



Durbin, Duckworth to Rauner: We need more than vague assurances that next steps are coming at IVH Quincy

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today once again urgently requested Governor Bruce Rauner’s detailed plan of action for ensuring the safety of residents, family, and staff at the Illinois Veterans’ Home (IVH) Quincy. They also pressed Rauner’s Administration to accept the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) offer of technical assistance—including a site visit to IVH Quincy—in tandem with ongoing VA financial support as well as expert assistance that has been provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) recently confirmed four additional cases of Legionnaires’ disease among residents of IVH Quincy—bringing the total number of confirmed legionellosis cases at IVH Quincy to 67 since 2015. According to the CDC, it is rare and worrisome that cases of Legionnaires’ disease are being found at this time of year, when the weather trends colder.

“While recent reports indicate you are considering options—from replacing piping to constructing new buildings on campus—we still do not yet have a detailed plan of action for ensuring the safety of residents, family, and staff at the facility going forward. Once again, we urge you to finalize such a plan without delay,” the members wrote in a letter to Gov. Rauner. “We hope you will uphold your responsibility as Governor and finally provide leadership on this crisis that has tragically resulted in the deaths of 13 residents at IVH Quincy over the past three years. Our veterans, their families, and the excellent staff there deserve nothing less.”

Full text of the letter is below:

March 7, 2018

Dear Governor Rauner:

We write today in light of yet another four cases of Legionnaires' disease confirmed at the Illinois Veterans' Home (IVH) Quincy and recent troubling reports that your Administration was more concerned with shaping coverage of the recurring Legionnaires' disease outbreaks at the IVH Quincy as opposed to ensuring appropriate, timely, and comprehensive health care and solutions to mitigate and prevent these outbreaks from recurring. While recent reports indicate you are considering options—from replacing piping to constructing new buildings on campus—we still do not yet have a detailed plan of action for ensuring the safety of residents, family, and staff at the facility going forward. Once again, we urge you to finalize such a plan without delay.

As you know, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) recently confirmed four additional cases of Legionnaires' disease among residents of IVH Quincy—bringing the total number of confirmed legionellosis cases at IVH Quincy to 67 since 2015. While we appreciate the disclosure of these cases in a more timely manner compared to previous instances of outbreaks, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted in a February 18, 2018, letter to Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA) Director Erica Jeffries that “four cases in February is notable from the epidemiologic viewpoint.” As Legionnaires' disease cases are typically diagnosed in warmer months, the fact that these four cases were confirmed at IVH Quincy in February is extremely disturbing. It is also indefensible that that three of the four latest Legionnaires' disease cases can once again be traced back to the Elmore Infirmary, considering that a number of recommendations have been made over the years to implement improvements and renovations in that building. Further troubling is the fact that your Administration has apparently ignored potential formal proposals commissioned by the Capital Development Board that date back as far as 2016. If adopted, these measures could have potentially prevented further outbreaks.

On March 1, 2018, members of the National Infectious Diseases Service at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) communicated with IDVA Director Jeffries. They offered additional technical assistance in the efforts to mitigate and prevent Legionnaires' disease outbreaks at IVH Quincy, in addition to the ongoing substantial financial assistance provided by the VA. We urge your Administration to accept the VA's offer of expert assistance—to include a site visit to IVH Quincy—in tandem with ongoing expert assistance that has been provided by the CDC.

Vague assurances that next steps are forthcoming “in the near future” are quite simply inexcusable, particularly as it took you three years before finally appointing an advisor to coordinate and oversee efforts for improvements at IVH Quincy. Moreover, claims that a final plan of action to make improvements at IVH Quincy will be presented to the Illinois General Assembly as late as May and that construction of new buildings on

campus could take up to five years are insufficient given how long your Administration has already delayed in addressing this public health crisis.

We hope you will uphold your responsibility as Governor and finally provide leadership on this crisis that has tragically resulted in the deaths of 13 residents at IVH Quincy over the past three years. Our veterans, their families, and the excellent staff there deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,