

United States Senate

April 21, 2016

Denise Deitzen
Network Director
VA Great Lakes Health Care System, Network Office (10N12)
Four Westbrook Corporate Tower
11301 W. Cermak Road, Suite 810
Westchester, IL 60154

Director Deitzen,

It has come to my attention that the dining environment within the Edward Hines Jr. VA Medical Center Nutrition and Food Service operations are of a questionable level of sanitation. In fact, reports of contamination, including but not limited to the persistent presence of roaches in and around the food service area, have been circulated by staff with facility leadership for years. I understand that these concerns have been brought to your attention, but that a resolution has yet to be reached.

As a U.S. Senator for the State of Illinois, and as Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, I believe it is my responsibility to ensure veterans receive the highest quality service from the Department of Veterans Affairs, including food service free of potentially hazardous and unsanitary conditions. No veteran should ever be served food with a roach on his or her tray.

To that end, I'm requesting detailed information related to your efforts to address the apparent lack of sanitation and persistent pest problem within the Hines VA Medical Center Food Service Department, and to otherwise ensure that veterans' food is handled with the highest standards of cleanliness.

Specifically:

- Were you aware of the ongoing presence of roaches in the Hines kitchen?
- Were you aware that on more than one occasion, veterans have been served food on trays where a roach has been present?
- What steps are being taken to remedy unsanitary conditions within kitchen and dining facilities at Hines?
- What are the current protocols to maintain cleanliness and prevent future recurrences of this problem?

As you know, whistleblowers within the VA provide a unique opportunity to identify potential shortcomings in VA performance before those shortcomings manifest in a poor experiences on the part of a veteran. As such, in your response, please provide any

additional detail necessary to demonstrate that complaints filed with VA leadership by whistleblowers were properly handled, and that no retaliatory actions against any whistleblowers were taken.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office at 202-224-2854.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Kirk". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left from the start of the word "Mark".

Mark Kirk
United States Senator