



# Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General

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## Administrative Investigation Preferential Treatment, Improper Travel Vouchers, Misuse of Resources, and Interference with an OIG Investigation Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System

**REDACTED**



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**Office of Inspector General**  
**Washington, DC 20420**

**TO:** Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7 (10N7)  
Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology (005)

**SUBJECT:** Administrative Investigation - Preferential Treatment, Improper Travel Vouchers, Misuse of Resources, and Interference with an OIG Investigation, Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (2008-01383-IQ-0018)

**Summary**

We substantiated that Dr. Robert Ratliff, Director, VA Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS), currently the Birmingham VA Medical Center Interim Director, improperly influenced the selection of an applicant, thereby engaging in preferential treatment; that the [REDACTED] improperly hired the applicant; and (b)(6) that the applicant received an improper relocation incentive. We also substantiated that the Director submitted improper travel vouchers when he sought mileage reimbursement for his personal indirect travel associated with his official travel, misused his VA-issued Blackberry for personal calls, and improperly erased his VA-issued computer hard drive while under investigation.

We did not substantiate allegations that [REDACTED] gave preferential treatment in hiring (b)(6) two other employees; brought back former retired employees under a contract; tampered with administrative investigation boards; improperly changed senior managers' duty stations so they could avoid paying occupational taxes; misused Government funds to erect an iron fence and gate and purchase flat screen monitors; improperly staffed the new gate checkpoint using unarmed employees; and misused a Government owned vehicle. Unsubstantiated allegations are not discussed further in this report

We also substantiated that Ms. Shirley Bealer, CAVHCS Acting Director, interfered with our investigation when she instructed employees to provide her information about our investigation and when she provided detailed information to Dr. Ratliff.



Texas. [REDACTED] said that when she left his office, she went directly to [REDACTED] and told her of their conversation. She told us that [REDACTED] said, "I know the position you are in. But if you don't select him, it's going to be hard for you, and it's going to be hard, because if things don't go right, he's (Dr. Ratliff's) going to be really on to you. Now, you select him, I want you to keep documents, and if he's (the applicant) not doing something, you just document it and we'll go from there." [REDACTED] told us that she recalled speaking to [REDACTED] about Dr. Ratliff's preference for hiring the applicant. She said that she told [REDACTED] that she could hire the candidate of her choice, but that she needed to think about her decision and the fact that Dr. Ratliff wanted that applicant for the position. (b)(6)

[REDACTED] said that after the vacancy announcement closed and HRMS sent the applicant a letter telling him that he was not considered for the position, the applicant sent her an electronic mail message asking for reconsideration, providing her a second resume in September 2006, expanding on his experience. [REDACTED] said that she asked [REDACTED] to re-issue the referral certificate with the applicant's name on it, but [REDACTED] refused. [REDACTED] told us that she then selected the applicant without his name being on the certificate, because she felt that she did not have a choice in the matter. Dr. Ratliff told us that if someone told him that the applicant was not on the certificate, he would question why, thinking someone was "playing games." He also told us that he did not trust [REDACTED] judgment in selecting applicants. (b)(6)

[REDACTED] stated that [REDACTED] was concerned about the pre-existing relationship between Dr. Ratliff and the applicant and wondered whether the applicant, if hired, would bypass her and go directly to Dr. Ratliff on issues that concerned her. Dr. Ratliff said that he spoke to [REDACTED] about her fear, telling her that if she selected the applicant, he would report directly to her. [REDACTED] told us that she knew [REDACTED] felt pressure from Dr. Ratliff to hire the applicant and that he (Dr. Ratliff) was too vocal about his preference for him. Dr. Ratliff told us that he did not direct [REDACTED] to hire the applicant, but he wanted to be sure that she did not discount him due to their prior working relationship. However, he said that his comments regarding the applicant may have been misconstrued. (b)(6)

HRMS records indicated that the [REDACTED] position, announcement number 619-06-1302-JS, closed for applicant submissions on July 14, 2006, and that the applicant's original resume, received on July 13, contained very limited information concerning his prior work experience. The job announcement expressly stated that the application package "must be received by the closing date of the announcement" and that "qualifications will be evaluated solely on the information submitted in the application." (b)(6)

A review of the HR records for this position determined that the applicant did not qualify for the position, due to a lack of compliance. The applicant did not submit a Standard Form 50, documenting his time in grade, and his resume contained a narrative that did not adequately describe the 1-year of required experience. A VA Human Resources

Director, after reviewing the job announcement and the applicant's original resume, concluded that based on the requirements contained in the job announcement and the inadequacies of information contained in the submitted documentation, she was unable to determine whether the applicant possessed the required minimum 1-year specialized experience. This confirmed the correctness of the conclusion reached by the facility's [REDACTED].

