



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

WASHINGTON OFFICE
1408 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
PHONE: (202) 225-3031

JANESVILLE DISTRICT OFFICE
20 S. MAIN STREET
SUITE 10
JANESVILLE, WI 53545
PHONE: (608) 752-4050

November 23, 2020

Mary M. Kolar
Secretary
Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs
2135 Rimrock Rd
Madison, WI 53713

Dear Secretary Kolar:

As you may be aware, earlier this year I requested that the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs review the COVID-19 outbreak occurring at the Union Grove Veterans Home located in Wisconsin's First Congressional District. My goal was to review the situation to help stop the outbreak and provide information to prevent future outbreaks from occurring at other facilities in Wisconsin and around the country. Unfortunately, since I wrote that letter, other outbreaks have continued to occur, including here in Wisconsin.

While I recognize the challenges facing the operation of these facilities during this difficult year, I trust you share my goal of helping Wisconsin's veterans receive the high quality care they deserve and helping frontline staff receive the protections and support they need. Frontline staff have faced an incredibly challenging set of circumstances this year and their efforts deserve appreciation.

Enclosed, please find a copy of the response I received from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. From this correspondence and other communications I have received, it is my understanding that the federal Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) 12 has been in frequent contact with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) throughout this year to determine if federally funded assistance was needed. VISN 12 offerings included assistance with PPE, testing, consulting, and staffing.

As you can see from the attached response, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs states that federal officials offered consultation and staffing assistance to the state veterans home in May of this year. That offer was apparently declined until August, after the outbreak occurred.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' response states, "(a)t the direction of Milwaukee's VAMC director, the State Veterans Home VA Medical Facility Representative offered the Wisconsin State Veterans Home at Union Grove consultation and staffing support on May 27, 2020. At that time, SVH leadership declined this assistance until the outbreak in August 2020."

It is my further understanding that this offer from the U.S. DVA was to provide the assistance without cost to the State of Wisconsin or WDVA. Can you please provide an explanation for why this assistance was initially declined? Can you also detail the extent of Federal assistance WI DVA has received since the initial outbreak occurred? Finally, can you please provide me with details about any other offers of Federal assistance that your agency has declined during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

BRYAN STEIL
Member of Congress