

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
CONNECTICUT

COMMITTEES:

AGING

ARMED SERVICES

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

JUDICIARY

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

706 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

(202) 224-2823  
FAX: (202) 224-9673

90 STATE HOUSE SQUARE, TENTH FLOOR  
HARTFORD, CT 06103  
(860) 258-6940  
FAX: (860) 258-6958

915 LAFAYETTE BOULEVARD, SUITE 304  
BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604  
(203) 330-0598  
FAX: (203) 330-0608

<http://blumenthal.senate.gov>

December 15, 2020

The Honorable Michael J. Missal  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Office of Inspector General  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Mr. Missal:

I write to request a review of policies and practices at the West Haven VA Medical Center regarding maintenance and repair activities. I am deeply concerned about ensuring safe working conditions and appropriate health care services to veterans. The review should include steps taken by VA managers to assess and reduce safety risks and responses to complaints and concerns raised by VA employees and contractors, and how such policies and practices encouraged or discouraged such complaints. This review should also assess the impact of inadequate financial resources on the ability of West Haven VA to address safety concerns.

As I'm sure you are aware, a fatal incident involving the West Haven VA steam system occurred on November 13, 2020, resulting in the tragic deaths of Euel Sims and Joseph O'Donnell. I called for a full and complete investigation that day.

In the weeks following this accident, my office has been contacted by whistleblowers—VA facilities employees and contractors—who allege that safety and personnel issues continue to affect the work environment at the West Haven VA. According to these whistleblowers, regular and emergency maintenance and repair work has been continually delayed, resulting in an unsafe and potentially life-threatening working environment for West Haven VA employees. They further allege that VA management has hired unqualified individuals who are unable to perform the requirements outlined in Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations, leading to unsafe working conditions.

Deepening the heartbreak of these workers' deaths is the fact that they perished because of potentially unsafe working conditions. I have sent all documents and correspondence received from these whistleblowers to OIG and would appreciate the opportunity to continue discussions with your office about the scope of this review.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richard Blumenthal".

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL

United States Senate