

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 2, 2012

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave.,
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

Over the past year, the California Members of Congress have sent multiple letters to you and the Government Accountability Office regarding the inefficiencies and inaccuracies in processing benefits claims in the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego regional offices (VAROs). We have reviewed the Department of Veterans Affairs' Office of the Inspector General (IG) reports released on May 10, 2012 evaluating the performance of these VAROs. These reports have laid out recommendations for a plan of action to improve the situation at these locations.

We respectfully request that your agency produce an action plan within the next 30 days that will specify how the backlog at Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego will be eliminated within the next 12 months. In particular, we want to know what additional resources will be dedicated to these three offices.

The VA offices in Los Angeles and Oakland have the largest percentage of cases over 125 days old in the entire VA system. In fact, many cases are more than 325 days old. This backlog is a crisis that may worsen as more veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan file claims. Forcing our veterans to endure long waits cannot be justified under any circumstance.

The Oakland office, for example, has closed about 1,700 cases in the past four months. At this rate it will take the Oakland VBO nearly six years to erase its current backlog of 29,736 claims while Los Angeles, with 21,309 claims over 125 days, may need seven years to eliminate its backlog based on its current closure rate. Earlier this year the VA said backlogs would be gone within one year, but the current trend indicates the VA will not come close to accomplishing its mission.

We are aware that new claims at these offices are shipped out of state to other VA offices in order to allow existing staff in Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego more time to work on aging claims. Why isn't the backlog shrinking if new claims are handled by other offices?

We thank you in advance for honoring our request and our resolve to help your agency improve its delivery of benefits to our veterans.

Sincerely,



Jackie Speier



John Campbell

Kevin McCarth

Howard O. Bucklin

David Dreen

Gene Bittner

Ray Miller

Don Palmer

Daniel E. Jensen

Elton Gellish

Ken Calvert

Ed Payne

Jerry Lewis

F. H. Cas

Wally Harger

Anna Hunt

Mary Bondmark

David Nove

WD

David

Karen Bass

Karen Bass

Lynn C. Jolley

Amie Hahn
James
Susan Davis

Lucille Royal-Mead

Joe Lynn

Eric Miller

Abel

Judy Chen

Ed E. Stone

Howard L. Brown

Doris Matson

John M. Mendenhall

Mike Skovron

Barbara Lee

Andi J. Jorgensen

Lolette Lane

Pete Stark

Alvin W. Winters

John B. Bledsoe

Gene Hares Napoletano

Joe Bacc

Michael Hank

Bob

Jim A

Jim M. King

Bob Filner

Tom Tan

Ken & Wayne

Les Capps

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