



# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

September 11, 2019

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has one of the most significant acquisition functions in the federal government, both in obligations and number of contract actions. Specifically, about a third of VA's discretionary budget in fiscal year 2018, approximately \$27 billion, has been used to contract for goods and services. The wide range of goods and services that VA procures – including construction, information technology, medical supplies, and many other services – is essential to meeting its mission to provide health care and other benefits to our nation's veterans and their families. However, unfortunately GAO and others have continued to find shortcomings in VA's ability to manage its acquisition programs. VA acquisition management was recently added to the GAO High Risk list, citing challenges such as outdated acquisition regulations and policies, lack of an effective medical supplies procurement strategy, lack of reliable data systems, and limited contract oversight.

VA has several ongoing, major efforts that will rely on sound contracting strategies and practices to ensure their success. For example, in June of 2019, VA implemented its new community care program authorized in the MISSION Act (P.L. 115-182) last year, which consolidates VA's previous community care programs into a single program. Additionally, the VA is about a year in to executing its new Electronic Health Records Modernization program. Recently, GAO reviewed aspects of both programs and found deficiencies in VA's strategic planning as well as implementation challenges. Given this, we are concerned that the VA has not taken proper steps to ensure that its contracting functions are sound, that the VA has the proper metrics in place to evaluate contractor performance, or whether large scale acquisitions achieve intended outcomes.

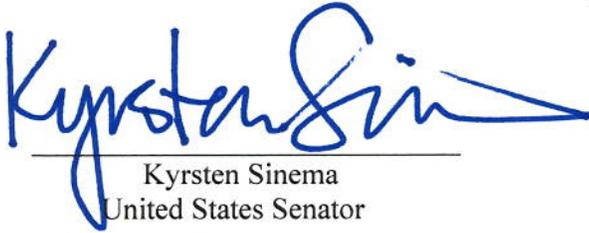
Therefore, we request that GAO select a number of contracts across the entire VA enterprise with a high-dollar value to provide an evaluation and analysis on the following topics:

1. What are the procurement policies and lines of authorities amongst VA's entire enterprise for high-value contracts and, for selected contracts, were source selection decisions and proposal evaluations documented in accordance with VA policies?
2. What is the major acquisition program structure, including the roles and responsibilities of the program and acquisition offices and coordination across personnel?
3. How does VA oversee high-value contracts, including the extent to which VA requires that metrics are included in the contract and assures that these metrics were met?
4. What dollar threshold does the VA consider high-value and what level of VA authority must approve of these high-value contracts?

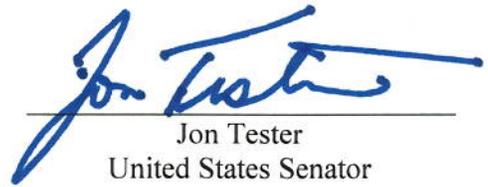
5. What training is in place for VA procurement officers and are the policies consistent across VA's central office, Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and National Cemeteries Administration?

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions about this request, please have your staff contact Jackie Maffucci on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management staff at 202-224-2210.

Sincerely,



Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator



Jon Tester  
United States Senator



James Lankford  
United States Senator