

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 23, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

I write to express concern regarding the recent report from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG), which found that the VA wrongly denied approximately 1,300 claims of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) related to military sexual trauma (MST) in 2017. The OIG identified several factors that contributed to these failures, including: lack of specialization; lack of an additional level of review; discontinued special focused reviews and inadequate training. I am deeply disturbed by the conclusions of this investigation and urge you to immediately begin implementing the OIG recommendations to remedy these failures and ensure MST survivors receive the support they deserve.

The Veterans Health Administration reports that approximately 1 in 5 women and 1 in 100 men have told their VA health care provider that they experienced MST while serving. The Department of Defense (DOD) reported that in Fiscal Year 2017 more than 5,200 service members reported an incident of sexual assault while serving in the military. Sadly, we know that these numbers are unlikely to reflect the actual rate of sexual assault in the military due to the nature of MST and the variety of reasons that a survivor may choose not to report an incident. Each of these cases represents a life-altering traumatic experience that often dramatically impacts the service member's physical and mental health and is more likely to result in symptoms of PTSD than other types of trauma, including combat.

My office works with veterans in New Hampshire who suffer from MST-related PTSD and have had their cases denied or delayed by a time consuming and convoluted VA process. I am honored that we can assist these veterans by serving as a liaison between them and the VA, but it is also my hope that veterans will be able to resolve their claims effectively and efficiently.

As you know, it is imperative that the VA immediately address the findings of this OIG report to ensure that survivors of MST who suffer from PTSD receive the care and benefits that they deserve. I respectfully request a timely response detailing the steps that the VA is taking to ensure that PTSD claims related to MST are managed appropriately and without delay. I look forward to working with you to address this issue moving forward, and thank you for your continued service to the nation.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator