

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 7, 2017

The Honorable Dr. David Shulkin
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
801 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin:

We are writing in follow up to a recent story in The Oregonian, highlighting the case of Aaron Olivas of Salem, OR, who was removed from the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) managed by the VA Portland Health Care System. The story raises serious concerns with the management of the program at the local level. It also serves to highlight how veterans are being treated in the VISN 20 service area, as other veterans have begun to step forward with similar experiences with PCAFC.

Specifically, the article claims that the VA Portland Health Care System has been removing service connected veterans from PCAFC at a rate of 50%, a rate significantly higher than the national rate of 16%. The story also highlights that veterans being removed from the program are not given a medical explanation nor are they given an opportunity to have their case reviewed by an independent third party. The "appeals" process seems to be done by the very system making the initial determination, and it is reported that not a single appealed case in the Portland VA HCS has been reversed. To that end, we are asking for responses to the questions listed on the attached enclosure.

Until the VA can assure us that veterans from the Portland VA Health Care System's PCAFC are being treated fairly and not held to a different standard than veterans in other states, we are asking that you immediately stop removals in Portland's jurisdiction. We thank you for your attention to these questions and our concerns.

Sincerely,



KURT SCHRADER
Member of Congress



RON WYDEN
U.S. Senator



JEFFREY MERKLEY
U.S. Senator



SUZANNE BONAMICI
Member of Congress



EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress



PETER DeFAZIO
Member of Congress

Oregon's Congressional Delegation Questions about the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) managed by the VA Portland Health Care System

PCAFC Communication

- How is the veteran and her/his caregiver informed about the PCAFC program upon entry into the program? For example, are they informed about the potentially temporary nature of the program, with a goal of restoring the veteran's ability to care for herself/himself, so the veteran can avoid financial commitments that will be at risk if the veteran is removed from the program?
- Are there milestones and/or conditions discussed as the veteran moves through the program, as part of a dialogue about progression toward "graduating" from the program?
- When the VA Portland Health Care System determines that a veteran is no longer eligible for PCAFC, what is being done to ensure that the veteran's spouse has ample time to supplement their income?

PCAFC Process

- What is the current rate of removal from the PCAFC at the VA Portland Health Care System compared to the national average? To other facilities within VISN 20? What is the rate of removal at VISN 20 compared to other VISN's?
 - If the rate of removal is higher at the VA Portland Health Care System and VISN 20, why?
 - What is the rate of removal for facilities using Veteran Eligibility Assessment Teams compared to facilities that are not using this model?
 - How is it determined if a veteran will need a long-term caregiver? How does this differ from other VISNs?
 - When a veteran appeals her/his removal from the PCAFC, what process is being used?
 - How many veterans have filed appeals with VISN 20 regarding removal from the PCAFC, and how many appeals have been overturned?
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