

GUS M. BILIRAKIS
12TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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Congress of the United States
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January 10, 2018

Dear Secretary Shulkin:

I wanted to follow-up on our recent communication about the unacceptable conditions in Building 102 at the CW Bill Young VA Medical Center. I appreciate your swift action in response to my call last Friday, ensuring Veterans were afforded the choice to relocate to other parts of the building.

It is my understanding that the steamline has not been working since September 2017, which has impacted the residential unit's living conditions, especially during the recent cold periods that we have had in the Tampa Bay area. In addition to the cold temperatures inside the building, the non-functioning steamline has restricted the use of hot water, requiring Veterans to either take cold showers, or utilize the mobilized shower units located outside the building. If they opt for the external showers, they are forced to endure the cold conditions outside as they transition to and from the showers. Given my position on the VA Committee and my close involvement with our local VA facilities, I am extremely disappointed that this matter was not brought to my attention prior to receiving a call from a reporter last Friday. We need to be working together in a proactive manner to ensure that our Veterans receive the care they deserve.

Yesterday, my District Director who is also a Veteran, went out and spoke with the Veterans who reside in the facility. He learned that many of those who are receiving treatment for PTS were hesitant to relocate out of concern that a change in their surroundings, particularly into a general population area, might trigger an emotional reaction. These Veterans communicated that they have been and continue to be extremely uncomfortable with both the lack of heat and the lack of options for a heated shower indoors. Mr. Secretary, I know you will agree that it is unacceptable for our Veterans to continue living in these conditions.

My office received a call today from a member of your team who indicated that an engineering fix has now begun and that it is estimated to last for 90 days. We are in the middle of winter and will undoubtedly experience more cold weather. As evidenced by the direct feedback from the Veterans in question, management's attempts to mitigate the cold temperatures inside the building have not been successful. Veterans should not have to choose between being warm with the ability to take a hot shower indoors and being in a segregated environment that is most conducive for addressing their mental health needs. I respectfully request your immediate assistance in identifying an alternate, segregated facility with proper heating to house these Veterans until repairs on Building 102 are complete and normal operations can resume. Building 102 is not currently habitable and should be closed. Additionally, I would ask that the mental health professionals working with these Veterans be directed to offer additional support to ensure that these Veterans experience a smooth transition to the alternate facility.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this important matter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gus M. Bilirakis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "G" and a trailing flourish.

Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress