

I'm honored to again introduce legislation to hold bad actors at the Department of Veterans Affairs accountable for misconduct, including sexual harassment. My bill, H.R. 3185, the *Personnel Integrity in Veterans Affairs Act*, would prohibit VA employees from evading accountability by simply resigning, retiring or transferring to avoid an investigation.

As a 26-year Navy veteran, former member of this Committee and current member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, I understand the importance of a strong and effective VA. That strength depends on holding every employee to the highest standards. Unfortunately, reports dating back a decade, along with recent whistleblower complaints, have exposed persistent issues with accountability and transparency within the Department.

In 2016, this Committee found that 96 percent of reviewed VA settlements failed to include proposed disciplinary actions in an employee's permanent record. More recently, in 2023, a whistleblower testified that senior VA leaders engaged in misconduct—including sexual harassment—without facing accountability.

This is deeply troubling and undermines the integrity of the Department. A change in culture is long overdue. My bill is needed to ensure investigations are completed, even if an employee departs before the process is complete. It also requires a permanent record of such investigations be included in the employee's official personnel file.

Misconduct has no place in the federal government, especially not within the Department of Veterans Affairs. Our veterans deserve a VA that enforces accountability at every level. There must be no loophole that allows individuals to avoid consequences.

This Committee passed the bill by voice vote last year. I again ask you to support this important measure to strengthen the VA. I was pleased to receive technical support from the VA on this bill, as they welcome the opportunity to strengthen their employee process as well. I thank the Committee for holding this hearing and look forward to working together to ensure the Department of Veterans Affairs serves our veterans with the excellence and accountability they deserve.