



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON DC 20420

February 26, 2016

U.S. OFFICE OF
SPECIAL COUNSEL
WASHINGTON, D.C.
2016 FEB 29 PM 3:24

The Honorable Carolyn N. Lerner
Special Counsel
U.S. Office of Special Counsel
1730 M Street, NW
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20036

RE: OSC File No. DI-15-2365, DI-15-2840, DI-15-3317

Dear Ms. Lerner:

I am responding to your letter of April 28, 2015, regarding allegations received from a whistleblower regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Oakland VA Regional Office (VARO), in Oakland, California. The whistleblower alleged that:

- Oakland VARO has a backlog of 13,184 unprocessed informal and formal claims requiring review and processing; and
- Oakland VARO Management was aware of this ongoing backlog, but took no action to correct it.

The enclosed report from the Office of Inspector General (OIG) responds to these allegations. The Secretary has delegated to me the authority to sign the enclosed report and take any actions deemed necessary as referenced in 5 United States Code § 1213(d)(5).

The OIG did not find evidence of the existence of the alleged list of approximately 13,184 informal claims even after interviews with current and former VARO staff, whistleblowers, and members of a previous VBA management support team. Further, VARO management did not provide the oversight needed to ensure timely and accurate processing of informal claims, and as a result, Veterans did not receive accurate or timely benefit payment.

OIG recommended the Oakland VARO Director provide training to staff on proper informal claims processing procedures, conduct a complete review of the additional list of 690 claims that may be informal claims, and conduct another review of the remaining 1,248 informal claims and provide certification of completion of the review to OIG.

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The Honorable Carolyn N. Lerner

The lack of management supervision noted in the January 8, 2016, report is considered a performance concern. There is no evidence or indication from the OIG report of malfeasance or an intent to do harm by any supervisor or employee that would prompt disciplinary action. However, management acted responsively to the recommendations outlined in the report, as confirmed by OIG. These actions to improve performance include conducting training for key claims processing positions and completing reviews of informal claims to ensure appropriate actions were taken. VBA's compensation service quality assurance staff will also perform subsequent independent reviews of the 1,248 informal claims and any further problems identified as a result of this review will be appropriately addressed.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robert D. Snyder".

Robert D. Snyder
Interim Chief of Staff

Enclosure