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Congress of the United States
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James B. Comey
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Ave NW
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Guy Cottrell
Chief Postal Inspector
U.S. Postal Inspection Service
900 Brentwood Rd NE
Washington, DC 20066

Zane David Memeger
United States Attorney
Eastern District of Pennsylvania
615 Chestnut Street, Ste 1250
Philadelphia, PA 19016

July 15, 2014

Dear Director Comey, Chief Cottrell, and U.S. Attorney Memeger,

On July 14, 2014, the House Veterans Affairs Committee held a hearing in which allegations of mail destruction and other misconduct by Department of Veterans Affairs employees and supervisors was brought to light.

Under oath, Kristen Ruell, a Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO) Authorization Quality Review Specialist, testified that the Philadelphia VARO engaged in the improper destruction of veterans' mail. Ms. Ruell described a 2012 experience she had in which 96 boxes of mail may have been improperly destroyed. She described how if a piece of mail was not easy to identify and enter into the digital system it was tossed aside to be sorted at a later date. However, it appears many of these documents were never sorted. Instead, these boxes, which included documents such as Certificates of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD Form 214) and potential new claims, were shredded.

Ms. Ruell's testimony was corroborated by the Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (OIG). In June 2014, the OIG confirmed that the Philadelphia VARO had 68 mail bins full of claims and associated evidence dating back to 2011. The OIG found the following: "[s]taff inappropriately shredding or destroying military and returned mail that could not be delivered" and "[s]taff hiding mail within the VARO."

Not only were allegations of mail destruction discussed at the hearing, but also efforts by VA supervisors and senior management to 'cook the books' by manipulating data. Specifically in Philadelphia, management may have intentionally misapplied a policy guidance memorandum, Fast Letter 13-10, "Guidance on Date of Claims Issues." Management was directing staff to use Fast Letter 13-10 as an excuse to improperly change dates on many older veteran claims. Instead of using the date the claim was received, they used the date it was 'discovered', thus making the backlog look shorter.

By manipulating claims dates, many of these employees and supervisors financially benefited. By making the backlog look smaller, performance reports looked better. VA bonuses are tied to claims processing and performance and some employees received bonuses over \$2,000, according to testimony.

I urge you to consider opening an investigation into these allegations. The unlawful destruction of veterans' claims and correspondence is a serious issue. The fact that data may have been manipulated so that certain VA supervisors and employees could get bonuses, at the expense of veterans' pension and disability claims languishing in the backlog, is unconscionable and deserving of further investigation.

I stand ready to assist your offices in any way you deem appropriate. Should you require additional information or action from my office, please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-225-4276.

Your courtesy and cooperation are appreciated.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael G. Fitzpatrick", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

MICHAEL G. FITZPATRICK
Member of Congress