

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 7, 2025

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to urge you to reverse your weaponization of the current lapse in appropriations and restore vital congressional communications to ensure our veterans receive the care and benefits they deserve, which are covered by multi-year appropriations and should not be affected by the current shutdown.

Congress has provided the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) with multi-year funding, which ensures a government shutdown has minimal impact on veterans' health care and benefits. That is why we are deeply concerned that your Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) refuses to initiate, dispatch, or respond to congressional inquiries on behalf of our veteran constituents. Every single day, veterans and their families come to our offices for help in getting their health care and benefits from VA. Often, they come to us as their last resort. We take those concerns or their specific cases directly to VA and advocate on their behalf. Thus, any delay in responding to this outreach or dispatching their cases will cause harm to the veterans we serve.

We understand that a lapse in appropriations requires certain nonessential functions to cease. However, it is imperative that the Department continue to be fully open, transparent and communicative with elected representatives in Congress. This is why we find the October 2, 2025, communication from OCLA Assistant Secretary Don Bergin to our Committees so troubling.

Not only does it show a lack of commitment to the relationship with Congress in overseeing the work that we have mandated to continue during a shutdown, but it also diminishes the role of Senators and Representatives in protecting the health and welfare of our veterans, a concern which we know you share. And nowhere is this lack of prioritization more acutely felt than with respect to casework submitted to OCLA by Member offices. While we understand that, according to Assistant Secretary Bergin, "...casework involving the health and welfare of veterans will be prioritized..." during this lapse in appropriations, it is difficult to rationalize how EVERY veteran-related casework would not be categorized as necessary to protect the life and property of veterans. The Department must revisit this prioritization scheme and dedicate sufficient staff and resources necessary to accomplish the task of responding in a timely manner to ALL constituent casework requests initiated by Congress.

Moreover, we are troubled that Assistant Secretary Bergin asserts that, "VA cannot initiate, dispatch, or respond to congressional requests..." during this shutdown. The use of the

word “cannot” is likely intentional in this context. It is also greatly misleading. We know that OCLA has carryover funding at its disposal during this shutdown and may choose which activities to prioritize with that funding. Additionally, we know that previous administrations planned to continue dispatching and responding to congressional inquiries during government shutdowns by utilizing non-furloughed employees. The fact that VA has chosen not to prioritize communication with Congress on policy matters is clearly a leadership decision and a direct affront to our constitutional duty to oversee the work of the Department.

To make matters worse, it appears that leaders within your Department have used congressionally appropriated funds to send politically charged messages to veterans and VA staff about the shutdown in what seem to be clear violations of the Hatch Act. We remind you and your leadership team that we are tracking these violations and taking them very seriously. While the Trump administration may not enforce the Hatch Act currently, we will not hesitate to investigate these violations.

To that end, we respectfully request the following information as soon as possible:

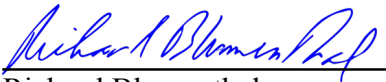
1. Please provide us with a “status of funds” report for the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, along with a specific breakdown of prior fiscal year carryover and a delineation of which activities within OCLA this funding has been dedicated toward.
2. Please provide a breakdown of current staffing levels within OCLA, disaggregated by function. Additionally, we would like a breakdown of how many staff have left OCLA since January 3, 2025, disaggregated by reason for their departure to include retirement (regular or VERA), Delayed Resignation Program, termination, reassignment or other.
3. According to Assistant Secretary Bergin’s message, OCLA staff is “...committed to working on government shutdown activities.” Please provide a detailed description of those activities, along with a list of which specific staff are assigned what duties during this shutdown.
 - a. Which, if any, staff of OCLA are involved in planning for the White House’s planned Reductions in Force during this lapse in appropriations, which appear to violate the law?
 - b. Which if any staff of OCLA have been involved in the shutdown-related messages sent to employees and veterans on behalf of the Department in apparent violation of the Hatch Act?
4. It has come to our attention that information has continued to be shared with the House Committee on Veterans Affairs (HVAC) Majority, which has not been shared with either the HVAC Minority or the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Majority and Minority, even after the shutdown commenced, contrary to Mr. Bergin’s message. Please provide us with all communications sent to the HVAC Majority of which the Minority was not copied or provided.

Mr. Secretary, we respect that you have the difficult task of maintaining access to care and benefits during an uncertain funding environment. However, it is crucial that you view the

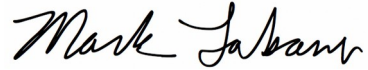
Congress as a partner in this effort, and not the enemy. Therefore, we encourage you to continue robust communication with Congress and dedicate sufficient time, both staff and your own, to the task.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. And we look forward to your timely response.

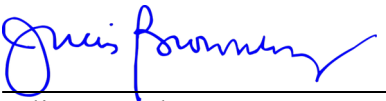
Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on
Veterans Affairs



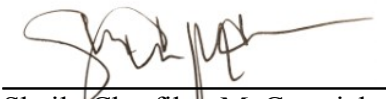
Mark Takano
Ranking Member
House Committee on
Veterans' Affairs



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



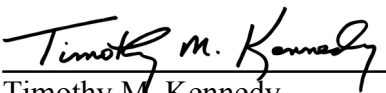
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



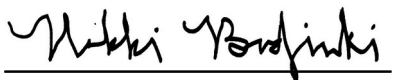
Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress



Maxine Dexter
Member of Congress



Timothy M. Kennedy
Member of Congress



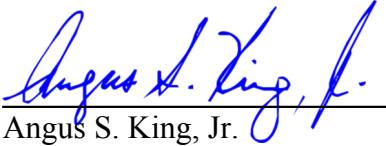
Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress



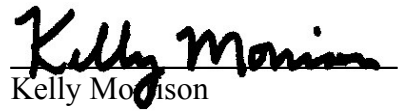
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Kelly Morrison
Member of Congress



Herbert C. Conaway, Jr.
Member of Congress