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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

CHRISTOPHER R. HIXON, STAFF DIRECTOR  
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October 27, 2016

Ms. Victoria P. Brahm  
Acting Director  
Tomah VA Medical Center  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
500 East Veterans Street  
Tomah, WI 54660

Dear Acting Director Brahm:

I write regarding the recent death of a veteran admitted to a program run by the Veterans Assistance Foundation Inc. (VAF) and operating on the Tomah VAMC grounds. Since September 26, 2016, my staff has been in contact with you, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG), and the VAF seeking more information about this death. Although I understand the matter is still under investigation by local law enforcement, I appreciate your assistance in providing information about the VAF program operating at the Tomah VAMC.

My office has learned that the VAF program has operated at the Tomah VAMC since around 1998.<sup>1</sup> The VAF program, which seeks to assist homeless veterans, operates on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors of Building 407 at the Tomah VAMC. VAF operates nearly 60 beds and currently has 40 participants in its program.<sup>2</sup>

According to VAF leadership, on October 18, 2016, the VA notified the VAF that the VA planned to cancel its agreement allowing the VAF to use the Tomah VAMC facilities effective January 16, 2017.<sup>3</sup> This decision may have unintended and adverse consequences for some veterans who participate in the VAF program. While it is important to allow for a thorough independent investigation into the recent death, the VA also must ensure that the veterans who currently rely on the VAF program are not adversely affected by this decision.

The most important duty of the VA is to ensure that the finest among us have the appropriate level of care and service. To understand what factors led to the Tomah VAMC's decision to cancel its use agreement with VAF and how the Tomah VAMC intends to address the resulting consequences to veterans care, I request that you please provide the following information:

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<sup>1</sup> Phone call with Veterans Assistance Foundation, Inc. and Committee staff. Oct. 26, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

1. When and how did the Tomah VAMC leadership, including Tomah VAMC police, learn of the death of the veteran in Building 407?
2. Did Tomah VAMC notify the VA OIG or VA headquarters about this death in Building 407? When? Please explain
3. Why is local law enforcement leading the investigation?
4. Has the Tomah VAMC conducted any internal audits or investigations of the VAF program prior to the death? If so, please provide the results of those reports.
5. Does the Tomah VAMC provide security for Building 407? Is there any written agreement pertaining to security for the VAF program? Please explain.
6. How is the Tomah VAMC working to ensure that veterans who participate in the program will not be harmed by the cancellation of the use agreement?
7. Have there been previous complaints about the VAF program? If so, please provide a summary of the complaints and what actions, if any, the VA took to mitigate any problems.

In addition to these questions, I request that the Tomah VAMC provide a briefing on these topics involving VAF. Please provide a briefing as soon as possible but no later than November 4, 2016.

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized by Rule XXV of the Standing Rules of the Senate to investigate “the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of all agencies and departments of the Government.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, S. Res. 73 (114th Congress) authorizes the Committee to examine “the efficiency and economy of all branches and functions of Government with particular references to the operations and management of Federal regulatory policies and programs.”<sup>5</sup>

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Brian Downey or Kyle Brosnan with the Committee staff at (202) 224-4751.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson  
Chairman

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<sup>4</sup> S. Rule XXV(k); *see also* S. Res. 445, 108th Cong. (2004).

<sup>5</sup> S. Res. 73 § 12, 114th Cong. (2015).

Ms. Victoria P. Brahm

October 27, 2016

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cc: The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
Ranking Member

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

The Honorable Michael J. Missal  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Christopher Hanson  
President/CEO and Board Member  
Veterans Assistance Foundation Inc.