

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0913

November 4, 2015

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

It recently came to my attention that there has been yet another case in the greater Tampa Bay area in which a person was declared deceased by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), even though that individual was very much alive.

As you will recall, back in February of this year, I alerted you to a similar case that had befallen one of my constituents. Because of mistakes that transpired within the VA, Mary-Ann Clough went months without receiving the Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC) that she was owed. We further discussed this phenomenon when you testified before the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriations subcommittee on March 4, 2015.

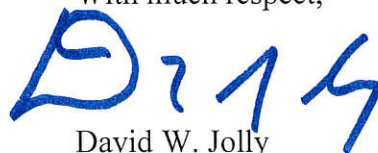
Within the last 18 months, my office has handled at least four similar cases where the VA declared someone dead when they were actually alive. Congressman Gus Bilirakis managed another such incident for a 92-year-old Florida woman last year. Earlier this week, I was contacted by Michael Rieker, who served in the Navy, lives in Florida's Thirteenth Congressional District, and now has to contend with this problem. Including Mr. Rieker, that makes at least six local cases that we know of where the VA declared someone dead and stopped their benefits when the person was, in fact, alive. One case is unacceptable, but six is outrageous.

Suffice it to say, if this is caused by human error there is clearly an inadequate system of checks and balances in place. If not human error, the current system is flawed.

In addition to requesting details about Mr. Rieker's case, please report back as to how many other such instances have transpired nationwide over the past five years, broken down on a per year basis. Additionally, since my February 2015 letter and our discussion at the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriations subcommittee, what steps has the VA taken in conjunction with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to prevent this from happening again?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

With much respect,



David W. Jolly
Member of Congress