

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 16, 2016

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald,

As members of Congress, helping our veterans receive the benefits and care they so rightfully deserve is one of our top priorities. While the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has made progress in reducing the veterans' claims backlog, we continue to believe that more needs to be done to advance a VA policy regarding congressional access to veterans' electronic claims files- CITRIX, MAP-D, SHARE, VBMS, VACOLS, and Virtual VA.

As you are aware, at the present time, only VA staff, certified lawyers, and Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) have permission to access these files. While we appreciate the complexity and concerns that have been raised regarding privacy, legal, and regulatory issues, as well as information technology system security limitations, we are confident that the combined efforts of the VA and Congress can adequately address and alleviate these potential barriers. By working in a collaborative manner on this issue we will help improve service to veterans and their families - a goal we can agree we share.

In previous correspondences, your office informed us that in order to provide even limited access to electronic claims files to congressional staff, the VA would have to transfer the access of other representatives currently utilizing the system: VSO service officers, private attorneys, and VA claims agents. According to your office, this would be necessary because the "system" is currently only capable of providing access to a single representative at a time. In our combined experience, by the time a constituent advocate begins working on a veteran's case they are the only staff working the issue because all other avenues have been exhausted. Given that our staffs are typically contacted in many cases as a last resort - after having first sought help from the VA or a service officer - to help veterans navigate significant issues they are facing at the VA, we request further information clarifying why congressional offices continue to be denied access.

Additionally, while the VA has indicated that it is working hard to expand veterans' on-line self-service capabilities we are concerned with the turn-around time of this project and the impact it will have on veterans currently awaiting a claims judgement. Could you please provide an

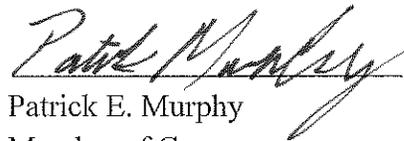
update on the progress of this initiative, as well as detail how the VA intends to assist veterans who lack access to a personal computer or broadband? Could you also address if the VA intends to hold training seminars to explain the program to older veterans who may have difficulty navigating online systems without assistance?

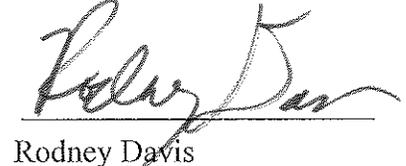
Finally, we are also requesting a status update on the proposed user-centered design sessions that had been discussed as a means to bring together member offices, veterans, VA privacy and security experts, and policy staff to workshop possible solutions that would meet both our needs to provide constituent services and uphold privacy protection laws. We urge the VA to establish a timeline for such sessions to take place in the very near future. This is an issue that simply can no longer be delayed.

We look forward to your timely response and continued engagement on this issue. In the meantime, our offices will be exploring legislative action that Congress can take to help initiate the necessary changes to ensure our veterans' needs are being met. Thank you for your time and attention regarding these critical issues.

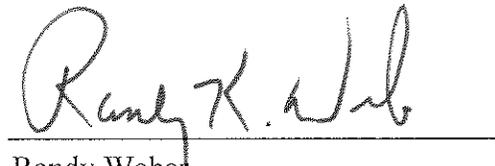
Sincerely,

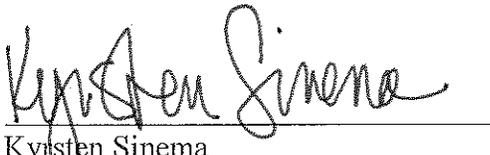

Ted S. Yoho, DVM
Member of Congress

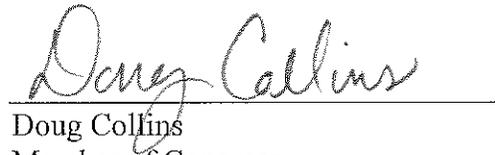

Patrick E. Murphy
Member of Congress


Rodney Davis
Member of Congress


Carlos Curbelo
Member of Congress


Randy Weber
Member of Congress


Kyrsten Sinema
Member of Congress

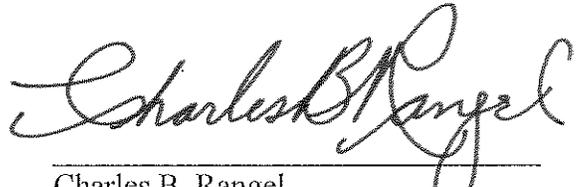

Doug Collins
Member of Congress


Mike Bost
Member of Congress


Ron DeSantis
Member of Congress



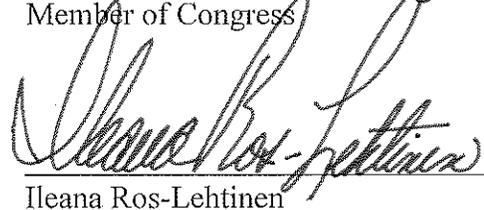
Anfi Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress



Charles B. Rangel
Member of Congress



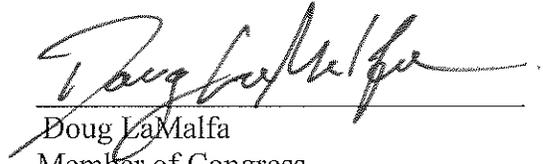
Marsha Blackburn
Member of Congress



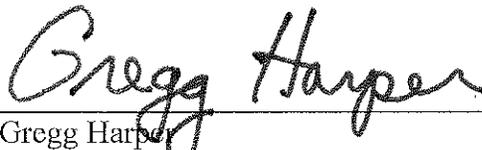
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress



C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress



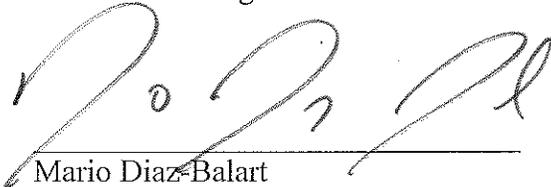
Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



Gregg Harper
Member of Congress



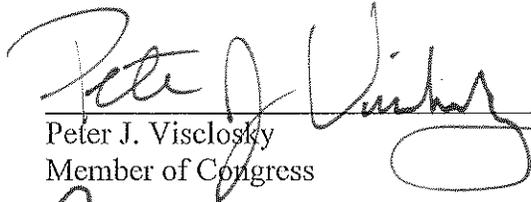
Lou Barletta
Member of Congress



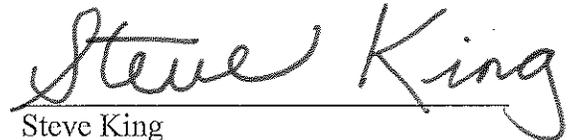
Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



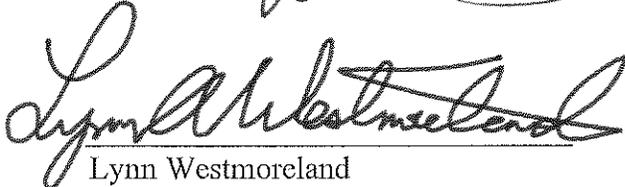
Andy Barr
Member of Congress



Peter J. Visclosky
Member of Congress



Steve King
Member of Congress



Lynn Westmoreland
Member of Congress



Jim Costa
Member of Congress



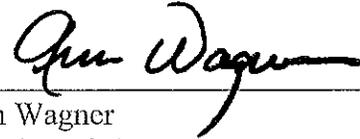
Kevin Cramer
Member of Congress



Earl L. 'Buddy' Carter
Member of Congress



David P. Joyce
Member of Congress



Ann Wagner
Member of Congress



Brad Ashford
Member of Congress



Lois Capps
Member of Congress



Darrell Issa
Member of Congress



Jody Hice
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



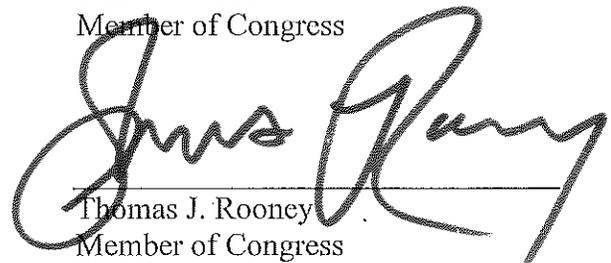
Bob Gibbs
Member of Congress



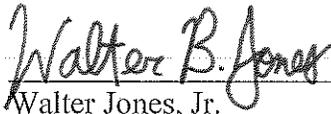
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



