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United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3805

January 12, 2021

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

I write today to request that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) take every step necessary to implement the recently passed Department of Veterans Affairs Website Accessibility Act (S. 3587), as well as to ask that the VA ensure robust enforcement of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act within the agency.

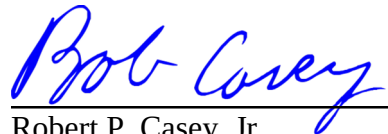
As you may be aware, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to individuals with a disability, including limited vision or blindness. Unfortunately, I have been informed by the Blinded Veterans Association that VA 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 passed by both the House and the Senate on a broad, bi-partisan basis, and signed into law by President Trump. This new 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. Accordingly, I ask that you respond to this letter with a commitment to carrying out the VA's obligations under S. 3587.

The requirements under Section 508 should not be controversial, and the VA should take every step necessary to bring itself into compliance with those longstanding protections. As such, I also ask that you respond to the following questions:

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. 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?
4. What do you plan to do, prior to the transition to the new administration, 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?
5. What recommendations for implementing the requirements under S. 3587, as well as for prioritizing the VA's compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, do you intend to communicate to your successor in the Biden Administration?

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator