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Congress of the United States
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January 22, 2015

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

I write you regarding the Milo C. Huempfner Outpatient Clinic, located in Green Bay, Wisconsin. This clinic is located in my congressional district and many of my constituents are looking to receive their health care at the facility.

It is paramount that we ensure the men and women who served this country and sacrificed for our freedom receive the best care possible. Despite legislative measures passed by Congress and initiatives carried out by the Department at the federal level, I continue to hear from constituents and staff at the Green Bay facility about problems that have persisted since the clinic's opening nearly a year and a half ago.

I have had a number of conversations with the former Chief of Surgery at the clinic, Dr. Per Anderas, who has brought multiple alarming and unacceptable occurrences to my attention. These instances, if true, demonstrate a clear absence of leadership in either the facility in Green Bay or the Department of Veterans Affairs overall. It also highlights staggering inefficiency, a waste of funds, and a lack of respect for the men and women who served our country. It is my understanding that these accounts were sent to you last month by Dr. Anderas. I ask you to conduct a thorough investigation of these concerns, and work to resolve these issues as quickly as possible so that veterans in Northeastern Wisconsin can receive the care and treatment they have been promised and deserve.

One of the systemic problems with either the clinic or Department policy is that although the clinic opened in August 2013, many surgical services are still unavailable to veterans. This is a delay of almost a year and a half. I raised concerns over the delay in getting services online when I visited the facility six months ago, on June 4, 2014, and was told that the clinic was on schedule. Private medical facilities open routinely and are staffed, supplied, and fully operational quickly. Why is the Department's timeline dramatically worse, and is the Green Bay facility still considered to be on schedule? What is the normal timeline for outpatient clinics to

be fully operational? And when can our veterans expect the Green Bay facility to be able to provide them with the surgical services they need?

A technical manifestation of basic operational breakdown is exemplified by the fact that while eye wash stations are required by federal law in order to perform surgeries, eye wash stations have still not been installed in the surgical suite. The clinic has hired more physicians in the last few months, however, many of them do not have the equipment they need to do their jobs and serve our veterans. In the meantime, precious financial resources that should be going to patient care are going to salaries and overhead, while our veterans continue to wait.

In addition to the lack of services available, the surgical department has also faced staff complaints of a hostile work environment, which the clinic administration has reportedly ignored and not investigated. The former Chief of Surgery has raised concerns about the treatment of the Surgical Services Manager, who was placed on administrative leave and ultimately terminated based on complaints which were potentially not fully investigated. This process led to the resignation of the Chief of Surgery, who did not agree with the clinic administration's handling of the situation, and has resulted in further delays in care for our veterans. In the course of your investigation, I would ask that the former Chief of Surgery be granted whistleblower protections under federal law. We need to encourage, not punish, individuals who know of a problem to come forward and report it.

The allegations Dr. Anderas sent to you are truly alarming and I strongly urge you to fully investigate the operations of the Milo C. Huempfner Outpatient Clinic. All our veterans deserve the best care right now and that is not what they are currently receiving at this facility. While there are many dedicated and excellent employees at this clinic, and veterans are receiving some care, I believe that serious problems exist and must be addressed immediately.

I would appreciate your prompt action in investigating the allegations presented to you. Given that the local administration is involved, I would request that any investigation be conducted at the national level to ensure full and unbiased results.

Sincerely,

Reid J. Ribble
Member of Congress