

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:  
APPROPRIATIONS  
BUDGET  
HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS  
HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

October 20, 2015

The Honorable David J. Shulkin, MD  
Under Secretary for Health  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Dr. Shulkin:

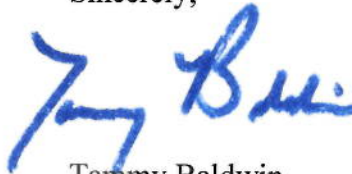
During the September 22, 2015, Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing on Improving VA Accountability, two Department of Veterans Affairs' employee whistleblowers, who had previously served in the Armed Forces and receive health care services at VA, testified that their health care records were improperly accessed after they raised patient safety concerns at their respective Veterans Health Administration facilities. I believe this issue must be immediately resolved so that VA's veteran employees who blow the whistle can be assured that their medical records will remain private.

Both individuals attributed the prevalence of inappropriate access to whistleblowers' medical records to a lack of accountability within VA. The unacceptable behavior displayed by those VA employees who inappropriately access colleagues' medical records must not be tolerated. Veterans who continue to serve this Nation by working at VA must be afforded the ability to blow the whistle, thereby improving benefits and services provided to their fellow veterans, without the added concern of their personal health care information being accessed by their coworkers for inappropriate reasons.

I request that you explore the feasibility of restricting access to VA's veteran employees' medical records. During the September 22 hearing, suggestions to meet such an end included two-party approval to access these health care records and making better use of information technology to restrict access to such records. There are undoubtedly other solutions that would address this need as well, and I ask that you thoroughly review all viable options.

I thank you for your personal commitment to those who have served in our Armed Forces and look forward to your response to this request.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin  
U.S. Senator