

Anthony Harrington
Written Statement
Field Hearing of the House Veterans Affairs Committee
Sault Ste Marie, MI – 9/1/15

Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownley, thank you for giving me the chance to testify today.

I am a disabled veteran and I live here in Sault Ste. Marie.

As you both know, there is a VA clinic here. The clinic has been here for many years but more than 2 years ago the attending physician retired. In the interim, part-time doctors have been trying to pick up the slack, and a Nurse Practitioner has been brought in to replace the retired physician.

I truly and deeply believe that our veterans should be entitled to proper healthcare. This specific VA clinic serves the entire Eastern Upper Peninsula. They are a very busy facility with many patients from across the region. The facility is having trouble keeping up with the number of patients and its quality of care is suffering as well. The NP, although very good at her job, can only do so much within the guidelines of her job description and abilities.

Currently, as it stands the NP can only see a maximum of six patients a day and is limited as far as what she is allowed to diagnose and treat. The facility is in desperate need of a full-time attending physician as well as the current NP to adequately care of the entire region and its patients.

Recently they hired a Physician's Assistant here. While that's a good first step, it's really not a replacement for a full time doctor. I just want to know why they were able to bring a PA if it wasn't possible for them to bring a doctor? I have been told by Iron Mountain VA officials that they were only authorized to hire a nurse practitioner, and then all the sudden the PA shows up. That doesn't make sense to me.

Prior to the hiring of the NP I was seeing a doctor by the name of Lisa Vanhevel at the Bay Mills Indian Clinic. The reason I turned to the Indian clinic instead of the VA clinic was due to the lack of an attending physician at the facility. While under Dr. Vanhevel's care we talked quite extensively about the need of a full time doctor at the VA clinic. She told me that her contract with Bay Mills was coming to an end and made her intentions clear that she was interested in interviewing for the position at the VA clinic.

Upon following the proper channels she was then granted an interview at the VA clinic in Iron Mountain, Michigan. Sometime later I happened to run into Dr. Vanhevel at Wal-Mart and she informed me that her interview went well and she was offered a position at the Sault Clinic as well as the Iron Mountain clinic. She stated that she was only offered two days a week through our facility or a full time position in Iron Mountain. She explained that she had to decline both positions because she didn't want to move to Iron Mountain or commute 295 miles away for work. She also didn't want to take a position for only two days a week.

Dr. Benishek, Ms. Brownley, I'm sure you can sympathize with her. Who in their right mind would want to take a position for 2 days a week following a contract where they had a full time position? This was very concerning to me considering the dire need for a full time attending physician here.

In addition, Dr. Benishek's staff has told me that prior to the hiring of the PA, Benishek's office was told by the VA that they were going to try to hire a doctor. However, despite what Benishek's office was told, we've seen no evidence that an ad was ever placed on usajobs.com, or that any ads were placed in UP newspapers. I'd like to know what exactly was done to try to get a doctor here.

I'm glad that Congress is finally investigating this issue. I have yet to have someone explain to me why it is that the veterans in this area are not entitled to a VA facility with a full time doctor and quality healthcare.

Thank you again for having me here today. I truly hope that you will take the time to look into this matter and serve justice to our vets as we have selflessly served you and this country. It is my hope

that you will confer with the new director of the VA and that you can come to an agreement to resolve this.

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.