

Durbin takes concerns about wait times at Hines to VA secretary during meeting in Washington

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Senator also offers support in VA's search for new permanent director at Hines VA Hospital



WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today pressed the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Robert McDonald, to explain the Department's progress in implementing corrective actions at Hines VA Hospital to address concerns

over wait times and the handling of whistleblower allegations. Durbin also spoke with McDonald about the need to for strong leadership at Hines which has not had a permanent Director since 2014.

“I told Secretary McDonald today that measures to ensure quality, timely care for veterans at Hines VA Hospital must be implemented more quickly,” said Durbin. “The best way to put an end to the controversy surrounding Hines is to finish carrying out the Inspector General recommendations and make certain that the appropriate whistleblower protections are in place so that future allegations can be fully investigated without delay. Secretary McDonald agreed to keep my office closely informed of the VA’s efforts going forward.”

Durbin requested today’s meeting after reviewing an independent, U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) report detailing serious deficiencies with the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigation into whistleblower allegations of wait times and delays in veterans’ access to mental health care at Hines VA Hospital. The OSC found that the OIG investigation did not include any analysis of actual wait times, assessment of the impact of such delays on patient mental health care, recommendations for corrective action, nor accountability among Hines VA Hospital management and leadership.

After writing to share concerns regarding allegations of improper and delayed care at Hines VA Hospital with the VA in 2013, Durbin and U.S. Representative Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) wrote to Secretary McDonald again in November 2015 to request an update on the implementation of recommendations to improve the quality of cardiovascular care at the facility. In addition to information about specific quality improvement measures, Durbin and Duckworth also inquired about the OSC report that was released late last week specific to wait times and the OIG.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General does not currently have a permanent Inspector General. President Obama nominated Michael Missal to serve as the VA Inspector General in October 2015, and his nomination was approved by both the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs in January. His nomination has yet to be considered for a vote on the Senate Floor.