

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1011

February 26, 2026

Acting Executive Director James Doelling
Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center
U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs
1 Freedom Way,
Augusta, VA 30904

Dear Acting Executive Director Doelling:

I write in the course of an ongoing inquiry my office is conducting into staffing shortages and leadership deficiencies at the Charlie Norwood Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Augusta, GA (Augusta VA) that are severely impacting veterans' health care. Over the last several months, investigators in my office have received alarming firsthand reports from employees and patients of the Augusta VA that raise urgent and ongoing concerns about harms to patient care, staff morale, and staff capacity resulting from these issues.

This follows disturbing reports in May¹ and August 2025² by the VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) about the Augusta VA. Already, in the course of our inquiry, my office has identified cases of dangerously deferred healthcare in critical specialties such as oncology and cardiology. One Augusta VA staff member stated that some patients "died while waiting for care."

Potential risks to patient health and safety require immediate investigation and remedy. Accordingly, please respond to the following questions by March 19, 2026:

1. What are the current vacancy rates for provider and staff positions at the Augusta VA? Please provide this information by service line.
2. For which positions do vacancy rates constitute "severe occupational staffing shortages," as described in the August 2025 VA OIG report?
3. What steps are being taken to retain and recruit critical staff and to stabilize scheduling of appointments and continuity of care?

¹ U.S. Dep't of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General, "Healthcare Facility Inspection of the VA Augusta Health Care System in Georgia," Report No. 24-00617-118 (May 22, 2025), <https://www.wjbf.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/47/2025/05/vaoig-24-00617-118.pdf>.

² U.S. Dep't of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General, "OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration's Severe Occupational Staffing Shortages Fiscal Year 2025," August 12, 2025, <https://www.vaoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2025-08/vaoig-25-01135-196-final.pdf>.

4. What additional steps does Augusta VA contemplate taking to recruit staff following the reported lifting of VA's hiring freeze on the health care workforce?³
5. What staffing caps, if any, are in place for currently vacant provider and staff positions at the Augusta VA? Has Augusta VA experienced any denials or delays in hiring approvals for provider and staff positions since the hiring freeze was lifted? Please describe.
6. What measures have been taken to address vacancies in leadership at the Augusta VA specifically?
7. How long is the average Augusta VA patient wait time prior to receiving an appointment? Please provide a breakdown by appointment type and specialty.
8. What interim measures have been put in place to mitigate risks to patient veteran safety and barriers to accessing care while vacancies persist?
9. What mechanisms are available to veterans and employees to report concerns about access, unsafe delays, or recurring disruptions in care? How are those reports reviewed and resolved?
10. Has Augusta VA or a third party conducted a formal review of impacts to patient care and safety from staffing shortages and/or leadership issues at Augusta VA? If so, what were its results? Please provide a copy of any review or associated report.

Sincerely,



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator

³ Jory Heckman, *VA officially lifts hiring freeze, but staffing caps still in place for shrinking workforce*, Fed. News Network (Jan. 22, 2026), <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/veterans-affairs/2026/01/va-officially-lifts-hiring-freeze-but-staffing-caps-still-in-place-for-shrinking-workforce/>.