

**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.

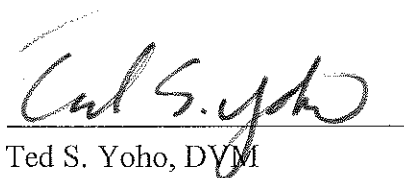
Additionally, while the VA has indicated that it is working hard to expand veterans' on-line self-service capabilities we are concerned with the turn-around time of this project and the impact it will have on veterans currently awaiting a claims judgement. Could you please provide an

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?

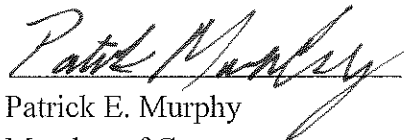
Finally, we are also requesting a status update on the proposed user-centered design sessions that had been discussed as a means to bring together member offices, veterans, VA privacy and security experts, and policy staff to workshop possible solutions that would meet both our needs to provide constituent 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,



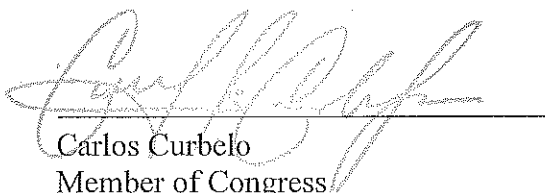
Ted S. Yoho, DVM  
Member of Congress



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



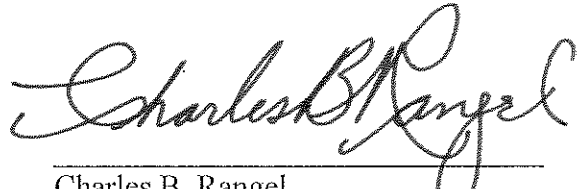
Mike Bost  
Member of Congress



Ron DeSantis  
Member of Congress



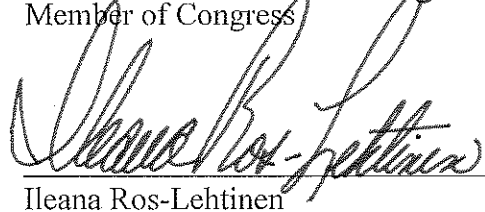
Anfi Bera, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Charles B. Rangel  
Member of Congress



Marsha Blackburn  
Member of Congress



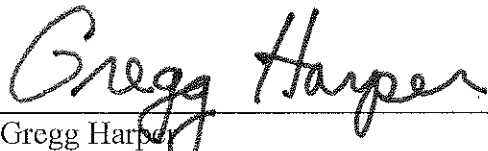
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen  
Member of Congress



C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger  
Member of Congress



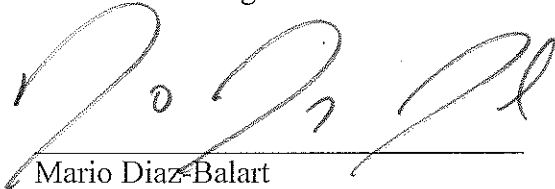
Doug LaMalfa  
Member of Congress



Gregg Harper  
Member of Congress



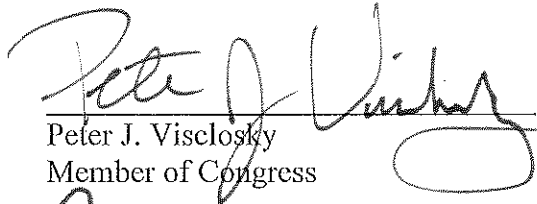
Lou Barletta  
Member of Congress



Mario Diaz-Balart  
Member of Congress



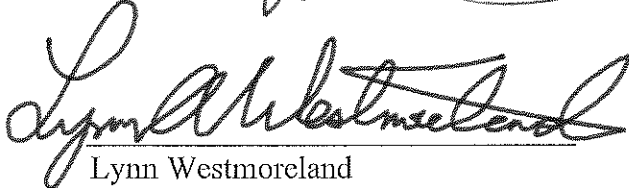
Andy Barr  
Member of Congress



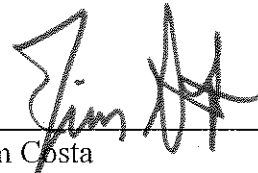
Peter J. Visclosky  
Member of Congress



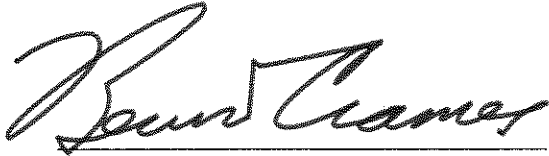
Steve King  
Member of Congress



Lynn Westmoreland  
Member of Congress



Jim Costa  
Member of Congress



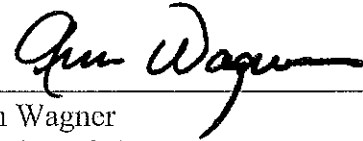
Kevin Cramer  
Member of Congress



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



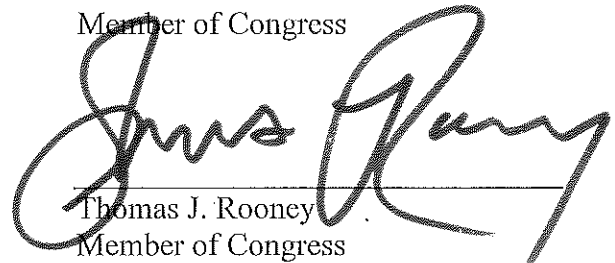
Bob Gibbs  
Member of Congress



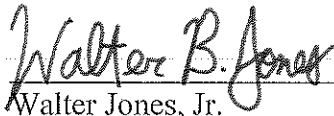
Dan Newhouse  
Member of Congress



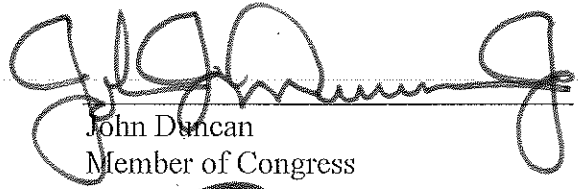
Dave Brat  
Member of Congress



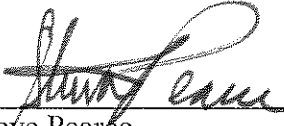
Thomas J. Rooney  
Member of Congress



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



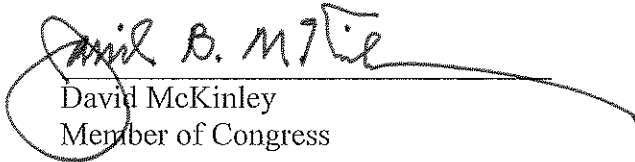
Rick Allen  
Member of Congress



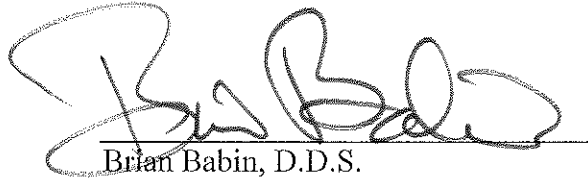
Thomas Massie  
Member of Congress



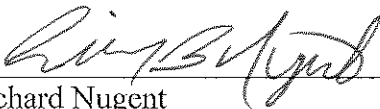
Marcy Kaptur  
Member of Congress



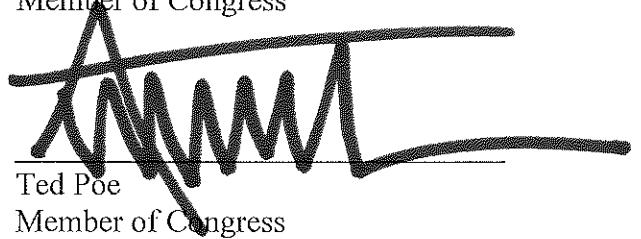
David McKinley  
Member of Congress



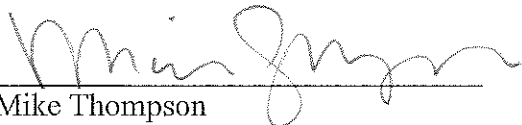
Brian Babin, D.D.S.  
Member of Congress



Richard Nugent  
Member of Congress



Ted Poe  
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson  
Member of Congress



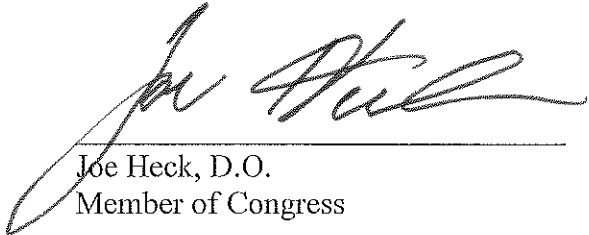
Brad R. Wenstrup  
Member of Congress



Alan Grayson  
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson  
Member of Congress



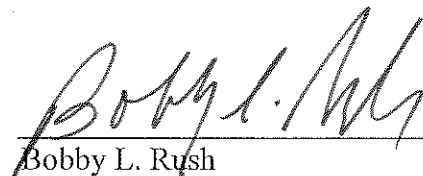
Joe Heck, D.O.  
Member of Congress



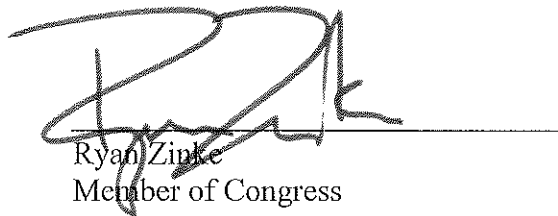
Matt Salmon  
Member of Congress



Lee M. Zeldin  
Member of Congress



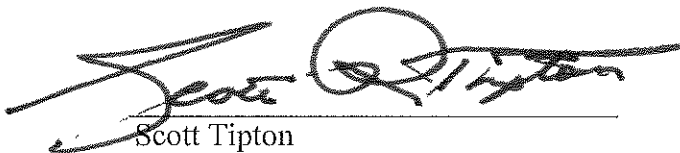
Bobby L. Rush  
Member of Congress



Ryan Zinke  
Member of Congress



Rob Wittman  
Member of Congress



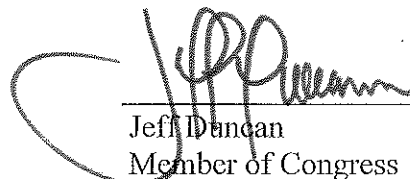
Scott Tipton  
Member of Congress



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



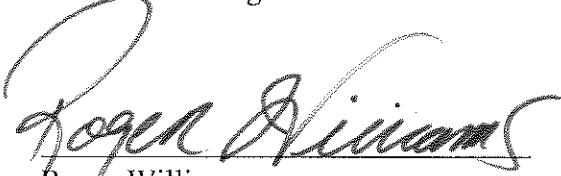
Sean Patrick Maloney  
Member of Congress




Louie Gohmert  
Member of Congress



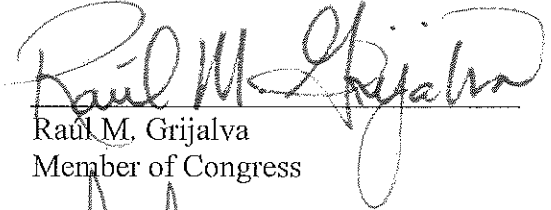
Bill Flores  
Member of Congress



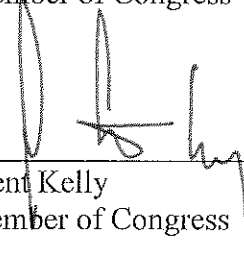
Roger Williams  
Member of Congress



Susan Brooks  
Member of Congress



Raul M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



Trent Kelly  
Member of Congress



Dennis A. Ross  
Member of Congress