



U.S. Office of Special Counsel
1730 M Street, N.W., Suite 218
Washington, D.C. 20036-4505

OSC Secures Relief for Additional VA Whistleblowers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Nick Schwellenbach, (202) 254-3631; nschwellenbach@osc.gov

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The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) has recently facilitated settlements for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) whistleblowers alleging problems with patient care and other health concerns, including:

Ryan Honl – Mr. Honl was a secretary in the mental health unit at the Tomah VA Medical Center in Tomah, Wisconsin. In addition to other concerns, he disclosed the alleged excessive prescription of opiates to patients. On the same day he made a disclosure to the VA Office of Inspector General, the VA stripped Mr. Honl of his job duties, locked him out of his office, and isolated him from co-workers. Shortly thereafter, he resigned. The VA and Mr. Honl settled his complaint with Mr. Honl receiving several corrective actions, including the removal of negative information from his personnel file and monetary damages.

Joseph Colon Christensen – Mr. Colon is a credentialing support specialist with the VA Caribbean Health System in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Mr. Colon reported concerns relating to patient care at his facility and information about alleged improper conduct by the director of his facility. In September 2014, two days after a newspaper called the facility's director asking for comment on a story about the director's conduct, the facility's chief of staff issued Mr. Colon a notice of proposed removal. In late December, the VA replaced the proposed removal with a three-day suspension and detailed him to a different position. Prior to his disclosures, Mr. Colon had an unblemished disciplinary history at the VA and had received "outstanding" performance reviews. The VA and Mr. Colon settled his retaliation complaint with Mr. Colon receiving several corrective actions, including the repeal of his suspension, a return to his position, and compensatory damages.

Troy Thompson – Mr. Thompson is a food services manager with the Philadelphia VA Medical Center. In 2012, Mr. Thompson reported management inaction on disciplinary issues and several violations of VA sanitation and safety policies, including a fly and pest infestation in facility kitchens. On the same day he made these disclosures to his supervisor, the supervisor detailed Mr. Thompson to the VA's Pathology and Lab Service pending an investigation into him for eating four expired sandwiches worth a total of \$5. His new job mostly consisted of janitorial work, including sanitizing the morgue and handling human body parts. Mr. Thompson already had admitted that he ate and gave away the sandwiches instead of disposing of them per VA practice. After the VA investigation concluded he had stolen government property (the sandwiches), he was issued a proposed removal and fined \$75. Mr. Thompson spent over two years on the detail and was under the pending removal for most of that time. The VA ultimately took positive steps to address his case by reassigning him to his previous position and rescinding the proposed removal. OSC determined, however, that the VA also owed Mr. Thompson compensatory damages, which the VA has agreed to provide as part of a settlement.

"Whistleblowers are vital in the effort to improve the VA's service to veterans. However, retaliation undermines reforms and deters others from coming forward," said Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner. "I appreciate the VA's continued cooperation in settling these whistleblower retaliation cases."

Some recent OSC press releases on VA whistleblowers settling retaliation claims can be found [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), and releases on VA whistleblower disclosures related to health care can be found [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) is an independent federal investigative and prosecutorial agency. Our basic authorities come from four federal statutes: the Civil Service Reform Act, the Whistleblower Protection Act, the Hatch Act, and the Uniformed Services Employment & Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). OSC's primary mission is to safeguard the merit system by protecting federal employees and applicants from prohibited personnel practices, especially reprisal for whistleblowing, and to serve as a safe channel for allegations of wrongdoing. For more information, please visit our website at www.osc.gov.