May 13, 2016

Senator Richard Blumenthal
706 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Johnny Isakson
131 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Blumenthal and Isakson:

The Project On Government Oversight is proud to support your "Veterans First Act." Improving the care of our veterans requires a cultural shift inside the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This can only be accomplished by statutory mandates that both protect whistleblowers and witnesses inside the agency and inject accountability to discipline supervisors who retaliate against those whistleblowers. Title One of the Veterans First Act includes many necessary improvements to how whistleblower complaints are addressed, and perhaps more importantly, how to handle supervisors who have been found to have retaliated against whistleblowers. It is also especially significant that this bill defines misconduct to include retaliating against whistleblowers . Accountability for illegal retaliation has been missing in other pending VA legislation, and is one of the strongest aspects of this legislation.

Managers at the VA have abused their discretionary authority and chosen not to punish those who retaliate. This bill would prohibit supervisors who retaliate against whistleblowers from receiving annual bonuses, sending a clear message that such retaliation is not acceptable. We are also pleased to see that the Veterans First Act requires annual training for all VA employees on prohibited personnel actions, which include retaliating against whistleblowers. Further, VA employees will receive an explanation of all the methods they can use to report wrongdoing.

A new level of accountability is required to ensure that the past is not repeated. Thank you for your tireless efforts on behalf of our veterans. We believe this bill will help ensure veterans get the care they deserve. POGO is pleased to support your bill, and will urge others to do the same.

Sincerely,

Danielle Brian,
Executive Director