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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

KOLAN L. DAVIS, Chief Counsel and Staff Director
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November 16, 2016

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Michael J. Missal
Inspector General
Department of Veterans Affairs
801 I Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Inspector General Missal:

In August, I wrote to you about Brandon Ketchum, a veteran of the Marine Corps and Army National Guard, who found himself at a crisis point, believing himself to be a threat to his own safety and sought the assistance of the Iowa City VA Medical Center.¹ He was reportedly denied treatment and took his own life just over 24 hours later. Sadly, I have learned that another Iowa veteran, Curtis Gearhart, also committed suicide after he was reportedly denied care at a VA facility in Iowa. Mr. Gearhart is an Iraq War veteran and served two tours as a combat engineer. News reports indicate that Mr. Gearhart was told to wait five to six weeks for treatment for severe headaches, well beyond the VA's goal of 30 days for medical treatment.²

Working to end the suicide epidemic among our veteran population should be an urgent priority. Accordingly, please conduct a thorough investigation into facts and circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. Gearhart.

Please respond by November 30, 2016, and inform me whether you have decided to open an inquiry into the matter. If not, please explain why not. If an inquiry is opened, I further request that you provide updates on its status, when appropriate. For any questions going forward, please contact Josh Flynn-Brown of Senator Grassley's Judiciary Committee staff at (202) 224-5225.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary

¹ Neumann, Greg, *Digging Deeper: Could the VA Have Done More to Prevent the Suicide of a Wisconsin Dells Native?*, (Jul. 13, 2016), available at <http://www.wkow.com/story/32430789/2016/07/12/digging-deeper-could-the-va-have-done-more-to-prevent-the-suicide-of-a-wisconsin-dells-native>

² Tony Leys, *Vets suicide came during wait for VA appointment, friends say*, The Des Moines Register (November 11, 2016). Available at <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/health/2016/11/11/vets-suicide-came-during-wait-va-appointment-friends-say/93656738/>. Justin Surrency, *Another Iowa Veteran Suicide After Family Says He Was Told to Wait for Treatment by VA*, WHOTV.com (November 10, 2016). Available at <http://whotv.com/2016/11/10/another-iowa-veteran-suicide-after-family-says-he-was-told-to-wait-for-treatment-by-va/>