

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 24, 2011

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
United States Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a study on the reasons for the delay in benefit processing times within the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Los Angeles Regional Office and the difficulty in scheduling healthcare appointments within the Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System.

Each year our offices assist thousands of veterans with their efforts to wade through red-tape and delays for both benefits and medical care. While our offices are happy to assist our veterans on these issues, it appears the intervention of our offices on behalf of our constituents is becoming commonplace for even the simplest and most routine VA matters. We hope this is not indicative of potential systemic problems in the VA Los Angeles Regional Office and the Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, which serve our constituents.

VA Medical Benefits Processing Time

To help us address this issue and develop possible solutions, we specifically request the GAO investigate the VA Los Angeles Regional Office claims processing and response times. According to the Los Angeles Regional Office, disability claims take an average of 236 days to process after they are originally submitted. Appeals of decisions can take up to two years to process before the VA releases any funds, meaning oftentimes our veterans go without the benefits or care they need. The GAO report should include the following:

- A detailed assessment of the claims procedures at the Los Angeles Regional Office and any areas of the process that cause delays of timely processing;
- A review of the effectiveness of policies, if any, that ensure long, outstanding claims are resolved, and a determination if those policies are being followed;
- A review of the effectiveness of policies, if any, designed to keep veterans apprised of the status of their claim and a determination if those policies are being followed;
- A review of the process, if any, of ensuring that the results of examinations by independent organizations are accurate and that the physicians conducting these

examinations are providing veterans thorough, in-depth evaluations of their claimed disabilities;

- A comparison of the claims processing procedures and times for the Los Angeles Regional Office to other VA Regional Offices;
- A review of the system, if any, that identifies applicable benefits to individual veterans, notifies veterans of the benefits that they are eligible for, and maintains a database for future coordination of information;

VA Vocational Rehabilitation Benefits Processing Time

To help with the processing of VA Vocational Rehabilitation claims, the GAO report should include an investigation of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Division, which assists with the placement of disabled, unemployed veterans into suitable career paths. The GAO report should include the following:

- A review of the system that identifies veterans eligible for vocational rehabilitation benefits, notifies the veteran of the benefits that they are eligible for, and maintains a database for future coordination of information;
- An identification of military and veteran-friendly employers and recommendations for the improvement of the system to notify individual veterans of those employers and maintains a database for future coordination of information;

VA Healthcare Appointments Scheduling

Also, we request the GAO study focus on the difficulty veterans often experience with scheduling and attending healthcare appointments within the Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System. The GAO report should include the following:

- An evaluation of all the paperwork, forms, and other information veterans are required to submit with a claim and if all of this information is necessary prior to scheduling any medical examinations;
- A detailed assessment of the reasons for the wait time to schedule needed healthcare appointments;
- A review of the effectiveness of policies, if any, designed to notify veterans of scheduled appointments ahead of time, especially if travel is involved;
- A review of the effectiveness of policies, if any, that provide reimbursement for travel expenses;
- A review of the effectiveness of policies, if any, designed to inform veterans about how emergency service expenses (i.e. ambulance transport and hospital stays) are approved and reimbursed;

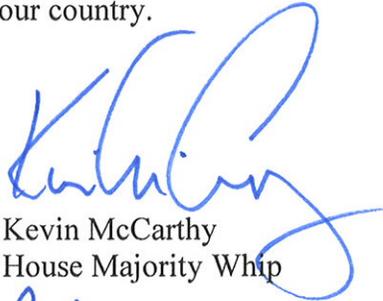
GAO Recommendations

Finally, we request that the GAO study include recommendations, both administrative and/or legislative, to shorten the claims processing time and improve customer services (i.e. access to health care, status updates and other interactions with veterans who enlist VA services, etc.) at the VA Los Angeles Regional Office and within the Greater Los Angeles Healthcare

System, as well as recommendations on best practices that could be administratively instituted in both institutions.

Thank you for your attention on this important matter to us and the veterans who have served our country.

Sincerely,



Kevin McCarthy
House Majority Whip



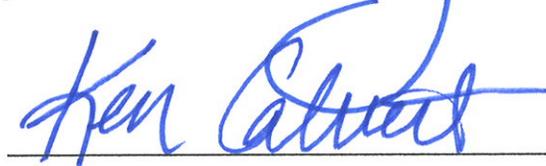
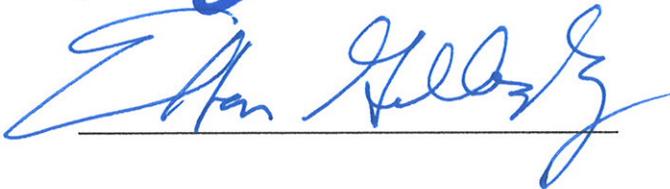
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