

Statement for the Record
Congresswoman Kathleen M. Rice
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Full Committee Legislative Hearing
September 10, 2020

I would like to thank Chairman Takano for including the *VA Police Improvement and Accountability Act* (H.R. 7784) in today's legislative hearing.

Last year, this Committee held a hearing to examine VA's police force, which provides security and other police functions at VA medical facilities. The hearing identified many shortcomings regarding current policies and procedures related to VA's law enforcement operations, including that a number of these policies have not been updated in many years.

A 2019 VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) report also revealed challenges with management of the VA police, finding that the police force for each facility largely operates without clear lines of supervision from VA headquarters.

And, finally, this week, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a major review of use of force incidents at VA medical facilities. This report made strong recommendations for VA's oversight of its police force, including instituting complete record keeping on use of force by officers and requiring that all incidents are reported by police chiefs.

We must take steps to begin addressing these issues within the VA police force. And the *VA Police Improvement and Accountability Act* does just that.

My bill aims to strengthen accountability and transparency for the law enforcement operations of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Among its provisions, the bill would require VA police to use body cameras and develop guidance with relevant stakeholders on their use, covering best practices to ensure that the use of body cameras is consistent with civil rights and privacy law.

It would require improvements to police training, including increased training for crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques, and other important skills that will strengthen VA's ability to address suicide among veterans.

Under the bill, the VA would also be required to report on the plans and status of actions taken to improve the Department's police data systems used for reporting, tracking and analyzing police activity – such as arrests, ticketing, and use of force – to strengthen oversight of the police force at VA medical facilities.

I want to thank the witnesses who have taken the time to join us here today. I look forward to working with you and my colleagues on the committee to advance this piece of legislation.