



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON

July 15, 2008

The Honorable Susan Bysiewicz  
Secretary of State of Connecticut  
State Capitol  
210 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Madam Secretary:

This is in response to your recent request to provide voter registration and voter education at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities in Connecticut. I regret the difficulty you have experienced and hope this letter clarifies the Department's policy.

On May 5, 2008, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) issued directive 2008-025, "Voting Assistance For VA Patients." This policy is the result of careful deliberation and consideration for the needs and rights of our patients, concerns about disrupting facility operations, and the need to ensure VA is not involved in partisan political activities. It requires each facility to establish written policies and procedures and to post information on voter assistance. In addition, it engages VA volunteers to provide voter assistance to those veterans who request it.

Although VHA directive 2008-025 does not authorize outside organizations to conduct voter registration drives at VA facilities, it permits outside entities or individuals to assist VA with voter registration or voting efforts in support of our veteran patients or residents of our community living centers and domiciliaries when the respective medical center determines such support is needed. To ensure that VA offers these veterans voter registration and voting assistance in a nonpartisan manner and with minimal disruptions to facility operations, we believe it is essential that these efforts be coordinated through the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) office at each VA medical center.

We recognize that state and local government election offices are experts in the voting process and we welcome your assistance. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) recently provided guidance to the field on how to fully utilize these offers. It was clarified that voter registration support from state and local government election officials should be coordinated through the appropriate VAVS office and be directed at the needs and interests of the patients in the facility. The agency is also directing each of our Voluntary Service Officers to contact Secretaries of State or chief election officials for voting and educational materials deemed appropriate to assist and inform veterans in regards to voting. To facilitate this process, VA is providing these officials the VAVS contact at the medical centers in their state. The contact information for the Connecticut VAVS program manager is enclosed.

VA is committed to assisting our veteran patients who request assistance with voter registration and voting. The Director, VA Connecticut Healthcare system, will contact your office

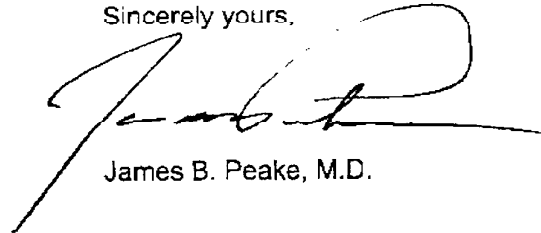
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The Honorable Susan Bysiewicz

regarding the proposed registration and demonstration activities. Your concern for veterans is appreciated. A similar response has been sent to Connecticut Attorney General, Richard Blumenthal.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James B. Peake". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, prominent loop at the end.

James B. Peake, M.D.

Enclosure