

CARL LEVIN, MICHIGAN
MARK L. PRYOR, ARKANSAS
MARY L. LANDRIEU, LOUISIANA
CLAIRE McCASKILL, MISSOURI
JON TESTER, MONTANA
MARK BEGICH, ALASKA
TAMMY BALDWIN, WISCONSIN
HEIDI HEITKAMP, NORTH DAKOTA

TOM COBURN, OKLAHOMA
JOHN MCCAIN, ARIZONA
RON JOHNSON, WISCONSIN
ROB PORTMAN, OHIO
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY
MICHAEL B. ENZI, WYOMING
KELLY AYOTTE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

RICHARD J. KESSLER, STAFF DIRECTOR
KEITH B. ASHDOWN, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

January 14, 2014

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I recently learned of reports of fraud and negligent representation of veterans by individuals who have received accreditation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide counsel and services to veterans. Some veterans have suffered financial damage due to their reliance on advice from these individuals. These individuals have also improperly obtained millions of taxpayer dollars from the VA by helping ineligible veterans obtain benefits.¹

I am concerned that the VA may not be adequately managing and overseeing the accreditation process. Reportedly, the VA has only four full-time employees evaluating approximately 5,000 accreditation applications annually, and all the information on an application, including criminal background, is self-reported without VA verification. In addition, despite customer complaints or regulatory actions against accredited service providers, the VA rarely revokes accreditation. Last year, the VA only revoked its accreditation for two of its more than 20,000 advisors.²

VA accreditation creates the impression that the VA has deemed a particular lawyer, financial advisor, or other type of advisor to be knowledgeable in VA benefits and qualified to provide veterans services. Based on these reports, however, it appears that the VA's accreditation process is providing unscrupulous or unqualified individuals with the opportunity to both abuse taxpayer dollars and directly harm our nation's veterans.

As part of the Subcommittee's ongoing oversight of government spending, I therefore request a briefing for Subcommittee staff about the VA's accreditation program, including its costs, management, and oversight. I request that this briefing take place on or before **Friday, January 24, 2014**.

The jurisdiction of the Subcommittee on Financial and Contracting Oversight is set forth in Senate Rule XXV clause 1(k); Senate Resolution 445 section 101 (108th Congress); and Senate Resolution 64 (113th Congress).

¹ *Winning Veterans' Trust, and Profiting From It*, The New York Times (Dec. 23, 2013).

² *Winning Veterans' Trust, and Profiting From It*, The New York Times (Dec. 23, 2013).

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki

January 14, 2014

Page 2

Please contact Cathy Yu with Senator McCaskill's Subcommittee staff at (202) 224-9383 with any questions. Please send any correspondence relating to this request to the Subcommittee's clerk at Kelsey_Stroud@hsgac.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Claire McCaskill
Chairman
Subcommittee on Financial and
Contracting Oversight

cc: Ron Johnson
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Financial and
Contracting Oversight