

**STATEMENT OF
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ASSISTANT SECRETARY
OFFICE OF OPERATIONS, SECURITY, AND PREPAREDNESS (OSP)
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
FAILURE AT THE FRONT GATE: EXAMINING VA POLICE AND SECURITY
DEFICIENCIES
JUNE 24, 2026**

Chairwoman Kiggans, Ranking Member Ramirez, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to provide an overview of the VA Police force and our plan to improve how it serves and protects Veterans, families, caregivers, survivors, visitors, and VA employees. I am accompanied by Mark Engelbaum, Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration; Patrick Hernandez, Director of Security and Law Enforcement; and Brett Simms, Executive Director, Office of Asset Enterprise Management.

VA Police officers proudly provide security and Federal law enforcement services for the largest integrated health care system in the country. However, when the second Trump Administration took office in 2025, we found a fractured force that was plagued with problems that had been highlighted for years by VA's Office of Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

Here are some of the most serious issues we faced:

For years, the VA Police were managed by individual VA medical facilities and reported to medical center personnel instead of senior law enforcement professionals. Without a unified chain of command, VA Police suffered from inconsistent policing

standards and a lack of discipline and accountability. In some VA facilities, police were being used for non-police missions, including serving as valets to park cars. This system increased safety risks for everyone at VA.

This basic structural problem also made it very difficult to retain and promote seasoned officers, because VA Police officers only reported to the facility and were not part of a larger law enforcement structure that could support their advancement. As a result, VA lost many senior officers to other law enforcement agencies.

This is a complex issue, but here is what happened:

- VA Police positions were not properly classified in accordance with Federal standards.
- The previous Administration's scattershot approach to addressing this problem threatened to lower the grades and pay of many VA police officers.
- The threat of lower grades and less pay created an even deeper crisis for the force, as it became far less competitive compared to what other law enforcement agencies could offer.

President Donald J. Trump charged Secretary Douglas A. Collins with putting Veterans first, and Secretary Collins is moving out aggressively to do so. Here is what we have done to fix these issues:

We recognized in 2025 that VA Police need a unified chain of command. We are completing a reorganization that gives the VA's Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness its own Assistant Secretary. This means at VA, we finally have law enforcement leaders in charge of VA Police. As a result:

- We can enforce standards and discipline across all facilities.
- We can improve training and professional development across the agency.
- VA Police have a direct line to the VA secretary to discuss emerging issues.
- We can create stability and opportunities for a long-term career at the VA for our police officers.

We also fixed the issues related to VA Police job classifications, including:

- We conducted a detailed review of duties and responsibilities in accordance with current classification standards and determined that we could classify VA police officers at higher pay grades based on the complex work they do.
- Instead of reducing grades and pay, we are giving our officers the pay and rank they deserve and have put in place a model that allows for expanded career progression for VA police.
- This will lead to better recruitment, retention and more upward mobility among VA police, a more stable force overall and safer VA facilities Department-wide.

These critical changes have put the VA police on much better footing to address emerging challenges, including those highlighted in a March 2026 GAO report that outlined a range of security issues at VA facilities. We believe our efforts to reform VA's police force will allow us to meet those challenges.

There is still more work to be done, however. That work includes addressing jurisdictional issues we have at a number of enhanced use lease (EUL) properties around the country. In short, there are legal questions regarding whether VA or local law enforcement has jurisdiction on EUL properties. VA is working to update its EUL agreements across the nation to address this issue. There is also an easy way Congress could help us fix this problem.

This would involve amending the definition of "Department property" in 38 U.S.C. § 901 to give VA the same law enforcement authority Congress already granted to other comparable Federal agencies.

I visited 14 VA facilities and police units in the short time I have been in this position. I have seen firsthand the improvements we need to make, but I can also tell you we have already made tremendous strides that are putting us on the right path.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss the importance of security to the VA system that millions of Veterans rely on for care and benefits. We look forward to your questions.

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