

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 1, 2021

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G St., NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) established the Solid Start program in 2019 to provide an important link between newly separated veterans and the resources the VA can provide, by connecting with each veteran through a one-on-one phone call three times within the first year after separation. These calls are an opportunity for veterans to learn about resources they may have overlooked, get connected to new resources, and receive support for immediate concerns, such as a mental health crisis.

We believe the Solid Start program will become a critical piece of the VA's efforts to reach out to veterans who may not otherwise access the resources the Department has to offer. We therefore request that the Government Accountability Office assess the program to ensure that it is meeting its stated goals and to analyze whether any improvements or other changes should be made to the program. This assessment should include topics such as:

- (1) Analyze how many veterans have been reached through the Solid Start program and how many have not. For those that have not been reached, determine potential reasons why and whether additional outreach is being attempted to make contact with those veterans;
- (2) Examine the VA's process for determining the optimal number of phone calls, or touch points, for each separated veteran, including the steps the VA takes to determine the value of these calls both for providing information about resources and for serving as a mental health check-in;
- (3) Identify the annual costs of the program, including the source of funds the VA uses for the program and what other programs are funded from that same source and;
- (4) Determine whether the program is effectively and efficiently accomplishing its stated goals of getting veterans connected to resources and note any improvements needed to increase its effectiveness, such as potentially requiring the VA to include veterans who separated from service before the program began in December 2019 or having the VA provide information on state resources and veterans service organization contacts; and
- (5) Any recommendations the Comptroller General deems appropriate for our consideration.

Please work with Melissa Reilly-Diakun, melissa_reilly-diakun@hassan.senate.gov, in Senator Hassan's office and Austin Girelli, austin.girelli@mail.house.gov, in Representative Slotkin's office with the specifics of your evaluation, and they will coordinate with the other offices.

Sincerely,




Margaret Wood Hassan
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Spending
Oversight and Emergency Management
Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs



Kevin Cramer
Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



David P. Joyce
Member of Congress