

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 23, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Linda Chapa LaVia
Director
Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
George Dunn County Building
69 West Washington
Suite 1620
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Director Chapa LaVia:

We write to express concern over the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreaks at The Adjutant Illinois Veterans Home – LaSalle (IVH LaSalle) and The Adjutant Illinois Veterans Home – Manteno (IVH Manteno).

The recent infection of 104 Veterans and 94 staff members living or working at IVH LaSalle is a significant public health threat that has tragically killed 27 Veterans to date. The previous outbreak at IVH Manteno is also deeply troubling and highlights the particular risk COVID-19 poses to Veterans – who typically have underlying health conditions and are more susceptible to such illnesses – living in group settings and the staff who serve them. We recognize that congregate living arrangements, whether nursing facilities or Veterans homes, can foster, and are associated with greater risk of, transmission.

While we appreciate the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs' (IDVA) efforts to provide exemplary care to our State's Veterans and ongoing work to mitigate this outbreak, it is clear that addressing this disease will take an unparalleled public health response. To mitigate the harm inflicted by these outbreaks and to protect residents and staff living or working at all of the Illinois Veterans Homes, we strongly urge IDVA immediately request that the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) conduct an independent review of the outbreaks at IVH LaSalle and IVH Manteno.

This independent investigation may also include other relevant public health authorities and should trace the causal factors that led to the likely initial infection and enabled the subsequent spread among Veterans and staff. Such review can help strengthen our public health understanding on patterns of disease spread and inform implementation of appropriate best practices at IVH LaSalle and IVH Manteno, along with taking pre-emptive safeguards at IVH Anna, IVH Quincy, and the Prince Home for homeless and disabled Veterans.

As the deadly COVID-19 public health crisis continues, public health authorities are learning more about how this novel virus spreads and best practices to lower the risk of infection. It is imperative that IDVA make sure staff at all of the Illinois Veterans Homes employ the most up-

to-date practices that enable personnel to carry out the mission while protecting themselves and the Veterans they serve.

You have served our Nation and Illinois with distinction, both in uniform and as an elected public servant. We are confident that you share our alarm over the recent outbreak at IVH LaSalle and our sense of urgency to prevent outbreaks at other IVH facilities. As IDVA takes all necessary measures to bring the current COVID-19 outbreak under control, we hope that acting on our request will help the Department prevent future outbreaks. As always, our respective offices are ready and prepared to assist IDVA efforts to address this immediate public health challenge and better serve our Veterans living in Illinois. Thank you in advance for considering our urgent request.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator