

Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe:

Thank you for hosting "Member Day" for your colleagues like me who have important legislation and priorities pending in your esteemed committee.

I miss serving on the committee with you all – I continue to work on solutions for our nation's veterans and thank you all as partners in our joint effort to do so. I'm pleased my friend, Mr. Levin, has represented San Diego's hundreds of thousands of veterans very well on the panel.

I'm here to thank you for passing two of my bills to help end veteran homelessness, and to urge you to provide oversight of the Office of Medical Inspector.

First, thank you for marking up and passing a very important bill that would help more chronically homeless veterans secure housing and get crucial supportive services.

H.R.2398, the Veteran HOUSE Act expands eligibility for HUD-VASH vouchers to veterans with other-than-honorable discharges.

Congress has acknowledged that other-than-honorable veterans deserve access to some VA homelessness services, such as programs like Grant and Per Diem and Supportive Services for Veteran Families.

Sadly, around the country, there are chronically homeless veterans who are falling through the bureaucratic cracks due to their discharge status. They can't receive housing vouchers because they are ineligible for VA health care, and therefore can't receive the invaluable supportive services provided by the VA.

Since this committee took action on the bill, Senators Jon Tester, Todd Young, and Chris Murphy introduced its companion bill.

My other bill seeks to find solutions for veterans experiencing homelessness in high-cost areas, like San Diego. For veterans living in these areas, even if they have rental assistance, they may struggle to find an affordable place to live.

Now I'd like to turn my attention to a troubling story from the San Diego VA. In November 2018, our office learned of an investigation detailing alleged unapproved human research.

The San Diego VA participated in a study examining alcoholic liver disease, which was one site, among other research institutions, of a larger, NIH-funded study led by the Pittsburgh Liver Research Center and UNC Chapel Hill.

Nine patients diagnosed with alcoholic hepatitis received transjugular biopsies. According to whistleblowers' disclosures, this was not the standard of care, and reported this to the VA's Office of Medical Inspector.

Due to follow up from whistleblowers, the Office of the Special Counsel conducted an independent investigation and found VA's internal report unsatisfactory.

The OSC report alleges that these samples were collected improperly, sometimes without patient consent, and could have put patients in harm's way. The Special Counsel urged the VA to "revisit its findings in this matter and take a truly critical look at the research being conducted" at the San Diego VA.

At the end of last Congress, I wrote to this committee requesting a hearing to investigate what happened at the San Diego VA, and more broadly to look at the Office of Medical Inspector to ensure it is doing its job to ensure patient safety at every medical center across the country.

My staff and I have worked with the committee to receive additional documents, and we all agree that it's our job to ensure the Office of Medical Inspector has enough resources to handle whistleblower disclosures.

We need to strengthen investigatory bodies to ensure improper allegations such as these are thoroughly vetted.

I ask you to work with me to get answers regarding this instance at the San Diego VA, and that as a committee, as examine the Office of Medical Inspector.

Testimony: Rep. Scott Peters (CA-52)
House Veterans' Affairs Committee Member Day
Tuesday, September 10, 2019

Veterans have served our nation, and deserve the best care, opportunities, and support. I am proud to advocate for San Diego's veterans, and I look forward to our ongoing work to deliver for them.

Thank you very much for your time today, I yield back.