

JOHN MCCAIN, ARIZONA
ROB PORTMAN, OHIO
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY
JAMES LANKFORD, OKLAHOMA
MICHAEL B. ENZI, WYOMING
KELLY AYOTTE, NEW HAMPSHIRE
JONI ERNST, IOWA
BEN SASSE, NEBRASKA

THOMAS R. CARPER, DELAWARE
CLAIRE McCASKILL, MISSOURI
JON TESTER, MONTANA
TAMMY BALDWIN, WISCONSIN
HEIDI HEITKAMP, NORTH DAKOTA
CORY A. BOOKER, NEW JERSEY
GARY C. PETERS, MICHIGAN

CHRISTOPHER R. HIXON, STAFF DIRECTOR
GABRIELLE A. BATKIN, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

March 29, 2016

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

Dear Secretary McDonald:

I recently became aware of allegations involving the Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center (Milwaukee VAMC) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. These allegations concern VA medication apparently being dispensed by the facility's pharmacy department to non-veterans. I write to seek a better understanding of what occurred at the facility and ask that the VA brief my Committee staff on this situation at the Milwaukee VAMC.

Last year, Wisconsinites learned about the tragedies at the VA Medical Center in Tomah, Wisconsin, in the wake of a news report about high prescription levels of opioids and allegations of drug diversion. I chaired a bicameral field hearing in Tomah last March to hear directly from those affected by the facility, and I am leading a bipartisan investigation to examine what happened at the Tomah VAMC.¹ As I continue this effort, the allegations about the Milwaukee VAMC are also concerning.

Although much is unknown about these allegations at this time, I have instructed my staff to examine this matter. My staff communicated with the leadership of the Milwaukee VAMC, as well as with the Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (VA OIG), late last week. According to VAMC leadership, they became aware of these allegations approximately two months ago and began an investigation immediately thereafter. The VAMC leadership turned the investigation over to law enforcement, including the VA OIG and the district attorney. The VAMC leadership stated that it has held the employee(s) involved in the allegations accountable.

I hope that the VA will assist the Committee in further fact-finding on this issue. As an initial matter, I ask that you direct your staff to arrange a staff-level briefing with the appropriate officials from the VA Central Office, VISN 12, and the Milwaukee VAMC to discuss the allegations in more detail. Please have your staff contact Brian Downey or Kyle Brosnan of my committee staff by March 31, 2016 to schedule a briefing. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

¹ S. Comm. on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, Tragedy at Tomah: Initial Findings (June 25, 2015).

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
March 29, 2016
Page 2

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ron Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ron Johnson
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member