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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

September 8, 2016

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The Honorable Michael J. Missal  
Inspector General  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
801 I Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Inspector General Missal:

I write with an urgent request that the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (VA OIG) open an independent inquiry into a potentially serious issue at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Tomah, Wisconsin (Tomah VAMC). I appreciate your prompt attention to this request.

In late August 2016, my staff received a message from a whistleblower at the Tomah VAMC. The whistleblower expressed concern about the ability of the Tomah VAMC's Mental Health Clinic to provide safe and timely care to veterans. According to the whistleblower, the Mental Health Clinic suffers from a shortage of providers despite an increase in veterans seeking treatment at the clinic. The whistleblower said that if this situation is not corrected quickly, "another disaster" could occur at the facility. The whistleblower noted that he had contacted the VA OIG on August 8, 2016.

Shortly after the whistleblower contacted my office, my staff contacted your staff to alert you to this serious issue. Your staff informed my staff that the VA OIG was aware of this concern and planned to refer the complaint to the VA's regional office, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN 12). Your staff indicated that they would provide VISN 12 with 60 days to respond to the matter.

I believe this complaint should be examined by the VA OIG and I therefore request that you open an independent inquiry regarding the Tomah VAMC Mental Health Clinic. An independent inquiry is especially critical given the recent news about a 29 year-old Army veteran, Brian Rossell, who allegedly sought treatment from the clinic but was turned away.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Rossell is currently missing.<sup>2</sup> According to his mother, Mr. Rossell suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Although many details about Mr. Rossell's care are unknown at this time, this news should be another urgent call to address the issues at the Tomah VAMC's Mental Health Clinic.

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<sup>1</sup> See Alexandra Burnley, *Mother of missing Wausau veteran says Tomah VA denied him help*, WAOW.com, Sept. 7, 2016. <http://www.waow.com/story/33043650/2016/09/07/mother-of-missing-wausau-veteran-says-tomah-va-denied-him-help>.

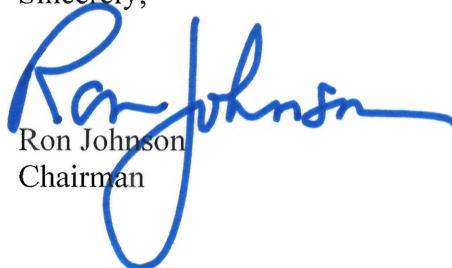
<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

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I hope that you will agree to open an independent inquiry into the Tomah VAMC's Mental Health Clinic. If you have any questions about this request, please ask your staff to contact Brian Downey of my staff at (202) 224-4751. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson  
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
Ranking Member

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs