

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 23, 2010

The Honorable Erik K. Shinseki
Secretary
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

We are writing at the request of a number of Vermont veterans who have contacted our offices for assistance in obtaining the "tax letters" which are used to document their eligibility for local property tax exemption based on their status as disabled veterans. Veterans must submit this information to their town clerks by May 1 of each year. Our staffs were informed in February that the letters would be generated and mailed from the Hines Data Center.

Subsequently, we were informed that the processing had been delayed, until most recently the letters were to be mailed on April 16. To date, we have received no verification that these letters have been sent. Any further delay in this process during the current year will result in hundreds of eligible veterans paying significantly more in property taxes than they owe. We are concerned about the extreme financial hardship this will cause our veterans, particularly in the current economic climate.

Moreover, veterans who have used the Department's toll-free customer service line have reported that the customer service representatives are unfamiliar with the program and are unable to provide accurate information about the letters. With the centralized call center, it is no longer possible for veterans to reach the White River Junction Regional Office directly to request that a letter be issued.

We would ask that the situation with the current year letters be immediately addressed to ensure that Vermont's veterans have the proper documentation to meet their May 1, 2010 deadline. We would also ask that you take steps to ensure that in the coming days, Vermont's veterans are provided accurate information about the status of these letters when they contact the centralized call center.

Thank you for all that you and your staff do on behalf of our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,


PATRICK J. LEAHY
United States Senator
Representative


BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator


PETER WELCH
United States