

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
DEPARTMENT OF AFFAIRS (VA)
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
"IMPROVING THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EFFECTIVENESS:
RESPONDING TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERSIGHT AGENCIES"**

May 22, 2019

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) appreciates the work of the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) to help the Department make improvements to programs throughout our enterprise that facilitate more effective and efficient services and benefits to our Nation's Veterans. VA has a strong collaborative relationship with both GAO and OIG. VA treats all recommendations seriously and strives to implement the concurred upon recommendations in a timely manner.

The Department would have liked to participate in this hearing; unfortunately, to do so would have been contrary to the longstanding practice of prior Administrations and this Administration by allowing Executive Branch officials to testify at a Congressional hearing on a panel that includes non-Executive Branch witnesses.

According to GAO, VA leads the Federal government with a 90 percent recommendation implementation rate. In March 2019, GAO issued its biennial high-risk report in which GAO added VA Acquisition Management as a high-risk area. This is the third high-risk area for VA—Managing Risks and Improving VA Health Care was added in 2015, and Improving and Modernizing Federal Disability Programs was added in 2003. The Department is committed to implementing all concurred upon GAO recommendations and moving off of GAO's high-risk list. In November, Secretary Wilkie met with the Comptroller General to discuss the high-risk report areas and high priority recommendations. During that meeting, Secretary Wilkie assured the Comptroller General that the Department appreciates GAO's work and that VA is working on taking corrective action on all open GAO recommendations.

With regard to the GAO high priority recommendations, in 2018, GAO identified 26 priority recommendations. Since that time, VA implemented 5 of the 26 open priority recommendations and GAO closed 1 priority recommendation on a program that recently underwent significant statutory changes. When GAO issued its March 2019 priority open recommendations report, VA had 20 open priority recommendations and GAO added 10 new priority recommendations bringing the total to 30 priority recommendations. VA provides GAO with updates on all open priority recommendations. Within the Department, several initiatives are underway to more

directly focus administrations and staff offices on the development of milestones and metrics and demonstrated progress on implementing GAO recommendations. VA leaders and staff meet periodically with GAO to discuss VA's efforts to implement action plans related to open recommendations and receive feedback from GAO on the progress being made.

The VA OIG is the independent oversight entity within VA that conducts reviews and recommends improvements that are designed to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness throughout VA programs and operations. The VA OIG issues hundreds of reports and recommendations each year involving programs throughout the VA enterprise. During the last 12 months, OIG issued 128 reports with 715 recommendations on VA programs and operations. The administrations and staff offices work with OIG inspectors and investigators to come to agreed upon corrective action plans to resolve audit recommendations. The Department strives to complete OIG recommendations with the same urgency as all oversight recommendations.

In June 2017, the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act was enacted. The Act, among other things, statutorily established the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection (OAWP) and codified its establishment under section 323 of title 38 of the United States Code (U.S.C.). As prescribed by Congress under 38 U.S.C. § 323(c)(1)(F), one of OAWP's core functions is to record, track, review, and confirm "implementation of recommendations from audits and investigations carried out by [VA OIG], the Medical Inspector of the Department, the Special Counsel, and the Comptroller General of the United States, including the imposition of disciplinary actions and other corrective actions contained in such recommendations." The Department is currently working on establishing processes to create this functionality within OAWP which would enhance oversight on the implementation of recommendations issued by, among other entities, GAO and VA OIG. The Department looks forward to updating the Committee on its implementation.

Conclusion

Our mission is to serve our Veterans. We are committed to taking corrective action on all oversight recommendations to ensure that VA is the most efficient and effective organization possible for our Veterans. Your continued support is essential to providing the best services and benefits for Veterans and their families.