

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0918

November 17, 2023

David Isaacks
Network Director
VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8)
13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd
Tampa, FL 33612

Cory P. Price
Medical Center Director
West Palm Beach VA Medical Center
7305 N Military Trail
West Palm Beach, FL 33410

Director Isaacks,

On October 20, 2023, my staff and I met with Director Price to address my concerns regarding the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center (WPB VAMC). During the meeting, Director Price presented a slideshow explaining how well the hospital is performing, but my office continues to receive complaints from employees and patients that directly contradict his claims. Director Price's 15-minute presentation did very little to assure me that the WPB VAMC is operating at the standard our veterans deserve, or that leadership is adequately addressing the concerns raised.

During the Congressional Town Hall in August, the main complaint raised to my colleagues and me was regarding the leadership at WPB VAMC. In fact, my staff has continued to receive complaints of a toxic work environment based on a culture of harassment, persecution, reprisal, and hostility from those in management and leadership. The physicians and nurses my team have spoken with even expressed their attempts to address the issues and communicated that their desire to employ solutions used at other VA facilities which were rejected each time.

The second complaint was the difficulty with recruiting and retaining staff. Tied in with leadership concerns, physicians, nurses, and specialists have cited pay discrepancies and lack of flexibility as the main causes for mass departure. When these employees have expressed their frustration and dissatisfaction in the past, according to the testimonies my office has received, the staffers are reminded that they are Title 38 employees and must be available 24/7 – even when they are not scheduled to be on call. However, some of their colleagues at the Orlando VA, just a mere two hours north, do not seem to face the same issue. There are claims that they receive better pay, abide by 40-hour week standards, and have protected time for improvement and education as Title 38 employees.

I understand that there were concerns about a “mob mentality” during the August Town Hall, but as mentioned employees of the WPB VAMC are not the only ones contacting my office. Veterans have called with complaints about canceled appointments, extensive wait times to speak with someone over the phone, constantly being transferred, and never receiving a call back when a call is dropped or after leaving a voicemail.

While Director Price's presentation claimed there was evident improvement and progress, the conditions of the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center and the treatment veterans receive at this facility remain a concern for me. As I said during the call, I want to be part of the solution.

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Therefore, I request that you respond to the following:

1. What issues did the solutions proposed by staff at the WPB VAMC hope to address?
 - a. Why were they rejected?
 - b. Please provide copies of the proposals and their rejection notices.

2. What percentage of employees who leave the hospital conduct exit interviews?
 - a. What are the top three reasons why employees leave the WPB VAMC?

3. When the WPB VAMC had a 1-star CMS rating, did WPB VAMC leadership receive any bonuses during the evaluation period?
 - a. If so, what was the basis for these rewards?

4. How is there an over \$5 million increase in compensation and incentives between Fiscal Year 2022 and Fiscal Year 2023?
 - a. Where did the additional \$5,547,250 in funds appear from?
 - b. Please provide a comparison of pay and bonuses for similar positions and experience within the following facilities: the WPB VAMC, Miami VAMC, James A. Haley VAMC (Tampa), Orlando VAMC, and the Malcom Randall VAMC (Gainesville) from Fiscal Year 2018 to Fiscal Year 2023.

Sincerely,



Brian Mast
Member of Congress