Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 20, 2015

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

Dear Secretary McDonald,

Over the past year, Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have fostered a healthier, stronger relationship by working together to tackle issues that prevented our veterans from receiving the healthcare they have earned and were promised by the nation they defended. Through bipartisan congressional action such as the *Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014*, and under your guidance, the VA has begun to make tremendous progress in providing veterans access to services provided by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and holding VHA officials accountable. It is in this same spirit of commitment and cooperation that we ask for your assistance in changing VA policy regarding constituent advocate access to the veterans' electronic claims files - CITRIX, MAP-D, SHARE, VBMS, VACOLS, and Virtual VA.

As the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) continues to tackle the enormous claims backlog, we ask that you permit certified, congressional constituent advocates to have read-only access to view the claims status via the electronic claims files. Only VA staff and certified Veterans Service Officers currently have permission to access these files. In order for our office to provide adequate assistance to our veterans, we require regular updates on the status of their claim. Under current policy, advocates must contact regional offices to obtain this information.

When advocates have to play the role of middle man, it often results in delayed responses, adding to the frustrations of veterans who have already had to endure excessive wait times for the VA's decision regarding their claim. The necessity of contacting regional offices also interferes with the ability of the VA to best utilize its personnel to reduce the claims backlog and make decisions in a more timely fashion. Permitting read-only access will reduce the volume of calls to regional office by congressional offices and allow VA staff to do their jobs in an expeditious manner. Together, our offices and the VA can eliminate congressional requests that often detract from the VA's core mission – helping veterans.

While we believe it is vital to allow congressional constituent advocates to have read-only access to veterans claims statuses, we also believe it is equally vital that the security and privacy of veterans' information be protected. We fully believe all advocates should undergo the same training as VSOs and the costs associated with the training should be absorbed by the congressional office seeking read-only access. Additionally, congressional offices operate on

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secure networks, similar to what VSOs currently operate on and constituent advocates must already obtain a privacy release form prior to opening a case on the behalf of the veteran.

Under your leadership, the nation has witnessed marked improvement in the lives of the thousands of veterans the VA provides services for. We sincerely hope you will strongly consider our request and work with Congress to continue to improve veterans' services and eliminate the claims backlog. If you have any follow-up questions, concerns, or comments, please feel free to contact our offices directly. Thank you for your service, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Ted S. Yoho, DVM
Member of Congress

Patrick E. Murphy
Member of Congress

Kyrsten Sinema
Member of Congress

Randy Weber
Member of Congress

Richard Nugent
Member of Congress

Alan Grayson
Member of Congress

Walter Jones, Jr.
Member of Congress

Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress

Lynn Westmoreland
Member of Congress

Gwen Graham
Member of Congress

Steve King
Member of Congress

Louie Gohmert
Member of Congress

Ron DeSantis
Member of Congress

Ted Poe
Member of Congress

Phil Roe, M.D.
Member of Congress

Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress

David Rouzer
Member of Congress

Tom Rice
Member of Congress

Keith Rothfus
Member of Congress

Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress

Marsha Blackburn
Member of Congress

Elizabeth Esty
Member of Congress

Mark Amodei
Member of Congress

Matt Cartwright
Member of Congress

Carlos Curbelo
Member of Congress

Matt Salmon
Member of Congress

Brad Ashford
Member of Congress

Andy Barr
Member of Congress

Ken Buck
Member of Congress

Lou Barletta
Member of Congress

Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress

Thomas Massie
Member of Congress

Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

Bobby Rush
Member of Congress

Patrick Meehan
Member of Congress

Doug Collins
Member of Congress

Brian Babin, D.D.S.
Member of Congress

Glenn 'GT' Thompson
Member of Congress

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

Ami Bera
Member of Congress

Pete Visclosky
Member of Congress

Bill Flores
Member of Congress

Gregg Harper
Member of Congress

Joseph Pitts
Member of Congress

John Duncan
Member of Congress

Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

David Joyce
Member of Congress

K. Michael Conaway
Member of Congress

Chris Collins
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

Kevin Cramer
Member of Congress

Dr. Joe Heck
Member of Congress

Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress

Joe Wilson
Member of Congress

Collin C. Peterson
Member of Congress

John Kline
Member of Congress

Brad R. Wenstrup
Member of Congress

Lee Zeldin
Member of Congress

Mike Coffman
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress