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21ST DISTRICT, FLORIDA

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

November 17, 2023

Denis McDonough  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20571

Secretary McDonough,

I appreciate you taking the time to hear my concerns regarding the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center (WPB VAMC) on October 24, 2023. Director Cory Price's leadership, or lack thereof, was brought to my attention after my staff received numerous complaints regarding the conditions at the WPB VAMC.

In August of this year, my colleagues – Representatives Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, and Lois Frankel – and I attended a Congressional Town Hall where we heard alarming statements from hospital staff describing a toxic work environment. Accusations of an unapproachable, non-responsive leadership team that is unwilling to listen to feedback was the tip of the iceberg. There remains great concern regarding pay disparities, work-life balance, and staff retention within the hospital and across the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8). Unfortunately, the staff of the WPB VAMC are not the only individuals complaining about the hospital.

Veterans who receive care at the facility continue to call my office to express their dissatisfaction with the conditions at the WPB VAMC – even commenting on the strain they have observed on hospital employees. The most frequent and chronic complaints are regarding the hospital's ineffective phone system – calls being dropped, excessive hold times, constantly being transferred between departments, an inability to leave voicemails, not receiving a return call when they can leave voicemails, etc.; the frequency of canceled appointments with little to no notice; the lack of timeliness of care; and the difficulties in accessing community care. Our nation's veterans deserve better than this.

During my call with Director Price on October 20, 2023, he claimed that the WPB VAMC's 1-star CMS rating was directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic between the evaluation years of 2018 to 2022. However, the WPB VAMC was only one of nine VA hospitals to receive this score at the time. As far as I am concerned, this score gives credence to the testimonies I have heard.

I informed Director Price that he and the hospital's conditions are on my radar and that I want to be part of the solution. In the past, my staff, along with staff from Representative Frankel, and former Representatives Hastings and Deutche, utilized space within the WPB VAMC to assist

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our respective constituents in addressing their concerns from the benefits they are eligible for to the care they receive.

Secretary McDonough, as a 12-year Army veteran, who receives his health care from the VA, I want our nation's veterans to receive the best care possible. I, again, invite you to tour the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center with me and ask that my staff be allotted weekly satellite hours in the hospital as they had before. Together, I am certain we can provide our nation's heroes with the quality of care and life they deserve.

As such, I would like a response to the following:

1. Can an independent review of the WPB VAMC be performed?
  - a. I would like the review to include an analysis of the leadership team, workplace climate, and staff morale.
  
2. Can data or metrics on patient satisfaction at the WPBVA MC be collected?
  - a. I would like the hospital's telephone system to be one of the various topics addressed.
  
3. When the 1-star CMS rating was published, what actions did the Department of Veterans Affairs take to address the hospital's failures?
  - a. Please detail all the actions taken to raise the CMS rating to 5 stars.
  
4. 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?

Sincerely,



Brian Mast  
Member of Congress