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## U.S. House of Representatives

### COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

335 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

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January 23, 2018

The Honorable David J. Shulkin, M.D.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

We write to you to express our deep concerns regarding the strength of the Human Resources (HR) Department at the Marion, Illinois VA Medical Center (VAMC). The Veterans' Affairs Committee's investigative work has uncovered numerous, systemic issues that plague VA health systems. A persistent root cause of issues like prolonged difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, failures to track and enforce training standards, and the inability to discipline misbehaving employees is an absence of strong HR leadership and staff.

The issues facing the Marion VAMC are of a similar nature. Staff consistently voice concerns about inconsistencies in pay scales and grade; a chronic confusion about processes for disciplining employees; and high employee turnover and vacancy rates. Furthermore, Committee investigators found that Marion fails to track employee no-show rates and disciplinary actions, despite the chronic recruitment and retention issues that face the medical center. The Committee knows conclusively that these issues persist, despite our and our staff's candid information sharing with you personally, as well as VAMC and VISN leadership.

Without a strong leader, the current status quo within Marion HR will continue to impact the organization's culture and productivity. However, the Committee found that Marion's long-time HR Chief has no college degree, raising concerns that his educational foundation is insufficient to carry out his role and responsibilities as the head of HR. We strongly encourage you to take the necessary steps to review and improve the HR department at the Marion VA and throughout the VA system.

We voice these concerns in a letter because we are sincerely invested in the well-being of both Marion's veterans and employees. This medical center is at a crossroads: Marion's dysfunctions

have been exposed for all to see, and subsequently the facility has received significant attention and support from the VISN, VA Central Office, and congressional stakeholders to improve operations and move forward. But bettering and maintaining the quality of services Marion provides requires that the medical center improve the culture of its workforce. This, in turn, necessitates an educated, competent, and respected HR Chief. Without such a leader in place, we fear Marion will continue to have issues recruiting and retaining a quality workforce.

Given these serious concerns, Committee staff will be in contact to schedule a briefing to discuss specific personnel actions that have taken place at the Marion VAMC since their investigation. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



**JACK BERGMAN**

Chairman

Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations



**MIKE BOST**

Chairman

Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and  
Memorial Affairs