

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1011

April 30, 2025

Mr. Kai Mentzer
Medical Center Director
Joseph Maxwell Cleland Atlanta VA Medical Center
1670 Clairmont Rd.
Decatur, GA 30033

Dear Mr. Mentzer,

I write today with concern for Georgia veterans. As you know, veterans seeking care at the Atlanta VAMC have faced long wait times to receive the care they need and have earned. The VA's Office of Inspector General has identified staff shortages at your facility¹ and implicated some of them in long wait times.² I am therefore deeply worried about the impact the Trump Administration's mass firings of VA personnel will have on our veterans' ability to receive timely access to healthcare at the Atlanta VAMC.

As you are aware, the Atlanta VAMC is the second largest VAMC in the country, currently serving more than 130,000 veterans.³ It is also one of the fastest growing centers in the country, due in large part to expanded veteran access under the PACT Act.^{4,5} And yet the Atlanta VAMC's growth in staffing has not kept pace with its veteran population growth. As was explicitly outlined in recent OIG reports, inadequate staffing is a longstanding issue and a key driver of delays in veteran scheduling appointments and accessing care at your facility. Thus, in order to meet the needs of our state's robust veteran population, the Atlanta VAMC should be aggressively recruiting qualified staff. Instead, the VA abruptly fired 1,400 probationary employees on February 24, 2025 on the sole basis of their status as new or recently promoted employee rather than upon their performance.⁶ Just a few days later, the Trump administration then announced its plan to further reduce the VA workforce by over 80,000 people—an estimated 20,000 of whom are likely to be veterans themselves—a figure which has also been confirmed by VA Secretary Doug Collins.⁷ This massive reduction in force (RIF) is expected to unfold within the next several months.

In 2022, I wrote to your predecessor Ms. Ann Brown, calling attention to exceptionally long wait times at the Atlanta VAMC and asked for a detailed explanation of this discrepancy. Since you took over as Executive Director of the Atlanta VAMC last year, you have consistently expressed your commitment to ensuring that veterans do not have to endure long wait times in order to receive the healthcare which they have earned and deserve, including in a meeting with you this past September.

Accordingly, I ask for your timely response to the following questions:

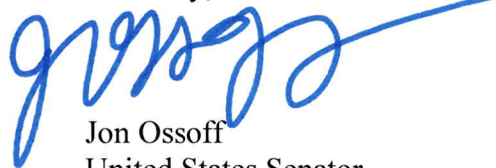
1. How many Atlanta VAMC probationary employees were fired during the first rounds of cuts in February? What were their roles?
2. How many of the above dismissed employees have since been reinstated?

3. How is Atlanta VAMC tracking wait times?
4. How many Atlanta VAMC employees are you expecting to be included in the upcoming RIF?
5. How many of the employees expected to be included in upcoming RIF have functions which directly impact veteran healthcare and wait times or recruitment and retention of staff, including but not limited to VA HR Specialists, administrative officers, schedulers, and program support assistants?
6. How many unfilled positions are there currently at the Atlanta VAMC?
7. How many employees with tentative or firm job offers have been delayed since the federal hiring freeze went into effect on January 20, 2025?
8. How has your ability to recruit and retain VA staff been impacted by recent and impending cuts?

Our veterans have earned timely and effective service from their government. We want to ensure that no veteran will receive delayed care or face barriers to accessing it. To do so would betray the sacred compact we make with those who wear the uniform and undermines faith in our institutions.

Thank you for your prompt response to this inquiry.

Sincerely,



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator

1. VA OIG Report: OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration's Severe Occupational Staffing Shortages Fiscal Year 2024. August 7, 2024. 24-00803-222

2. VA OIG Report: Atlanta Call Center Staffing and Operational Challenges Provide Lessons for the New VISN 7 Clinical Contact Center. January 30, 2025. 23-01609-14.

3. Atlanta VA Medical Center: Emory University School of Medicine. <https://med.emory.edu/departments/emergency-medicine/patient-care/atlanta-va-medicalcenter/index>.

4. Federal Practitioner Directory, Atlanta VAMC. 2024

5. VA News: 400,000+ Veterans enrolled in VA health care over past 365 days, 30% increase over last year, March 29, 2024.

6. VA News: VA dismisses more than 1,400 probationary employees. February 24, 2025.

7. US Department of Veterans of Affairs. A Message from SecVA Doug Collins. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juRR9-ojusA>. March 5, 2025