

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 18, 2025

Secretary Douglas A. Collins  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins,

On February 13, 2025, you filmed and released a video from your office at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) informing the American people that, despite what they may have heard in the news, “the reality is, veterans benefits aren’t getting cut.”<sup>1</sup> I am writing to you today with grave concern because, despite your pledge to not cut benefits, recent changes and plans at the VA suggest exactly the opposite.

The government spending package recently advanced through the House and Senate, a partisan and flawed measure which I voted against, slashes the \$22.8 billion Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF) from VA’s budget.<sup>2</sup> The TEF is a fund that provides critical benefits for former service members who, during their valiant service, were exposed to life-threatening toxic substances like Agent Orange, burn pits, and contaminated water sources. TEF funding is designed to address five activities: health care, processing disability claims, medical research, modernizing information technology systems through which benefits are administered and received, and other services related to the administration of health services.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, according to an internal memorandum that your Chief of Staff, Christopher Syrek, circulated on March 4, 2025, the Veterans Affairs Department is planning to slash more than 83,000 individuals from its workforce in an effort that he said is sweeping and will spare no part of the department, setting a goal of returning VA staffing levels to the lowest number since 2019.<sup>4</sup>

Reports indicate that the Trump Administration, working closely with ‘DOGE’, has established an April 14th deadline for federal agencies to transmit further plans that are expected to include a significantly diminished organizational structure and the shuttering of public facing offices across the country.<sup>5</sup> Illinois is home to more than 550,000 veterans<sup>6</sup>, more than half of whom are enrolled in Illinois’ Veterans Affairs healthcare system. I refuse to sit idly as the benefits and services that they earned by bravely serving our nation are stripped away under the guise of ‘efficiency’ and ‘cost savings’ that Elon Musk and DOGE purport to have identified.

I formally request that you release the plans that you and your aides are developing for the Office of Management & Budget and make public any plans for additional cuts that will deny veterans the care

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Secretary Doug Collins addresses Veterans’ benefits in new video, [2025](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Hill, Burn pit fund for veterans on chopping block in GOP spending bill, [2025](#)

<sup>3</sup> Congressional Budget Office, Toxic Exposures Fund, [2025](#)

<sup>4</sup> The Hill, VA plans to lay off as many as 83,000 employees this year, [2025](#)

<sup>5</sup> Government Executive, Agencies to deliver large-scale RIF plans in two weeks, [2025](#)

<sup>6</sup> WiseVoter, Veteran Population by State, [2025](#)

they deserve.

Specifically, I request that your office release information regarding the following questions:

1. What is the impact of the cuts already implemented and additional planned cuts on the administration of veterans benefits? Please include information specific to the changes in the VA workforce as it relates to how care is administered, such as the effects on skilled nursing care that veterans depend on.
2. Illinois is investing significantly in Veterans' Homes programs that support aging and disabled veterans. How will your cuts affect the funding that supports these facilities?
3. More than one in four VA employees are veterans. Given your stated plans to make severe cuts to VA's workforce, what protections will these former service members be afforded when your department fires them?

Due to the urgent nature of this matter, I request a response to this inquiry by April 1, 2025.

Sincerely,



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Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress