



RICK SCOTT
GOVERNOR

May 13, 2015

Secretary Robert McDonald
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

Thank you for your letter on May 4, 2015 regarding our March 18, 2015 telephone conversation discussing the ongoing issues between Florida and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

With 1.5 million veterans that call Florida home, we are committed to being the most veteran-friendly state in the nation – and reports of deaths, neglect, poor conditions and a secret waiting list in federal VA hospitals in Florida are unacceptable. Transparency and accountability are critical to supporting our veterans. It is no secret that our veterans who have served with honor and distinction were not receiving the proper care they deserved, and when Florida offered support and assistance - our efforts were rebuffed.

This problem arose last spring when national media reports documented the poor treatment of veterans at federal hospitals in the Sunshine VISN, a federal region including Florida and other states. Reports said the treatment of veterans was so neglectful that veterans sustained injuries and tragically lost their lives. These issues were also made visible through the hard work of Florida Congressman Jeff Miller, who shed a light on the conditions plaguing federal VA facilities - and we are appreciative of Congressman Miller's efforts to protect our veterans and hold the federal government accountable.

We cannot allow our heroes to suffer at the hands of neglect and incompetence ever again. I appreciate your willingness to follow through on Florida's requests to provide our Agency for Health Care Administration with audit reports detailing facilities' activities and to take action on our requests for information.

We have said for some time that Veteran's Affairs was not taking our requests for information seriously, and your commitment demonstrates a fundamental shift from how the federal department previously operated. It is imperative, however, that the VA follow through on its commitments; no doubt greater transparency and accountability will benefit our veterans.

Thank you for your immediate attention to these matters and I look forward to your action on these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rick Scott".

Rick Scott
Governor



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

May 4, 2015

The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor of Florida
The Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor Scott:

I enjoyed our conversation of March 18, 2015, in which we discussed our mutual interest in ensuring that our nation's Veterans receive the best possible care. I am writing to follow up on your request for copies of survey reports issued by The Joint Commission (TJC) concerning its on-site inspections and accreditation of VA's medical facilities in the state of Florida, and VA's written responses to any adverse findings in those reports, including remedial or mitigating actions taken. VA would be pleased to provide future TJC reports along with VA responses regarding mitigation actions taken.

Since our telephone conversation, I learned that, in addition to the civil action filed in the U.S. District Court by the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) and two individual Veterans, ACHA submitted a written request at your direction on April 30, 2014, under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), for records relating to VA's risk management and quality assurance programs, as well as prior survey reports issued by TJC for each of the VISN 8 Network hospitals located in Florida. VA provided a Partial Initial Agency Decision on July 18, 2014, which released 74 documents in their entirety, totaling 1,308 pages, including the last two triennial TJC survey reports, dated 2010 and 2013, for each of the VISN 8 Network hospitals located in Florida. We expect to complete our response to this FOIA request very soon.

As you are aware, under FOIA, in order for VA to provide Florida officials future TJC survey reports and VA's responses, they will need to provide a separate, written request for those records in each survey year. Written requests for records under the FOIA should be sent to the following office:

Department of Veterans Affairs
VHA FOIA Office (10P2C1)/Information Access and Privacy Office
Health Information Governance/Office of Informatics and Analytics
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

During our conversation, you also requested VA points of contact if Florida officials have follow-up questions. For questions regarding TJC accreditation

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The Honorable Rick Scott

maintenance and remediation, please contact Dr. Carolyn Clancy, Interim Under Secretary for Health, at (202-461-0370). Questions regarding legal matters should be addressed to Leigh Bradley, VA General Counsel, at (202-461-4995). For questions regarding FOIA, please contact Timothy Graham, Director, VHA FOIA Office, at (215-823-4146).

Since our conversation was also about the litigation, I'm sending a copy of this letter to our attorney at the Department of Justice. We will see to it that she sends a copy to plaintiffs' counsel in the case.

As I mentioned in our conversation last month, we welcome the opportunity to be transparent and accountable with regard to VA health care delivery decisions and the operations of the VHA health care system in the State of Florida.

Thank you for your continued support of our nation's Veterans.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert A. McDonald".

Robert A. McDonald

Cc: Kyle R. Freeny