

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

April 18, 2016

Ms. Shelia Jackson
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
Director, Reno VA Regional Office
5460 Reno Corporate Drive
Reno, NV 89511

Dear Director Jackson,

I write to you today about unacceptable and disappointing findings from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) regarding the inappropriate shredding of claims-related documents that resulted in denied benefits to one of Nevada's heroes. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I want to ensure the serious issues identified in this report have been resolved by the Reno VA Regional Office (VARO) so that veterans are not inaccurately denied their earned benefits.

As you know, the OIG released a troubling report on April 14, 2016, after conducting unannounced inspections at 10 VAROs, including Nevada's VARO. I was disappointed to learn the OIG found that six out of 16 claims-related documents reviewed at the Reno VARO were inappropriately placed in the shredding bin, and one of those documents resulted in a veteran's family being incorrectly denied burial benefits of more than \$700. Not only is this a dishonor to the veteran who passed away, but it placed an unnecessary financial burden on the veteran's family during their difficult time of grieving. This type of inaccuracy in shredding occurred at a time when the Reno VARO had significant management and performance issues, which is one of the many reasons I fought to remove poor leadership and bring a new director to Nevada who would re-establish accountability and quality benefits delivery.

Our nation's veterans and their families have earned and deserve these benefits, and I know that you will agree this was an unacceptable outcome that cannot happen again. As I have said in hearings, letters, and during our recent meeting at the Reno VARO, I am committed to holding the VA accountable so that our nation's veterans receive the care and benefits they were promised. That is why, under your leadership as the new director, the Reno VARO should review its policies to ensure that any failures in this system are rectified so that the process is accurate moving forward. Given the findings in this report, I respectfully request answers to the following questions:

1. Since you became director, have you reviewed the process for handling of claims-related documents, including any policies for appropriate shredding, signature requirements, and training requirements?

2. What improvements will you be making to this process in light of this VA OIG report?
3. When was the last time the Reno VARO performed training for its employees on the handling of claims-related documents?
4. Does the Reno VARO have a designated Records Management Officer (RMO)?
 - a. If yes, does the RMO have any responsibilities outside the scope of this position that could take away from them fully performing their responsibilities?
 - b. If not, when will this position be filled?
5. Does the Reno VARO have a designated Records Management Technician (RMT)? If not, does the VARO plan to hire a full-time RMT?
6. Since the release of this report, has a violations log been established at the Reno VARO to ensure proper documentation of any violations?

I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to working with you to address the VA's claims process and ensuring all claims and claims-related documents are handled properly. I look forward to your response to this letter by April 25, 2016.

Sincerely,



DEAN HELLER
U.S. Senator