

**STATEMENT OF
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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Michaud, Members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs: I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) work to provide Congress with needed information.

VA and Congress share the same goal: to do everything we can to improve the healthcare, benefits and other services delivered to our Nation's Veterans, their families, and Survivors earned through service. That is what guides our work at VA throughout the country.

I want to acknowledge the dedicated professionals that work at VA. While more work remains, remarkable progress has been made in implementing Secretary Shinseki's top priorities: improving Veteran access to VA benefits and services, eliminating the claims backlog in 2015, and ending Veteran homelessness in 2015. As a Veteran who cares deeply about the welfare of Veterans and their families, I also want to express my gratitude for the passion, commitment and sustained support Congress continues to provide, both in resources and legislative authorities, for these critical initiatives.

Everything we do at VA is built on a foundation of trust. We earn the trust of Veterans as we deliver, each day, on our promise to care for those "who shall have borne the battle." We also have to continue to earn the trust of the American people and their elected representatives. They provide the resources that allow us to serve Veterans, and they must have confidence that VA is a good steward of those resources. Anything that erodes this trust does tangible harm to Veterans.

For the benefit of our Veterans, the status quo in our working relationship must change. VA employees work hard to provide the Committee with the information it needs to perform its legislative function. We can make the process work better. From my perspective, this is not a VA Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) issue. It is not a Veterans Health Administration or a Veterans Benefits Administration issue. It is a Department issue. That is why I am here. I am committed to working with the Committee in a collaborative and constructive manner to best serve our Veterans.

Since the last hearing on this subject in September 2013, the data show that, our on-time performance for delivering testimony and Questions for the Record has improved dramatically. In that time period, 100 percent of QFRs and approximately 96 percent of

written testimony were submitted on-time. Additionally, during the same time period, the Department has responded to over 1,000 requests for information from the Congress. We can do more to improve the on-time delivery of congressionally mandated reports and correspondence, and we are working aggressively in those areas.

It is important to note that VA is already providing vast amounts of information. In the first six months of this Fiscal Year VA has testified at 32 hearings, delivered 217 briefings, responded to 1,346 Requests for Information, responded to 213 pieces of executive correspondence, completed 143 requests for Technical Assistance on legislation, and answered 723 Questions for the Record. By any standard, this is a remarkable volume of information.

The level of care and services VA provides to Veterans every day has an impact on every Member of Congress because every Member represents Veterans in their district. Most Members of Congress also represent districts that have VA facilities that provide and maintain healthcare, benefits, and cemeteries. For that reason, VA receives a large number of requests from Congress. In FY 2013 and the first five months of FY 2014, VA Central Office responded to tens of thousands of Congressional requests for information.

Moving forward, I want to ensure that VA and this committee are working together in a positive, constructive, and collaborative manner. Our Veterans expect that we expend our time and energy moving forward. That will require regular and open two way communication to insure that we are putting our resources toward those efforts that best support appropriate congressional oversight and lead to improved care and services for our Veterans.

To reiterate, VA and Congress share the same goal: to do everything we can to improve the healthcare, benefits and other services delivered to our Nation's Veterans, their families, and Survivors. We respect the Congress' important oversight role and look forward to working collaboratively and cooperatively together.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify and am prepared to answer any questions you may have.