

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 13, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

Dr. Robert Buckley
Medical Director
Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center
3001 Green Bay Road
North Chicago, IL 60064

Dear Director Buckley:

We are writing to bring to your attention our serious concerns about the proper implementation of COVID-19 protocols at Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs) in Illinois in light of the recent COVID-19 outbreak at Jesse Brown VAMC. We urge you to continue to follow guidance of from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) to ensure the health and safety of veterans and employees at Illinois VAMCs.

We recognize the difficulty of combatting COVID-19 as it continues to evolve and more information is learned on how it infects and causes illness. We appreciate the great strides VAMCs have done to care for and vaccinate veterans and civilians during this pandemic. However, with the recent news of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, it remains critical that staff continue to follow COVID-19 precautionary measures for the health and safety of veterans under their care and themselves.

We remain concerned about a possible significant number of unvaccinated staff and the repercussions it can have on a facility's ability to provide excellent care for veterans and ensure proper staffing levels. To provide continuity of care for our veterans, we request the following information:

1. What are the VAMC's COVID-19 protocols for: masking and other protective equipment usage, employee testing, and employee vaccination and how do they comply with VA and IDPH's guidance?
2. Is there an oversight mechanism to ensure the proper implementation of VA and IDPH COVID-19 protocols?
3. In the event of a positive case, what is the notification process for staff, patients, IDPH, local public health departments, and other relevant VA authorities?
4. What are the employee vaccination rates at the facility? Does the VAMC have contingency plans in the event that multiple terminations result in staff shortages?

We want to ensure VAMCs provide a safe environment for veterans and employees, especially frontline healthcare staff. We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

CC: Ms. Victoria Brahm, Network Director VISN 12
Dr. William Patterson, Network Director VISN 15