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California's senators and representatives are demanding answers and accountability regarding the state's three Veterans Affairs regional offices -- all of which received scathing reviews last week for their slow and inaccurate handling of vets' disability claims.

Most of the state's congressional delegation, as well as Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, signed a letter sent Thursday to the Veterans Affairs secretary following a critical report by the VA inspector general last week about the Oakland, Los Angeles and San Diego regional offices, which handle all of the state's veteran disability claims.

"These reports show that the Los Angeles, Oakland and San Diego VAROs have significant deficiencies as a result of mismanagement and a lack of staff understanding of applicable rules and regulations," according to the letter to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. "As a result, the benefits claims of veterans in California take longer to process and experience more errors than veterans' claims in other states."

The letter asks for answers to these questions:

- What steps are being taken to ensure the offices address the inspector general recommendations, including how staff will be held accountable?
- What follow-up actions will be taken to ensure the California offices improve?
- Why is the Los Angeles office in "safe mode," allowing staff to not be held

In Oakland last month, the office had average delays of 320 days, the second worst backlog of the nation's benefits centers, according to the VA inspector general report. One claim had been pending for eight years. In addition, 39 percent of the 90 disability claims inspected in Oakland were incorrectly processed.

The other two California facilities were not much better. At the Los Angeles office, 80 percent of claims reviewed in that report were unnecessarily delayed, as were about half of those at the San Diego operation.

Also in Los Angeles, 97 percent of temporary total disability evaluations studied for the report were incorrectly processed. In San Diego, 77 percent were processed improperly, as were 53 percent of those in Oakland.

Ironically, that inaccuracy rate ranked Oakland as the eighth most accurate of the 44 VA facilities reviewed so far.

In evaluations of residual disabilities of traumatic brain injuries, the reports found about half of the evaluations were processed incorrectly in all three California facilities -- a higher rate than other regional offices across the country.

"I've heard time and again from veterans in California about the troubling delays they experienced while having their claims processed. These are truly heartbreaking stories, and this is not the way their service and sacrifice should be honored," said Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton, who previously wrote Shinseki to add the Oakland office to a group of 12 regional offices to receive updated technology. "I will not accept anything other than seeing the backlog of claims reduced and fewer mistakes made."