

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

Mr. Al Montoya
Director, VA Connecticut Healthcare System
Department of Veterans Affairs
950 Campbell Avenue
West Haven, Connecticut 06516

Dear Director Montoya:

I write to apprise you of information that has been provided to my office regarding the steam heating system accident that caused the tragic deaths of Euel Sims, a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employee, and Joseph O'Donnell, a VA contractor, at the VA Hospital in West Haven, Connecticut, on November 13, 2020.

As you know, I called for a full and complete investigation on the day of this terrible accident and I understand that VA is conducting an investigation along with several other agencies. More recently, VA employees and contractors have contacted my office regarding unresolved, potentially life-threatening safety and personnel issues ranging from 2018 to the present.

Due to the serious nature of these concerns, my office has alerted the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) about these allegations, and provided the OIG with all documentation sent to us by these whistleblowers. From the documentation provided, it appears that these individuals made every effort to appropriately address their concerns with supervisors, then escalated to VA Connecticut leadership, and only came forward to my office as a last resort. I have asked the OIG to investigate.

Clearly the aging infrastructure at the West Haven VA is causing health and safety issues for VA employees and patients. I will continue to push for an increase in construction funding for VA, and an acceleration of the planning, design and construction for the new Surgical and Clinical Space Tower.

Most urgently, there is an immediate need for action by VA Connecticut leadership to protect current employees and patients by repairing and remediating any and all maintenance issues that could lead to serious injury or death.

I strongly urge you to conduct an internal audit to identify any emergent safety issues that must be remedied, and fully cooperate with the VA OIG investigators should they launch an inquiry. I request regular updates on any documented safety issues and stand ready to work with you and to secure any necessary federal resources.

My paramount concern is that the West Haven VA facility is safe for workers and patients. These healthcare heroes have been working tirelessly through the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that our veterans receive the best care possible, and they must be provided with safe working conditions.

I appreciate your immediate attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate