

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 22, 2013

The Honorable John Culberson, Chair
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, the Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Ranking
Member
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Bishop:

We are writing in regards to the excessive backlog of disability claims at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regional offices (ROs). As you know, the VA has set a goal of processing all disability claims within 125 days at a 98 percent accuracy level by 2015 and eliminating the claims backlog. We commend this effort, but the agency must be held accountable for its results.

The claims backlog continues to grow as many veterans struggle while waiting for a decision from the VA. According to a recent Government Accountability Office report the average length of time to process a claim rose from 161 days in fiscal year 2009 to 260 days in fiscal year 2012. This same report stated that the VA's backlog of claims defined as a claim that takes over 125 days to complete has tripled since September 2009. More alarming, the report also found that the VA does not have clear performance measures for the new initiatives it has in place that are intended to contribute to the reduction in claims.

There are legitimate reasons that have led to the increase in disability claims at ROs, including more veterans applying for benefits and the complexity of the cases. A House Appropriations Committee report accompanying H.R. 2025, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012, specifically highlighted concerns about the backlog in disability claims. Furthermore, despite increased funding, far too many VA ROs are not performing at high levels. We know staff at these offices care deeply for veterans and are committed to processing claims in an accurate and timely manner. Clearly defined plans of action and goals for these offices will benefit our nation's veterans and their families as the VA works to eliminate the claims backlog.

Our brave men and women made great sacrifices for our country and deserve timely decisions on their benefits. Therefore, as Congress works to address the VA's disability claims backlog, we urge your subcommittee to include the attached language request regarding increased oversight at VA ROs, and we appreciate your consideration of this important issue.

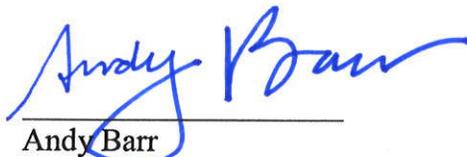
Legislative Language:

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) shall identify all of the regional offices under its jurisdiction with average days pending for disability claims in excess of 200 calendar days and report to Congress once a quarter on its actions to reduce the backlogs in these offices. In addition, the VA is directed to use all resources available to clear the backlogs at regional offices that exceed the 200 calendar day threshold. At the end of each fiscal quarter, the VA will have 30 days to produce a report to Congress that identifies the reasons behind the backlogs at the identified regional offices and the action it is taking to address the issue. Furthermore, the VA shall produce a one page handout once a fiscal year for all Congressional Districts located near regional offices where the average days pending for a disability claim is over 200 days. This handout should contain information about the claims backlog and what the VA is doing to solve the challenges at the regional offices in question, and shall be distributed to the veterans in the region. The VA Undersecretary for Benefits shall personally visit all regional offices mentioned in this section.

Sincerely,


Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress


Paul Cook
Member of Congress


Andy Barr
Member of Congress

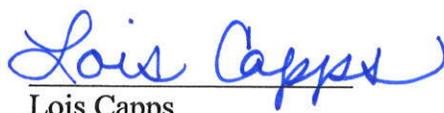

Tony Cárdenas
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Judy Chu
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Ami Bera
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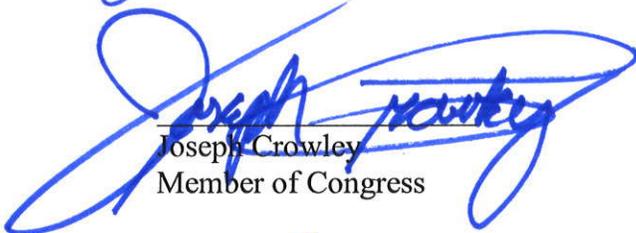

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Member of Congress


Lois Capps
Member of Congress


Gerry Connolly
Member of Congress

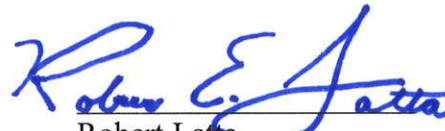

John Conyers
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Walter Jones
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Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress

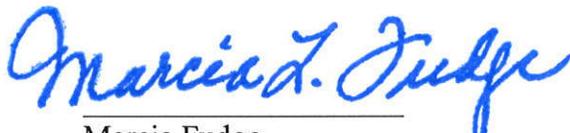

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress


Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress


Robert Latta
Member of Congress

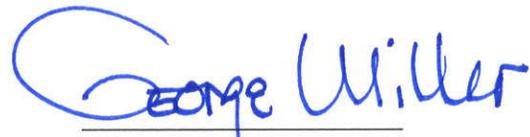

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

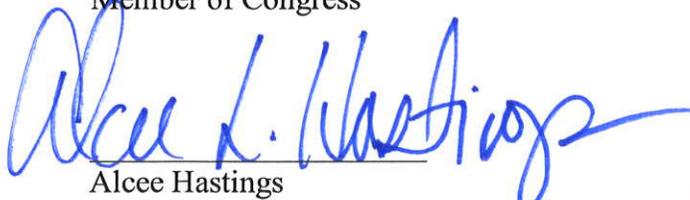

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Marcia Fudge
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Tulsi Gabbard
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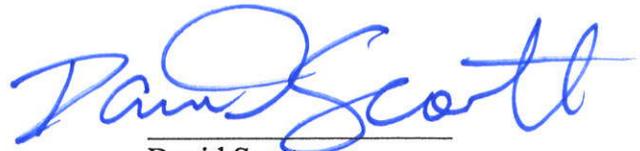

George Miller
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Member of Congress


Grace Napolitano
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Pete Olson
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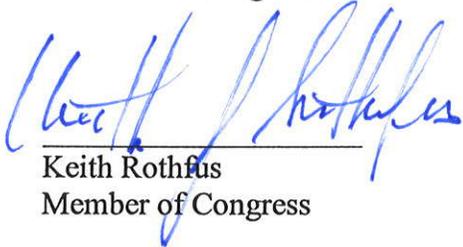
David Scott
Member of Congress



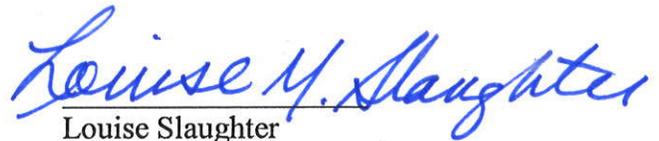
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Kyrsten Sinema
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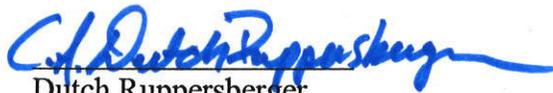
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Chris Van Hollen
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