

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-1317

March 2, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie, Jr.  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue NE  
Washington, DC 20420

Dr. Tamara Bonzanto  
Assistant Secretary for Accountability and Whistleblower Protection  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue NE  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie and Dr. Bonzanto:

I write to raise a concern about findings within the Office of the Inspector (OIG) Report #18-04968-249 entitled "Failures Implementing Aspects of the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017."

The Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection was created by Executive Order on April 27, 2017, and Congress statutorily established the Office of Accountability & Whistleblower Protection (OAWP) with the enactment of the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017 on June 23, 2017. The goal of the office is to improve the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) ability to hold employees accountable, especially senior executives for misconduct, and to enhance protections for whistleblowers. However, the OIG report found that since the creation of the office, OAWP did not consistently conduct procedurally sound, accurate, and thorough investigations and related activities and did not adequately protect whistleblowers from retaliation amongst other failures.

In some cases, not only did OAWP fail to protect whistleblowers, but the office actively retaliated against those raising concerns and/or failed to investigate the reported allegations at all, since only 15 percent of the submissions had been investigated at the time of the OIG report.

I appreciate Dr. Bonzanto's testimony on November 14, 2019, to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, & Related Agencies, and the agency's

commitment to improve the Whistleblower Protection program. Employee engagement and trust are critical to maintaining an engaged workforce that provides the best service to Veterans.

To follow up on issues raised in that hearing, I respectfully request answers to the following questions:

- What is the agency doing to reinstate and restore trust with employees that were retaliated against up to and including dismissal?
- How is VA engaging with employees agency-wide to ensure that the OAWP is viewed as a trusted resource?

Your attention to this issue is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your prompt attention to this inquiry.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cheri Bustos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cheri Bustos  
Member of Congress