

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 22, 2019

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Recent reports indicate that the Department of Veterans Affairs has failed to properly train VA personnel and to conduct outreach to veterans after Congress passed the bipartisan *Honor Our Commitment Act* (38 U.S. Code § 1712I) last year, which provides mental and behavioral healthcare to certain veterans with Other-than-Honorable (OTH) discharges. We are deeply frustrated that, as a result, thousands of veterans who are legally owed mental health care are unaware of their eligibility or have been denied care at VA facilities.

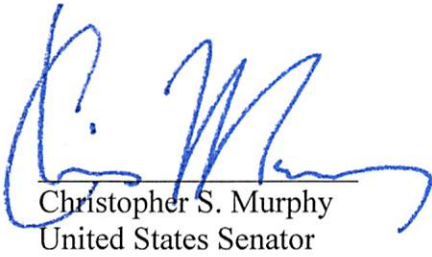
Press reports and information provided directly to our offices allege that VA personnel at the Puget Sound, WA and West Haven, CT Veterans Medical Centers have turned away OTH veterans or provided incorrect information. OTH veterans, many of whom have never entered a VA facility before, were in some cases told they were ineligible for care or incorrectly eligible only for short-term care under the outdated 2017 Emergency Mental Health Care directive. In addition, VA personnel have indicated that the VA's IT systems still automatically categorize OTH veterans as ineligible for care. It is troubling that 14 months after passage the VA still has not updated its IT systems with a fix to indicate that these OTH veterans may be eligible for mental healthcare. The VA must immediately update its IT systems, retrain VA personnel on the eligibility changes under the *Honor Our Commitment Act*, and conduct routine inspections of VA intake personnel to ensure they are providing the correct information to OTH veterans.

The VA must also conduct a public outreach campaign to educate veterans, Veterans Service Organizations and the broader public about the new law. We recognize that the VA finally complied with the law by mailing 477,404 letters to OTH veterans' last known address in January, but the VA must do more than the bare minimum. Despite mental health being a top priority for the VA and receiving substantial budget increases, the VA Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs has failed to reach out to OTH veterans adequately.

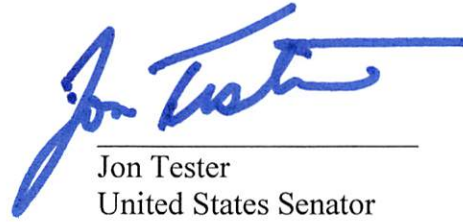
We remain concerned that the Department's failure to properly train VA employees and conduct public outreach puts hundreds of thousands of veterans at risk. OTH veterans face a much greater risk of mental health disorders, homelessness, and suicide. We urge you to move quickly to fix

these failures to ensure OTH veterans are receiving correct information from the VA. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



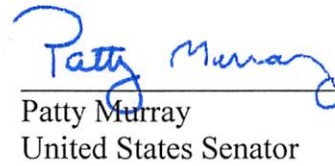
Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Jon Tester  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator