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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 8, 2021

The Honorable Denis McDonough  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

I write today to follow up on my January 12, 2021 letter to your predecessor regarding implementation of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Website Accessibility Act (S. 3587) and enforcement of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. I request that the Department of Veterans Affairs take every step necessary to implement the VA Website Accessibility Act as well as to ask that the VA ensure robust enforcement of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act within the agency.

As you may be aware, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to individuals with a disability, including limited vision or blindness. Unfortunately, I have been informed by the Blinded Veterans Association that VA websites frequently fail to meet this standard and that VA contactors often fail to live up to promises to make information technology accessible. Failure to comply with Section 508 creates an unacceptable barrier for blind veterans, as well as the blind caregivers and relatives of veterans, who wish to learn about the VA's important services.

It was for that reason that I introduced S. 3587, which was signed into law in December 2020 with broad, bi-partisan support. This law requires your agency to examine all of its websites and issue a report on Section 508 compliance to Congress within 180 days passage. It also requires this report to include a plan for bringing websites that are not accessible into compliance with Section 508. These are reasonable steps to ensure that all of our Nation's veterans, regardless of disability, can make use of the electronic resources that are available to them.

The requirements under Section 508 should not be controversial, and I look forward to working together to bring the VA into compliance with them. I also ask that you respond to the following questions, many of which were included in my January letter to then-Secretary Wilkie:

1. What did the VA allocate in fiscal year (FY) 2020 for staffing, full time equivalent employees and contractors for Section 508 and Section 504 compliance at the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA)?

2. What does the VA plan to allocate for FY 2021 and FY 2022 for staffing, full time equivalent employees and contractors for Section 508 and Section 504 compliance at the VBA and VHA?
3. Does the VA plan to request additional resources from Congress to improve Section 508 and Section 504 compliance, either as part of your agency's FY 2022 budget request, or as a separate request to Congress?
4. As noted in this correspondence, S. 3587 requires the VA to include a plan for bringing its electronic resources into compliance with existing federal law in the report that it will submit to Congress. What additional funding does the VA plan to allocate in FY 2021 and FY 2022 to carry out that plan?
5. My staff have been informed that it may take longer than the 180 day deadline to evaluate the accessibility of kiosks at VA Medical Centers, which is also a requirement in S. 3587. What are the barriers to evaluating these kiosks before the deadline, and what options are your agency considering to ensure that they are evaluated as quickly as possible?
6. Have you or the VA communicated any needs to either chamber of Congress that could help your agency carry out the required evaluation of VA websites, or complete the evaluation of VA kiosks, in a timely fashion? If you have not done so, do you plan to do so, either as part of your agency's FY 2022 budget request, or as a separate request to Congress?
7. What do you plan to do to ensure that the VA meets the needs of blind and disabled veterans and to ensure that your agency maintains a robust and well-funded enforcement mechanism for Section 508 requirements moving forward?

I appreciate the Biden Administration's commitment to upholding and expanding protections for persons with disabilities. I am certain you agree that ensuring all Americans can access the benefits and information available to them through agencies such as the VA is a critical part of that agenda. Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions, and please reach out if I can be helpful with your efforts.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator