

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 8, 2017

The Honorable David J. Shulkin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin:

We are deeply disturbed by recent reports that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) intended to redirect \$460 million in funding for programs that provide direct assistance to homeless veterans to a General Purpose fund to be used by local VA hospitals at their discretion. Despite the VA's statement that they have walked back this decision, we remain concerned that this is another example of the Administration's actions running contrary to the best interest of veterans. As such, we demand your full commitment that you will not follow through with this plan and ask that you work with all members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies to ensure funds for programs for homeless veterans are never used for purposes outside their intent.

Even the consideration of redirecting funding from programs that support homeless veterans contradicts your repeated commitments to end veterans' homelessness. The VA's cruel and callous plan would disseminate targeted funding from services that specialize in addressing the needs of homeless veterans to an account for general purposes. Doing so would likely result in pressure for facilities to use funding in contradiction with the intended use as identified by Congress: to specifically assist homeless veterans. Aside from being short sighted and misguided, this decision is an indication that the VA continues to let their poor financial management policies fall on the backs of our nation's most vulnerable veterans. This is unacceptable and will not go unnoticed. Additionally, we find it unconscionable that this decision would be made without consultation with interagency and community partners who implement the programs on the ground. We request that you provide a full explanation of the VA's rationale for this proposal, specifically discussing any current funding shortfalls the VA apparently intends to fill with money designed to combat homelessness.

Additionally, the VA's statement to these recent reports is insufficient and opaque. In response to public outrage from advocates and Congress, you stated "There will be absolutely no change in the funding to support our homeless programs. We will not be shifting any homeless program money to the Choice program." This response only references the Choice Program and does not address the VA's original plan to redirect funding to local VA medical centers. It further does not clarify if "no change in the funding" includes the VA's plan to allow local Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) and Medical Center Directors the ability to shift funding for homeless veterans among different programs and services.

The national statistics remain staggering, heartbreaking, and unacceptable – approximately 40,000 veterans are homeless in American today. Although you have said time and time again that the VA cannot allow another veteran to slip through the cracks, your actions have said otherwise. Our veterans deserve better than this funding proposal and we ask that you provide them assurance that the VA is not simply turning its back on homeless veterans to provide funding to other programs and priorities.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Richard Blumenthal", written over a horizontal line.

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Sherrod Brown", written over a horizontal line.

SHERROD BROWN
United States Senate