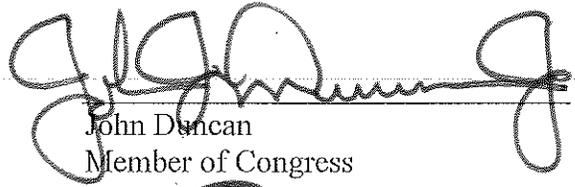
Dave Brat
Member of Congress



Thomas J. Rooney
Member of Congress



Walter Jones, Jr.
Member of Congress



John Duncan
Member of Congress



Steve Pearce
Member of Congress



Todd Rokita
Member of Congress



Keith Rothfus
Member of Congress



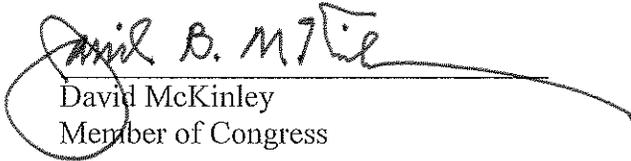
Rick Allen
Member of Congress



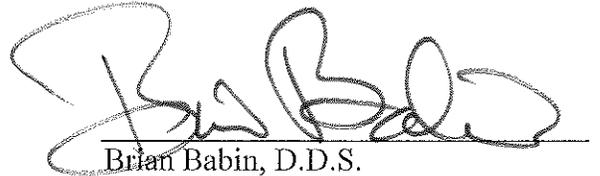
Thomas Massie
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



David McKinley
Member of Congress



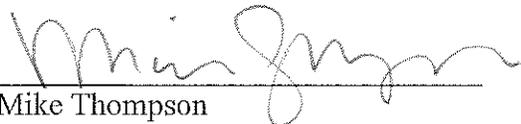
Brian Babin, D.D.S.
Member of Congress



Richard Nugent
Member of Congress



Ted Poe
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



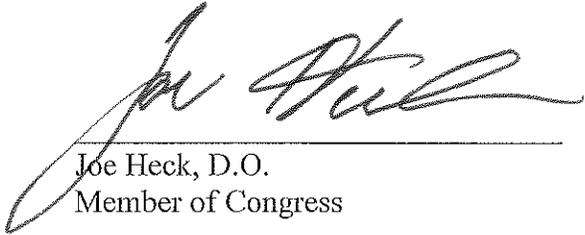
Brad R. Wenstrup
Member of Congress



Alan Grayson
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson
Member of Congress



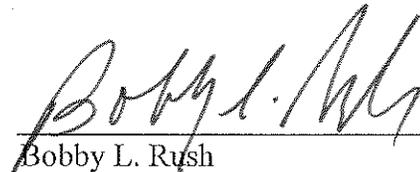
Joe Heck, D.O.
Member of Congress



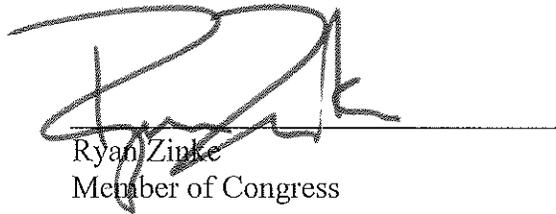
Matt Salmon
Member of Congress



Lee M. Zeldin
Member of Congress



Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



Ryan Zinke
Member of Congress



Rob Wittman
Member of Congress



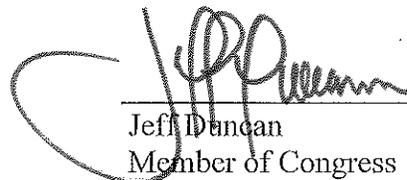
Scott Tipton
Member of Congress



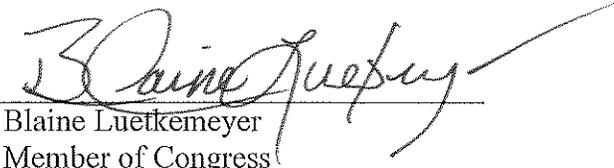
Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress



Glenn 'GT' Thompson
Member of Congress



Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress



Blaine Luetkemeyer
Member of Congress



Phil Roe, M.D.
Member of Congress



Brett Guthrie
Member of Congress



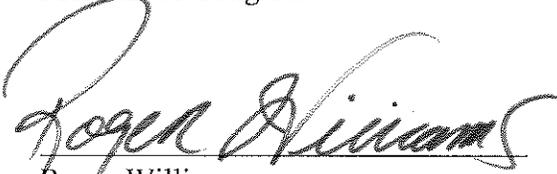
Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress



Louie Gohmert
Member of Congress



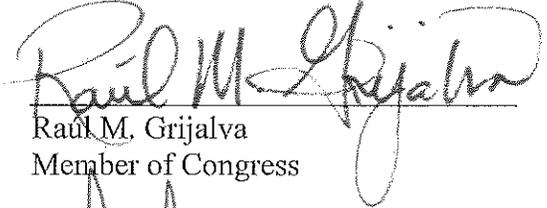
Bill Flores
Member of Congress



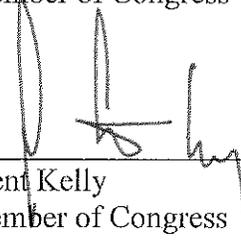
Roger Williams
Member of Congress



Susan Brooks
Member of Congress



Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Trent Kelly
Member of Congress



Dennis A. Ross
Member of Congress