

To: Robert McDonald
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

From: Jared Kinnaman



Mr. McDonald,

My first year of employment at the Phoenix VAMC Medical Center has evoked mixed emotions regarding the care and professionalism the Department of Veterans Affairs provides to both our veterans as well as employees. I am a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, a Service Connected Marine Corps Combat Veteran and a Whistleblower. In all three of these roles it pains me to sit back and watch my fellow brothers and sisters suffer under your leadership. I, along with several other whistleblowers have brought to the attention of leadership on numerous occasions factual and undeniable evidence that your office has yet to resolve. Instead we have received countless forms of harassment, defamation, and threats while working and receiving care at this medical facility.

It is painfully obvious that your office openly and knowingly allow retaliation against whistleblowers and Veterans employees. The Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2012 was additionally redirected by you recently. You stated that whistleblowers will be protected within the Department of Veterans Affairs. This is clearly not happening and nothing is being done to employees and/or supervisors who perpetrate whistleblower retaliation. Why is that?

Allowing coworkers and management to harass and intimidate whistleblowers is not only an immoral act, it is unethical and an abuse of power. Whistleblowers at the Phoenix VAMC have had “gag” orders illegally placed on them, their character assassinated, offices illegally searched after the whistleblower leaves at the end of their tour of duty. It also seems to be accepted that other employees are readily allowed to probe through our personal medical records that are protected by the Privacy Act of 1974 and HIPAA 1997.

Sadly the list of these incidences continues unabated without intervention from you or your subordinates who are tasked to protect us. This is something that you directly promised. The VA cannot retaliate against an employee who exercises his or her rights under any Federal anti-discrimination or whistleblower protection laws. Under existing laws, the VA retains the right to discipline a manager or supervisor who has engaged in discriminatory or retaliatory conduct, up to and including removal. The impact of all this, has caused the Phoenix VA

Medical Center and countless other facilities under your direct control to become a very volatile and grossly unsafe environment for Veteran patients to receive care as well as employees currently working in duress.

The Joint Commission issued a Sentinel Event issue 40, July 9th 2008 which discusses behaviors that undermine a culture of safety. Directly quoted from their issue states “Intimidating and disruptive behaviors include overt actions such as verbal outbursts and physical threats, as well as passive activities such as refusing to perform assigned tasks or quietly exhibiting uncooperative attitudes during routine activities. Intimidating and disruptive behaviors are often manifested by health care professionals in positions of power. Such behaviors include reluctance or refusal to answer questions, return phone calls or pages; condescending language or voice intonation; and impatience with questions. Overt and passive behaviors undermine team effectiveness and can compromise the safety of patients. All intimidating and disruptive behaviors are unprofessional and should not be tolerated.” It continues and talks about root causes and contributing factors it states “There is a history of tolerance and indifference to intimidating and disruptive behaviors in health care. Organizations that fail to address unprofessional behavior through formal systems are indirectly promoting it.”

When you spoke about reprimanding and firing of employees on or around February, 2015. You stated “Nine hundred people have been fired since I became secretary....We’ve got 60 people that we fired who have manipulated wait times. We’ve got about 100 senior leaders who are under investigation now whose performance reviews have been deferred until we get feedback from the IG and Department of Justice. So we’re holding people accountable.” My question to you are any of these numbers of employees true? Who exactly are you holding accountable? The repeated misstatements and lack of transparency that you demonstrate on a regular basis only further affirm that you are resistant to change.

Your administration’s inability to meet with Whistleblowers who are mostly frontline employees is an opportunity that you have passed up in the last few months. The meeting that you had with whistleblower Brandon Coleman was the only invitation extended when there were two other whistleblowers at this facility ready to speak with you trying to tell you what has happened to us as well and suggest improvements to help bring change. This would have been a great opportunity to extend an offer to collaborate with you and your staff to improve the Department of Veterans Affairs which directly affects patient care.

Along with the reasons listed above and the current level of ineffective leadership, lack of ability to maintain (moral, ethical, legal, professional) boundaries, and countless misspoken statements and lies has directly and negatively influenced veteran patient care. I currently include you in the countless lists of leadership failures that have come through the VA recently. At this time I am calling for your resignation as the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs effective immediately. We need strong steady leadership that is moral, ethical, and honest to

assist frontline employees in fixing the Department of Veterans Affairs and that is currently not happening under your tutelage.

Sincerely,

Jared Kinnaman