

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

May 15, 2018

The Honorable Thomas Bowman
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Deputy Secretary Bowman:

We are deeply concerned by the malign neglect within the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) efforts to achieve electronic health record (EHR) modernization. This is evident through the failure to obtain qualified leadership for the Office of Information Technology (OIT), reports of political interference hindering EHR implementation, as well as the rampant vacancies for positions that ensure proper oversight of a new EHR system. We ask that you act to swiftly resolve our concerns and ensure an interoperable VA EHR system with the Department of Defense expeditiously comes to fruition.

As you are aware, OIT is responsible for carrying out the VA's multibillion dollar overhaul of its outdated EHR system which will improve care for veterans by ensuring interoperability with the Department of Defense and private sector. We are troubled to learn of the temporary appointment of Mr. Camilo Sandoval – a former Trump campaign staffer – to serve as Chief Information Officer (CIO). This appointment raises serious data security concerns stemming from Mr. Sandoval's previous position as the Director of Data Operations in 2016 while the Trump campaign was contracting with Cambridge Analytica. Cambridge Analytica's misuse of personal information from tens of millions of Americans, including veterans, was an incredible breach of trust. As such, Mr. Sandoval's role in these activities must be thoroughly examined and he should be put nowhere near veterans' health and benefits data.

Furthermore, there are serious character concerns that should disqualify Mr. Sandoval for this position. According to recent reports, Mr. Sandoval is the subject of a \$25 million lawsuit charging that he "slandered, harassed and sexually discriminated against [a campaign colleague] in violation of New York City's human rights laws." Likewise, his previous conflicts while working at the Department of Treasury and Veterans Health Administration raise serious red flags and indicate a history of rampant interpersonal conflicts with co-workers. Mr. Sandoval should be removed from his temporary position as CIO and replaced with a first class leader who is capable of implementing the VA's EHR modernization and fulfilling the VA's obligation to our nation's heroes.

In addition to VA's inability to secure a qualified, capable professional to spearhead EHR modernization, we are aware that members of the President's inner circle are inappropriately influencing EHR modernization. This \$16 billion overhaul requires input from specialized professionals to align the two largest federal agencies with an interoperable system. Reports that the Department of Defense's own modernization effort is facing challenges, highlight the critical need to understand the risks and requirements of this historic undertaking. Instead, the President is taking advice from his personal friend and member of his Mar-a-Lago circle, Dr. Bruce Moskowitz. As an internist with no government experience, Dr. Moskowitz lacks the expertise to provide the Administration with insight to address the challenges of developing an interoperable system. As such, we ask that you provide an update on the status of EHR modernization, including information on all contact with Dr. Moskowitz or any other individual who has provided input on EHR modernization outside of VA.

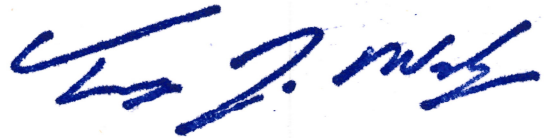
The VA has 33,000 vacancies agency wide, including 553 within OIT. In the last four months alone, nearly 40 senior staffers have resigned, effectively stalling operations in essential areas such as information technology. As such, we urge you to take immediate action to implement a specific initiative to rapidly hire the expertise necessary to address the VA's pervasive vacancies. In order to provide world-class service to our veterans, the VA must be fully staffed with driven, capable leaders. Current VA employees, who are dedicated to serving and honoring our veterans, are forced to shoulder the work of former-colleagues – contributing the low morale among the VA workforce. The historic overhaul of the VA's outdated health record system requires adequate staffing levels to ensure this project succeeds. Anything less than a robust workforce is a disservice to veterans, VA employees, and tax payers.

The need for VA's EHR modernization cannot be overstated. We ask that you take meaningful action to ensure transparency and accountability as VA seeks to establish a new EHR system. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



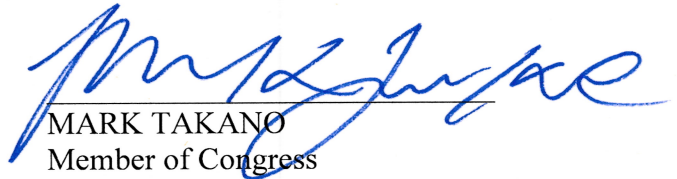
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



TIM WALZ
Member of Congress



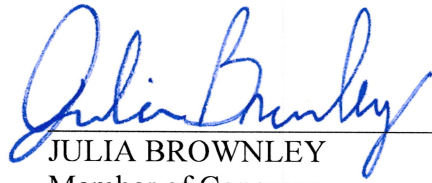
MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senate



MARK TAKANO
Member of Congress



TINA SMITH
United States Senate



JULIA BROWNLEY
Member of Congress



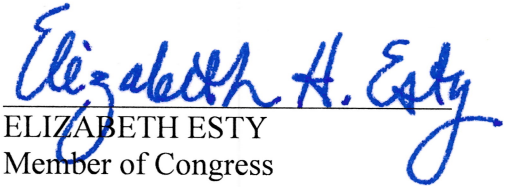
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