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February 6, 2015

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

Dear Secretary McDonald,

I write you today to discuss my concerns about recent allegations regarding the mishandling of veterans' suicides at Phoenix VA Health Care System (PVAHCS) and the way that those allegations have been apparently handled. According to those reports, Brandon Coleman, a whistleblower who reported concerns about the way PVAHCS managed the care of patients at risk of suicide, was subject to harassment and intimidation by his superiors. My office has since learned that Mr. Coleman has been placed on administrative leave. Without prejudging the merits of Mr. Coleman's concerns but in light of recent revelations regarding related misconduct at PVAHCS, I urge you to look into and address this situation immediately.

As we have learned over the last few months, Mr. Coleman does not appear to be alone. In a June 2014 report, the Office of Special Counsel (OSC) investigated 37 claims of whistleblower retaliation at the VA. Furthermore, I have heard from an increasing number of current and former VA employees who have shared similar fears of retaliation for bringing serious allegations of manipulated wait times, mismanagement, and neglect to the attention of their superiors.

Those facts suggest that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues to face a systemic problem in its handling of whistleblower complaints, as well as a culture that breeds intimidation and retaliation. If true, this would be unacceptable. The VA must change its culture and accord all due protection to whistleblowers within the agency, as required under law.

I look forward to your response to the concerns raised in this letter.

Sincerely,



John McCain
United States Senator