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[www.osc.gov](http://www.osc.gov)

**The Special Counsel**

March 29, 2018

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

Re: OSC File No. DI-16-4251

Dear Mr. President:

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 1213(e)(3), I am forwarding to you a report from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) based on disclosures of wrongdoing at the William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center (Dorn VAMC or VAMC), Columbia, South Carolina.<sup>1</sup> I have reviewed the agency report and, in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 1213(e), provide the following summary of the report and my findings.<sup>2</sup>

The whistleblower, who chose to remain anonymous, disclosed that the Dorn VAMC Environmental Management Services did not meet VA and Joint Commission health and cleanliness standards in certain clinics, administrative areas, and lobbies. Specifically, the whistleblower reported that housekeeping did not fully clean dirt and bodily fluids from surfaces and trashcans in the exam areas and restrooms in the Freedom Clinic, Women's Clinic, White Team Unit, the Compensation and Pension Administrative Areas, and the main lobbies. The whistleblower also observed housekeeping use incorrect products and techniques in these spaces. The whistleblower further disclosed that housekeeping did not maintain appropriate trash removal practices, and left dirty water in, and soiled rags on, mop carts in the hallways of the VAMC's first and second floors and the Community Living Center (CLC). This allegedly caused CLC staff and patients to complain of an odor emanating from human waste disposal containers. The whistleblower asserted that these issues stemmed from a lack of oversight and training, noting that supervisors were neither present nor engaged in their subordinates' work, and new employees tried to educate themselves on VA sanitation policy and practices.

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<sup>1</sup> OSC referred the whistleblower's allegations to former Secretary David J. Shulkin pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 1213(c) and the Office of Environmental Programs Services investigated. Former Chief of Staff Vivieca Wright Simpson submitted the report to OSC on September 25, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> The whistleblower chose not to comment on the agency's report.

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Investigators reviewed relevant policies, procedures, professional standards, and other documents, interviewed both medical and environmental services personnel, and visually inspected the areas identified in the referral. The agency report substantiated two of the whistleblower's three allegations. The report concluded that environmental services (i.e., housekeeping) personnel were not properly trained or supervised. Specifically, investigators found that Environmental Management Services employees lacked knowledge on cleaning steps, sequencing, and frequency. The report also found that staff had no formal training on waste handling procedures, no continuing sanitation training, and incomplete competency assessments. The report concluded that while environmental supervisors were available during work hours, they did not conduct frequent rounds during their shifts, noting that some environmental personnel did not see a supervisor more than once during a work day.

The report included eight recommendations to the Dorn VAMC. The agency recommended that the Dorn VAMC environmental services program regularly train and monitor their staff. The report directed environmental services to provide remedial training as needed, implement a comprehensive training program to meet future needs, customize environmental services personnel competency assessments, and employ daily cleaning checklists and frequency regimes for assigned areas. The report also instructed the VAMC to provide remedial training to the environmental services supervisors concerning their oversight duties, and the VA's sanitation policies and procedures.

The agency did not substantiate that the above-listed areas in the Dorn VAMC were routinely unclean and unsanitary. The agency concluded that no current environmental management practices or conditions existed that would have created a substantial and specific danger to public health. Nevertheless, the report contained six recommendations to better ensure an effective environmental services program at the Dorn VAMC. The agency recommended implementing location-specific cleaning schedules and regimes, and cleaning product checklists to ensure access to and use of the products. It also recommended establishing an automated customer satisfaction survey to report environmental care concerns, and a quality assurance process to monitor compliance with cleaning practices. The agency further recommended that an environmental services team report to Dorn VAMC leadership on customer service and quality assurance data, and environmental inspections, deficiencies, and corrections. Additionally, the report recommended employing specific performance measures and improvement plans to ensure environmental services staff know their responsibilities and adhere to professional cleanliness standards.

I have reviewed the original disclosure and the report. I have determined that the report meets all statutory requirements and the findings appear reasonable. The disclosure and subsequent investigation led to valuable Environmental Management Services improvements at the facility. As required by 5 U.S.C. § 1213(e)(3), I have sent a copy of this letter and the agency report to the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Senate and

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House Committees on Veterans' Affairs. I have also filed copies of this letter, and the redacted agency report in our public file, which is available at [www.osc.gov](http://www.osc.gov). This matter is now closed.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "H. J. Kerner", written in a cursive style.

Henry J. Kerner  
Special Counsel

Enclosure