

**Testimony before the HVAC Subcommittee on Health
Congressman Mike Bost IL-12**

H.R. 5864 – *VA Hospitals Establishing Leadership Performance Act*

Script

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Brownley for providing me the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Health on my legislation, H.R. 5864, the *VA Hospitals Establishing Leadership Performance Act* or VA HELP Act.

The mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs is to care for those “who shall have borne the battle.” When our heroes transition from the military, they deserve to have access to quality healthcare and services.

Unfortunately, VA continues to fall short on that promise, due in part to failures in human resources management and operations. VA’s internal assessments, and those by the Government Accountability Office and VA Inspector General, have identified serious human capital challenges and weaknesses within VHA’s Human Resources operations. Most recently, we all heard about inadequate staffing and human resource management deficiencies that contributed to failures at the Washington DC VAMC.

This issue hit close to home for me after the VA National Center for Patient Safety surveyed the Marion VA Medical Center.

The Marion VA’s Patient Safety Culture Survey showed a considerable decline in key factors such as communication between management and staff and the frequency of reporting problems to management. During the site visit, multiple employees raised concerns about poor management and poor communication, distrust between leadership and management, and the lack of accountability.

These factors help measure the culture at VA facilities, and it was clear that employees were unsatisfied with their work environment.

Following this report, General Bergman and I sent a letter to then Secretary Shulkin requesting that the VA further investigate this matter. This effort was followed-up by an Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee staff visit to the Marion VAMC in order to get a firsthand look at the issues at the facility.

A report of the Subcommittee's findings confirmed a lack of accountability, improper communication and a lack of standards to measure the success of the HR department. We also learned that you do not need a college degree to be a Chief of Human Resources in the VA. I do not know of any health system that has a Chief of HR without a college degree overseeing thousands of employees and responsible for negotiating job offers and proposing disciplinary actions. I also do not know of any health system that would hire or promote an individual to manage and oversee a human resources department without requiring a college degree.

During my time on this committee I have seen that it is common in VA to move problem employees into high-level jobs with greater responsibility, without assessing their prior leadership experience and performance.

Unfortunately, despite the Subcommittee's findings and several efforts to encourage VA Headquarters leadership to address these problems, limited actions have been taken. My office continues to receive complaints about the mistrust of medical center leadership, confusion and inconsistencies in disciplinary processes, and failures to track employee performance and outcomes.

Human resource management is a critical part of delivering quality healthcare. HR is responsible for recruiting and retaining highly qualified professionals, and the current status quo within VHA's HR offices cannot continue.

H.R. 5864, the VA HELP Act will ensure that the VA addresses deficiencies within its Human Resources departments by giving it the ability to compare the performance of departments across VHA and measure their success.

This straightforward legislation instructs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish qualifications for Human Resources positions within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). It also requires the VA to establish standardized performance metrics for Human Resources positions. These commonsense reforms will ensure that the Human Resources departments at VAMCs are operating on a uniform standard, and that it is clear who qualifies to hold such an important position.

In closing, I would like to thank Representative Sinema for helping to introduce the legislation and would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Brownley, for allowing me to testify before the Subcommittee. I hope that we can work together on H.R. 5864 to ensure that our nation's veterans are being provided the best possible care from VA employees.