

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 8, 2018

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. We write today with concerns about painful and unnecessary dog experimentation at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). As you may be aware, we worked closely with your predecessor David Shulkin to wind down the VA's use of canine testing. While we are encouraged by the progress that has been made and the positive developments under former Secretary Shulkin, we are troubled by a lack of responsiveness to our repeated inquiries and by new information that we have recently reviewed. We respectfully request more details about your plans as Secretary to address this issue as Secretary and urge you to clarify that you will uphold the commitment made by the VA in March 2018 to end the use of painful dog testing.

As you may be aware, the FY18 Omnibus that was signed into law in March included language defunding and restricting VA dog testing. These same restrictions were included in both the House and Senate passed versions of the FY19 MilCon-VA bill. Our efforts—which are supported by a majority of veterans and Veteran Service Organizations including AMVETS—followed exposés of questionable testing on dogs at several VA facilities, including inducing heart attacks, drilling into their skulls, and collapsing their lungs. In some cases, investigations into these experiments showed procedural violations and other missteps that led to the death of several dogs.

Following the enactment of the FY18 Omnibus, House Veterans Affairs Committee staff informed us in April that the VA's Office of Research and Development confirmed that no dog testing studies involving pain and distress had been submitted for the Secretary's approval (now a legal requirement), and that new studies involving pain or distress were not likely to be proposed. Just two months ago the VA said that, in regards to new study submissions and approvals, “[n]one have completed the approval process recently.”

We recently reviewed documents, however, released through the Freedom of Information Act indicating that in April—just two weeks after the Omnibus passed—the Cleveland VA Medical Center spent \$42,721 to pre-order seven shipments of hounds to be used in research with delivery dates extending from June 2018 well into FY19. We are concerned that these purchases may be prohibited by the FY18 funding restrictions passed into law, and that they also appear to be an attempt to circumvent anticipated FY19 funding restrictions on dog testing.

Since the FY18 Omnibus passed, our offices have repeatedly sought updated information on experimental dog use from the VA's Congressional Relations Office, the Office of Research and Development, and even Acting Secretary O'Rourke. It is troublesome that our numerous requests have either been entirely ignored or answered incompletely and inadequately. We are increasingly concerned about the VA's continued lack of transparency and refusal to answer basic questions from Congress about its dog experimentation.

In light of these concerns, we respectfully request that your office provide us with the following information that we have repeatedly requested in writing from the VA:

1. A list of all dog experimentation projects that have been approved, as required by law, by the Secretary and the Chief of Research and Development since March 2018. Please include project titles, approval dates, approved budget, VA location, and USDA pain category.
2. The amount of taxpayer money spent on dog experimentation since the omnibus—which defunded and dramatically limited future spending—was signed into law in March.
3. A list of all dog experimentation projects that have been discontinued since March 2018.
4. For projects that were discontinued, what is the fate of the dogs no longer needed for the research? Provide specifics on each project and the disposition of the dogs.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you have any questions, please contact Christine Godinez (Christine.godinez@mail.house.gov) with Congresswoman Dina Titus's office or Eric Heigis (Eric.Heigis@mail.house.gov) with Congressman Dave Brat's office.

Sincerely,



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Dave Brat
Member of Congress