

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 1, 2025

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to you with great concern regarding the impact of President Trump's recent executive orders on the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) research workforce.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Novel treatments for Alzheimer's disease. Advanced cancers of the mouth, throat and voice box.<sup>1</sup> Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and multiple sclerosis (MS).<sup>2</sup> Opioid use disorder.<sup>3</sup> Health outcomes of veterans experiencing homelessness. Chronic disease like heart disease, kidney disease, and hepatitis.

These are just a few of the ongoing research projects at VA that veterans, stakeholders, and congressional staff know of that have been impacted by these recent executive orders. We are extremely concerned that, absent your immediate action, ongoing disruptions to this research will severely damage veteran healthcare. We hope you are as concerned by this as we are, given your commitment to ensuring veteran's access to healthcare is not impacted by the Trump administration's actions.

As you know, VA has a long history of conducting world-class research and developing groundbreaking technologies and devices to support not only our nation's veterans, but the population at large. The nicotine patch, the cardiac pacemaker, and computerized tomography (CT) scanner were all developed thanks to VA's research. But perhaps most importantly for our veterans, VA's Office of Research and Development conducts specialized research on diseases and injuries that primarily affect veterans, including traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, and blast injuries.

This research is only possible with the hard work of over 6,500 VA researchers, over half of whom (3,800) are on time-limited appointments. Some of these researchers are appointed in "without compensation" (WOC) positions, which are positions that allow them to access VA facilities, equipment, and networks for purposes of conducting research, but are not paid a salary

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<sup>1</sup> Roni Caryn Rabin and Nicholas Nehamas, [\*Chaos at the V.A.: Inside the DOGE Cuts Disrupting the Veterans Agency\*](#), NY Times (March 10, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Linda F. Hershey, [\*Democratic Lawmakers Warn of Canceled VA Research Projects, But Agency Denies It\*](#), Stars and Stripes (March 6, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Cybele Mayes-Osterman, [\*VA Health Researchers Get 90-Day Extension, But Mass Layoffs Still Loom\*](#), USA Today (March 16, 2025).

by VA. Many of these researchers have dual appointments with academic affiliates and are funded through extramural funding, which also are not directly funded through VA dollars.

Alarming, we have heard from stakeholders, researchers, and veterans themselves that VA's research workforce is being dramatically impacted by President Trump's executive orders and your workforce actions. In particular, President Trump's executive order mandating a federal workforce hiring freeze has damaged VA's ability to conduct research. This is because researchers with not to exceed (NTE) term appointments that expired after the hiring freeze went into effect were being summarily dismissed from VA employment, as VA was prohibited from renewing their appointments.

To date, VA has provided no information about any aspect of these impacts on its research functions. However, we are aware from external sources that VA is extending for 90 days the terms of all research employees whose appointments are due to expire within the next 90 days. However, this abrupt, although welcome, change in policy is silent on recourse for those researchers who have already lost their positions.

The fact that your department has made efforts to extend these appointments demonstrates to us that you realized too late the crucial role these researchers play in ensuring veterans' access to care and are now seeking to mitigate the effects of your haphazard, unconsidered approach to hiring decisions. However, we are extremely concerned that, despite this belated and halfhearted attempt to fix the damage your actions caused, you have made no efforts to rehire those researchers whose terms have already expired. Nor have you made clear what your administration's plan will be once the 90-day extensions are up.

Already, VA's research workforce cuts and contract cancellations have interrupted ongoing research projects and studies, precluded veterans from participating in potentially life-saving clinical trials, and led to concerns of impacts on veteran safety. In fact, stakeholders estimate that if President Trump's hiring freeze executive order continues to be in effect, 370 extramural studies and clinical trials will be suspended or canceled at VA, ten thousand veterans that were relying on these clinical trials and studies will be denied care, and VA will lose \$35 million in research funding due to delays and cancellations.<sup>4</sup> In many cases, this money has already been set aside by VA or has been provided by external funding sources, which will now be wasted.

In light of these concerns, we ask that you respond to the following questions:

1. Please provide a complete, unredacted list of all of VA researchers with NTE appointments to conduct research at VA whose appointments expired after January 20, 2025. When providing this list, indicate which researchers' agreements have since been restored under the recent 90-day extension and which researchers remain removed from employment at VA.

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<sup>4</sup>Natalie McGill, [Veterans Affairs Cuts Could Setback Research, Patient Care](#), PR Newswire (March 4, 2025).

2. Please provide a complete, unredacted list of all VA researchers who had without compensation (WOC) appointments to conduct research at VA that expired after January 20, 2025. When providing this list, please indicate which researchers' appointments have since been restored and which researchers remain removed from employment at VA.
3. Please provide a complete, unredacted list of all VA research projects or clinical trials that have been interrupted, paused, or canceled since January 20, 2025, due to workforce changes and/or contract cancellations at VA. Please include the locations where these projects or trials were taking place and any academic affiliates or VA facilities associated with the trials.
4. How many veterans were enrolled in clinical trials that were interrupted, delayed, or canceled due to VA researchers losing their appointments from January 20, 2025, to date? How is VA communicating with these veterans to ensure they can continue to access care and potentially participate in clinical trials through other means?
5. Please outline the steps VA has taken to communicate with VA researchers with NTE appointments at VA about the 90-day extension.
6. What is VA's policy for those VA researchers with NTE appointments that already expired and who were fired from VA? Will they be afforded the same 90-day extension that researchers with unexpired NTE appointments have received?

We ask that you provide written responses to the above questions no later than **April 11, 2025**. Additionally, we request that you provide a briefing for Committee and member staff no later than **April 18, 2025**. Should you have any questions about this request, you may contact Ms. Alexis MacDonald ([alexis.macdonald@mail.house.gov](mailto:alexis.macdonald@mail.house.gov)) and Ms. Abbie Killian ([abbie.killian@mail.house.gov](mailto:abbie.killian@mail.house.gov)).

Sincerely,



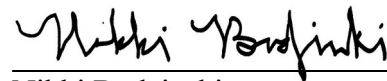
Mark Takano  
Ranking Member



Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez  
Member of Congress

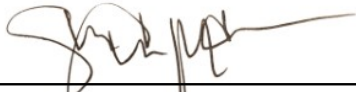


Nikki Budzinski  
Member of Congress

The Honorable Doug Collins

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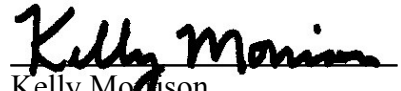
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