

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 11, 2015

The Honorable Tony Milons
Director
Cleveland Veterans Affairs Regional Office
1240 East Ninth Street
Cleveland, OH 44199

Dear Director Milons,

In October 2014, shortly after you became director the of the Veterans' Affairs Cleveland Regional Benefit Office (VARO), we met in your office and you stated that you were committed to fixing the problems at the Cleveland VARO. It has come to our attention that a recent Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) report on the effectiveness of the disability claims process at the Cleveland Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO) has found that your office did not accurately process one-third of the reviewed claims.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that the OIG has found faults at the Cleveland VARO. The OIG found faults in 2012. Three years later, the corrective steps taken by the Cleveland Regional Office, as it relates to Veterans' Benefits Administration's (VBA) national review plan, were found to be ineffective. In that 2012 report, the IG found that the Cleveland VARO incorrectly processed over half of the inspected claims. With the latest inspection, the VARO was found to have incorrectly processed one-third of the claims. On the July 25th Monday Morning Report, the VA reported the Cleveland VARO internal accuracy at 89.2% over the last 12 months. This outside inspection found a 33% error rate for the claims they examined. Even one incorrectly processed claim is a harmful mistake to our veterans. They deserve to have their service-connected disabilities to be accurately rated.

A common theme that I hear from veteran service organizations is that the VA does not follow their own regulations. The VAIG report backs up these organizations with the statement, "the Cleveland VARO did not consistently process the three types of disability claims we reviewed." It is vital that the VA maintain a standard process in completing claims.

The IG report noted that the Cleveland VARO staff established incorrect dates of claim for 10% of the reviewed claims. If the VA is seeking to process claims within 125 days, it is imperative that the VA establishes the correct date of claim. How can your office accurately track this data when the IG report noted that the initial date of claim was incorrect on 10% of claims found with an error? The Cleveland Plain Dealer recently reported that it is taking 106 days to complete a claim at the Cleveland VARO; however, the most recent Monday Morning report shows it is taking 165 days to complete a claim. Our veterans deserve better, and those who depend on the

VA rightfully have an expectation that their claims will be properly handled. A failure in this area can irreparably harm those who have served and sacrificed for this great nation.

The Cleveland VARO has made an impact on the initial claims backlog; however, this impact was made at the expense of other areas. After the Cleveland VARO, at the direction of Charles Moore, transferred staff around, they improved in processing initial claims, but fell in other areas. It is my understanding that the VARO has 7 decision review officers handling 13,781 appeals. Last year, your appeals team was working on Notices of Disagreement file in 2012. The appeals team is still working Notices of Disagreement filed in early 2012. For formal appeals, the Cleveland VARO has 2010 and 2011 appeals awaiting certification to the Board of Veteran Appeals.

The systemic problems include claims that do not have to be rated by your team. With the current delay in processing dependency claims, if a veteran were to add a dependent to a claim today, the child would be walking, talking, and attending preschool before the Cleveland VARO processes the paperwork.

The Cleveland VARO moved personnel and now processes claims from outside of its original jurisdiction. Meanwhile, Ohio's veterans have suffered. The Cleveland VARO personnel decisions have led your office to be the worst in the Midwest and one of the worst in the nation in regards to the appeals backlog. What is your plan for addressing the deficiencies created by the Cleveland VARO personnel moves?

Congress is outraged by the systematic failures that were revealed in the VA Inspector General's interim report and the revelations of wait time manipulation on the part of some VA employees. The fact that the Cleveland VARO, even after the subsequent VA overhaul of last year, is still unable to provide timely care to our state's veterans is deeply concerning.

Ohio is home to over 800,000 of our nation's veterans. Those who have sacrificed so much to serve our country deserve to receive the benefits they have earned once they return home, yet widespread mismanagement within the Department of Veterans Affairs continues to stand in the way. We urge you to continue pursuing this matter and to work with the OIG to ensure that all our veterans are properly cared for.

Sincerely,



JIM RENACCI
Member of Congress



BOB GIBBS
Member of Congress