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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

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March 1, 2018

The Honorable Dr. David Shulkin
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin:

I am writing to request ongoing information regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) efforts to upgrade the agency's aging health information technology system, the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA). Given the length and expense of the VA's historical efforts to replace VistA, I respectfully request your cooperation on the Senate Budget Committee's oversight of this matter.

Dating back to 2001, the VA's four separate attempts to modernize VistA have been costly, and to date, unsuccessful. A report recently published by the Government Accountability Office titled "VA Health IT Modernization" noted that between fiscal years 2011 and 2016, the VA obligated approximately \$1.1 billion to contractors developing two separate replacement programs for VistA – both of which have since been abandoned. A modern health IT system will ensure that the VA can continue to capably deliver the best possible health care services to America's veterans at VA facilities across the country. At the same time, the VA's obligation to deliver that care can never be divorced from the agency's duty to responsibly oversee taxpayer dollars.

Last June, you announced the VA would abandon its current VistA modernization effort to purchase the same health records system the Department of Defense (DOD) is adopting. The VA's Acquisition Plan for this effort, the Electronic Health Records Modernization (EHRM), estimates that implementing the new system will cost approximately \$12.4 billion over a 10-year period. I applaud the notion of a shared health IT system that will enable seamless records sharing and coordination among DOD, the VA, and community partners. But given the financial magnitude of the EHRM acquisition, the VA's costly history of pursuing – then abandoning – VistA upgrades, and my duty to American veterans and taxpayers alike, I intend to closely monitor the EHRM purchase and implementation.

In order to provide adequate fiscal oversight of the VA's EHRM acquisition and upgrade process, I respectfully request the following:

- I request that the appropriate VA personnel provide my Budget Committee staff with oral quarterly updates regarding the VA's EHRM acquisition and implementation progress. While I realize that the VA anticipates full programmatic implementation may

require several years, I request these quarterly briefings continue until that time. I respectfully request the first of these briefings be completed no later than March 16, 2018.

- As the VA continues work on implementation of EHRM, I request that the VA provide me with an annual written update, no later than November 30 of each year, detailing the EHRM implementation progress during the previous fiscal year, along with associated budget outlays. The update should, at minimum, include an analysis of any departures or variances from the VA's initial cost estimates; an explanation of the delay of any project milestone or contract deliverable by more than 30 days; updated EHRM deployment and implementation schedules; and a current roster of key personnel responsible for EHRM implementation.

I appreciate the enormity of the challenge to deliver quality care across a health system that spans the country and your continued work to deliver the best possible care and benefits to America's veterans. A modernized health IT system will improve the VA's delivery of care, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that the VA implements the EHRM in a timely and fiscally responsible manner. Please have your staff contact Alison McGuire of my Budget Committee staff at (202) 224-2887 or alison_mcguire@budget.senate.gov to arrange briefings and to discuss any related concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Michael B. Enzi".

Michael B. Enzi
Chairman
Committee on the Budget