



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Robert P. Casey Jr.
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

Thank you for your April 8, 2021, letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding implementation of the VA Website Accessibility Act of 2019 (S. 3587; a.k.a. P.L. 116-213) and enforcement of section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

The enclosed information paper addresses each of the questions outlined in your correspondence. In addition, we look forward to briefing you on this matter on March 24, 2022. I appreciate your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patricia Ross". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Patricia Ross
Assistant Secretary for Congressional
and Legislative Affairs

Enclosures

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Response to Senator Casey Regarding the VA
Website Accessibility Act of 2019 and Section
508 of the Rehabilitation Act**

Question 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)?

VA Response: Please refer to Attachment 4: *VHA Remediation Plan* and Attachment 6: *VBA Remediation Plan*, provided in Enclosure 2, *Report on the Accessibility of Websites of the Department of Veterans Affairs to Individuals with Disabilities*. This report was provided to Congress on September 29, 2021. VBA does not have full-time equivalent (FTE) positions allocated for sections 508- and 504-compliance; however, VBA works with the VA Section 508 Office to ensure websites and materials are compliant.

Question 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?

VA Response: Please refer to Attachments 4 and 6, in Enclosure 2. VBA relies on the VA Section 508 Office to support sections 508 and 504 compliance needs; thus, no additional funding for FTE staff or contractors is planned.

Question 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?

VA Response: Please refer to Enclosure 2.

Question 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?

VA Response: Please refer to Enclosure 2.

Question 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?

VA Response: As part of VHA's modernization plans, integrated scheduling applications are replacing the kiosks at VA medical facilities used for appointment check-ins. These applications streamline functionality while allowing Veterans to access scheduling services via the VA Digital Front Door.

VHA launched the Veterans Scheduling Interoperability Platform (VSIP) to develop an additional access point for patient check-in activities once the national Vecna contract ends. VSIP strengthens VHA's scheduling processes and improves the Veteran experience.

The Patient Check-In application will exceed current VA accessibility standards and will be both Section 508-compliant (current standard) and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 compliant (current VA standard is 2.0). The Department is committed to an accessibility-first, mobile-first design approach and is actively taking concrete steps to advance new products to WCAG 2.1, including the kiosk replacement.

Question 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?

VA Response: Please refer to Enclosure 2.

Question 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?

VA Response: VA supports the diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility of information to all Veterans, their families and their caregivers. As referenced in Enclosure 2, the Department is moving forward with remediation plans across the enterprise and appreciate the continued support from Congress for these efforts.

Additionally, VA reinvigorated partnerships between VA's Section 508 Office; the administrations; and the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) that will increase collaboration towards our commonly shared goal of supporting all Veterans. VA is also exploring a Department-wide remediation team to handle all accessibility concerns, including those related to document remediation; website; application compliance; and audio description and captioning. The Department will balance these priorities, as supported and directed by the Secretary, our committees of jurisdiction and the President.

Department of Veterans Affairs
March 2022