

CAPITOL OFFICE:
1034 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-2472

MANKATO OFFICE:
527½ SOUTH FRONT STREET
MANKATO, MN 56001
(507) 388-2149

ROCHESTER OFFICE:
1202½ 7TH STREET NW,
SUITE 211
ROCHESTER, MN 55901
(507) 388-2149

TOLL FREE #:
(877) 846-9259



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TIMOTHY J. WALZ
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
FIRST DISTRICT, MINNESOTA
WWW.WALZ.HOUSE.GOV

September 2, 2015

Steven C. Julius, M.D., Acting Director
VISN 23 - VA Midwest Health Care Network
2805 Dodd Road, Suite 250
Eagan, MN 55121

Dear Dr. Julius:

I am contacting you about VISN 23's report of January 17, 2014, reviewing the allegations reported to the Office of the Inspector General regarding alleged insufficient staffing and alleged managerial issues at the St. Cloud VA Health Care System.

After these allegations recently came to light, I obtained a redacted copy of your report from the Deputy Inspector General. I have reviewed your report and understand that some allegations were not substantiated and some were substantiated.

Your report stated that VISN leadership will monitor the facility's improvement actions until all findings are addressed.

I would appreciate it if you would provide me with a status report of your oversight of the situation. In addition, I have six specific questions about what has transpired at the facility regarding certain substantiated allegations since you concluded your review eighteen months ago:

- 1. Physician and mid-level provider resignations.** *Your report substantiated the allegation that "many physicians and mid-level providers have recently (2013) resigned. Can you assure me and my constituents who seek care at the St. Cloud facility that they have recruited and retained a sufficient number of physicians and mid-level providers since you concluded your report? Please provide any relevant data to back up your assessment.*
- 2. Management issues.** *Your report substantiated the allegation of "disrespectful manner by senior management." It said, "...we received comments from more than one discipline and PACT teams on fear of reprisal and not wanting to get on the bad side of the Medical Center Director and Chief of Staff." Can you assure me and my constituents who receive care at the St. Cloud facility that the workplace conditions you identified*

have been corrected at the facility? What documentation can you share with me and the public to support your conclusions? If conditions have not improved, what additional steps are you taking to address the situation?

3. **Panel sizes.** *Your report substantiated the allegation that panel sizes grew to 150% of recommended as of July 1, 2013. Can you please provide me with what steps have been taken to bring the panel size down to recommended levels? Please provide me the most current data concerning panel sizes.*
4. **Canceled appointments.** *Your report substantiated the allegation that a number of appointments had been canceled due to insufficient staffing. It found that “canceled by clinic for St. Cloud 19.5% of all appointments compared to VISN 23 average of 12.08%.” What has been done since your report to bring the rate down to acceptable levels?*
5. **Death rates.** *Your report substantiated the allegation that staff had to review many lab results, outside records, medication requests, as it was afraid to miss something that could lead to a veteran’s death. Your report stated “death rates were within normal variance for all but two providers, both located at two separate CBOCs. One provider is under active surveillance, the second provider will be evaluated by the Primary Care Service Line Director.” Can you please provide me with an update on the status of your overview of both providers and the care they are providing veterans? Have there been any significant issues with either of these providers since your report?*
6. **Progress report.** *Your report said that VISN leadership will monitor the facility’s improvement actions until all findings are addressed. Can you confirm that all findings have been successfully addressed? If not, what additional steps are being taken to correct the situation?*

I would appreciate it if you would provide me with a status report of your oversight of the situation. I would appreciate it if you would look into my questions and advise me of your findings. Please direct your response to Shawn Schloesser, of my staff, at my Mankato office at Shawn.Schloesser@mail.house.gov.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,



Tim Walz
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

TJW/js