

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 29, 2015

Linda A. Halliday  
Deputy Inspector General  
Office of Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
801 I Street NW  
Washington DC, 20001

Dear Mrs. Halliday,

Earlier this week we requested information from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the process by which the Department shares information with non-Agency personnel for purposes of assisting veterans with their claims for service-connection of disabilities. In that letter we requested information on how personally identifiable information (PII) is safeguarded on the Department's e-mail system from inappropriate or accidental disclosure from the Department to a third-party, such as a state department of veterans affairs, or from the third-party to another individual. As you know, unintended disclosure of PII puts veterans at risk for fraud or identity theft.

This request was prompted due to an April 2015 incident in which a State employee at the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) sent veterans' PII to an unintended and unauthorized recipient over the Department of Veterans Affairs' email system. Shortly thereafter, Senator Baldwin's office reached out to your office to explore whether there was cause for the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to review the incident in Wisconsin. At that time, your office stated that there was no nexus for the OIG to review an incident that appeared to wholly involve a state entity. However, we would argue that there is indeed a federal nexus given that the WDVA—when transmitting veterans' information—utilizes VA systems, including software and email servers, which include tools to protect veterans' PII from unintended disclosure. Despite these safeguards the accidental disclosure in Wisconsin still occurred.

Therefore, we are writing to request a formal investigation by the OIG to determine whether the process and system by which the Department shares information with non-Agency personnel for purposes of assisting veterans with their claims for service-connection of disabilities is adequate to safeguard veterans' PII. While this particular incident occurred in Wisconsin, we believe the issue is one of national importance and request that you conduct a system-wide review of the Department's practice.

We look forward to your response and thank you for all you do on behalf of our Nation's veterans.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal  
U.S. Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
U.S. Senator