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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

KEITH B. ASHDOWN, STAFF DIRECTOR
GABRIELLE A. BATKIN, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

February 12, 2016

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is examining issues relating to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Tomah, Wisconsin (Tomah VAMC). I write with concern about the physical security of Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) and other small VA facilities surrounding the Tomah VAMC, elsewhere in Wisconsin, and around the country. I request your immediate attention to this serious issue.

My staff recently met with representatives of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 0007 to discuss the Tomah VAMC.¹ During this meeting, the AFGE representatives alerted my staff to a serious issue involving the physical security of CBOCs in Wisconsin. They described security threats—including threats of shootings—that have been received by these facilities. Despite these threats, the CBOCs apparently do not have internal doors that lock, card-swipe technology, or bullet proof glass. The AFGE representatives also stated that the distance of the CBOCs from the Tomah VAMC makes it virtually impossible for VA police to respond to an emergency, and that the VA's agreement with local law-enforcement does not effectively alert CBOC personnel about ongoing emergencies in the community.

While the Tomah VAMC has security features to protect veterans and VA employees in the case of an emergency, it appears that some of the VA's smaller, community-oriented facilities in Wisconsin may be lacking. It is critical that the VA do everything possible to ensure the physical safety of its employees and the veterans who receive care. I ask that you take appropriate steps to ensure that CBOCs and other small VA facilities have adequate physical safety features in place. To ensure that the VA is fulfilling its responsibility to our veterans and VA employees, I ask that your staff provide a briefing to my staff by February 26, 2016, about the work the VA is doing to remedy this serious issue.

¹ Meeting with between Comm. staff and AFGE staff (Feb. 10, 2016).

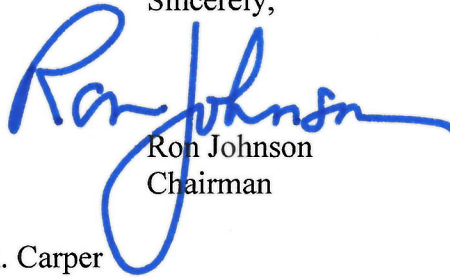
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Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If you have any questions, please ask your staff to contact Kyle Brosnan or Brian Downey at 202-224-4751.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "R" and a long, sweeping tail.

Ron Johnson
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member