

Duckworth Joins Colleagues to Call for Investigation into VA's Handling of Sexual Assault Report at DC VA Medical Center

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– Combat Veteran and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and four of their Democratic colleagues in demanding an investigation into the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) handling of a sexual assault reported by a Veteran at the Washington, D.C. VA Medical Center (DC VAMC). The letter follows recent reports alleging that VA officials, led by Secretary Robert Wilkie, actively sought to discredit a Veteran who reported being assaulted and mischaracterized the initial VA Inspector General (VA IG) investigation of the reported assault. Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) also signed onto the letter

“Secretary Wilkie’s decision to cast doubt, paint the individual as dishonest, and discredit her traumatic experience demonstrates VA’s continued inability to ensure women Veterans are welcomed and supported by the country they have served,” wrote the senators. **“Furthermore, this type of toxic leadership undermines the**

hardworking, dedicated professional staff at VA, and makes it less likely that women Veterans—the largest growing demographic—will seek the care and benefits that they have earned through their service.”

The Veteran, a senior policy adviser for the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee’s Women Veterans Task Force, first reported the assault to several VA employees who declined to take any action and it was not until she notified her doctor that police were called and an investigation began. The investigation ultimately didn’t result in criminal charges due in part to a lack of functioning cameras in the DC VAMC. Secretary Wilkie afterwards mischaracterized the assault allegation as “unsubstantiated,” which the VA IG quickly corrected as false. [Subsequent media reports](#) have alleged that starting in October, Secretary Wilkie sought out damaging information on the Veteran and discussed with VA officials and a member of Congress potentially using the information to discredit her. If true, as the senators argue in their letter, these actions by Secretary Wilkie and the lack of counter-action from other VA officials constitute an egregious abuse of power and create a dangerous environment at VA facilities, especially for women Veterans.

“The failure of the DC VAMC to protect and support this Veteran at the time of the incident – from the lack of bystander intervention, to a lapse in following protocol – should have been immediately corrected by the Secretary. The Secretary’s failure to take corrective action and, even worse, to retaliate against the Veteran, is absolutely unacceptable,” the senators’ letter continued.

In response to these allegations, and in order to ensure that VA is creating a safe environment for all Veterans, the senators in their letter call for a full investigation into Secretary Wilkie and other VA officials’ actions.

A copy of the letter can be found [here](#) and below: