

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 24, 2014

The Honorable Sloan Gibson
Acting Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20010

Dear Secretary Gibson:

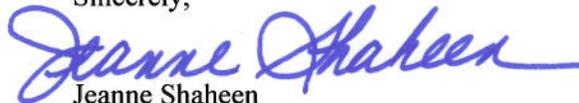
I write regarding the deeply troubling reports of misconduct at the Phoenix VA Medical Center and the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) effort to overhaul its patient scheduling process. While I appreciate your attention to this issue and the reforms recently announced by your office, I strongly urge you to consider establishing random, external audits to independently verify compliance with both current VA policy and future reforms.

As you know, the Department's scheduling system is broken. In all, we know that more than sixty percent of VA facilities were found to have improperly recorded appointment requests, while thirteen percent of schedulers reported administrative pressure to falsify records. I was also shocked and saddened to learn yesterday that VA personnel at the Phoenix VA Medical Center reportedly altered the times of death for numerous veterans to conceal the fact that they were awaiting appointments when they passed away. The culpability of the VA's own management in furthering this crisis has seriously compromised the Department's credibility in conducting internal oversight.

To that end, I urge you to immediately establish a process for random, external audits. External audits not only provide objective assessments of employee performance and policy effectiveness, they would also help boost public confidence that these serious problems are actually being addressed. Moreover, random audits provide a powerful deterrent against future wrongdoing by creating the perception that misconduct could be discovered at any time. I included a requirement for random external audits in my recent legislation, the Veterans Access to Care Accountability Act (S. 2423), which is pending before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. However, I encourage you to implement this proposal as soon as possible.

Our nation has a collective obligation to provide the best possible health care for the men and women that willingly put themselves in harm's way on our behalf. Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your continued service to our nation.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator