions without waiting for the full conclusion of this investigation. Please keep my Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee staff, and the investigators assisting us, informed every step of the way.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jerry Moran". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Enclosure

cc: Michael Missal, Inspector General, Department of Veterans Affairs