## Conclusion

We concluded that Dr. Ratliff, CAVHCS Director, who had the authority to direct others to take personnel actions, improperly influenced the selection of an applicant for the position of [REDACTED], because the applicant was provided an opportunity none of the other applicants received. By virtue of his position as CAVHCS Director and by his actions and statements to [REDACTED] and others, Dr. Ratliff made it clear that he had a personal preference for the applicant. Further, in verbally advocating for the applicant before [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], Dr. Ratliff's comments and recommendations of the applicant influenced [REDACTED] to improperly consider information provided by the applicant after the vacancy announcement closed. The applicant, therefore, improperly received preferential treatment the other applicants did not receive. (b)(6)

We further concluded that the [REDACTED] improperly selected the applicant, knowing he was not eligible for selection. [REDACTED], she knew that what she was doing was improper, since the applicant's name was not included on the certificate of eligible candidates for selection. Whether the applicant actually had the required 1-year specialized experience is irrelevant, as his original application was inadequately written and did not contain sufficient information to determine whether he was qualified. His second application, containing considerably more detailed information about his qualifications and work experience, was submitted in September 2006, well after the closing date of the announcement and therefore should not have been considered.

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, take appropriate administrative action against Dr. Ratliff for improperly influencing the selection of an applicant and giving him preferential treatment and an unfair advantage over other applicants.

**Recommendation 2.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, [REDACTED] (b)(6)

**Issue 2: Whether [REDACTED] Received an Improper Relocation Incentive (b)(6)**

Federal regulations authorize agencies to pay a relocation incentive when the position is likely to be difficult to fill absent the incentive. 5 CFR Part 575, Subpart B. To utilize the incentive, the agency must determine that the position is likely to be difficult to fill. In order to make that determination, the agency must consider the following factors: (1) the availability and quality of candidates with the competencies required for the position, including the success of recent efforts to recruit candidates for similar positions, the proportion of positions filled, and the length of time required to fill these similar positions; (2) salaries typically paid outside the Federal Government for similar positions; (3) recent turnover in similar positions; (4) employment trends and labor-market factors that may affect the agency's ability to recruit candidates for similar positions; (5) special or unique competencies required for the position; (6) agency efforts to use non-pay authorities to resolve difficulties alone or in combination with a relocation incentive; (7) desirability of the duties, work or organizational environment, or geographic location of the position; and (8) other supporting factors. 5 CFR § 575.206. It also requires an agency to document in writing the basis for determining that a position is difficult to fill; the basis for authorizing a relocation incentive; the basis for the amount and timing of the approved relocation incentive payments and the length of the required service period, and; that the worksite is not in the same geographic area as that of the position held immediately before the move. 5 CFR § 575.208.

VA policy contained in VA Handbook 5007 mirrors Federal regulations and delegates the authority to approve relocation incentives at the local level to facility directors. It states that approving officials must review and approve each incentive in writing, and there must be documentary evidence that the above factors were considered before the employee enters on duty. It also states that HR Management Officers are responsible for advising management officials on the provisions of the policy and for ensuring the completeness of requests prepared or approved. It further requires that records sufficient to reconstruct the action must be maintained at the approving level for a minimum of 3 years. VA Handbook 5007, Part VI, Chapter 1, paragraph 2(e); Chapter 2, paragraph 1(d), paragraph 4(c), and paragraph 14 and 15.

Human Resources records contained an undated selection form signed by [REDACTED] selecting [REDACTED]. In an electronic mail message dated October 28, 2006, an [REDACTED] asked the [REDACTED] to complete a recruitment incentive form so that she could forward it to "00" for a signature, attaching a copy of the signed agreement. The payroll report for pay period 2006-22, ending November 11, 2006, showed that the employee hired for the [REDACTED] position received a relocation incentive of \$5,536.00 when selected for that position. Recruitment documents showed that the employee received the incentive in connection with his appointment and he signed a 12 month service agreement accepting the offer, but the required signatures of the recommending and approving officials were

(b)(6)

missing from the agreement. There was no documentation whatsoever to show that the required factors were ever considered, and there was no evidence of record to justify a relocation incentive for this position.

## Conclusion

We concluded that the [REDACTED] (b)(6) in the amount of \$5,536.00 in connection with his selection at CAVHCS. Regulations and policy authorize VA to pay an employee a relocation incentive under certain circumstances, but it also requires specified justification in writing to be kept for a minimum of 3 years. We found no evidence of the required documentation and justification to show that absent the payment of the incentive, it would be difficult to fill the position. Further, [REDACTED] was not listed as an eligible candidate on a referral certificate at the time of his selection.

In addition, [REDACTED] failed, even though reminded by staff to follow up with it, to properly advise management on the requirements associated with the payment of relocation incentives and failed to ensure that a written request documenting the recommendation, justification, and approval of the relocation incentive was prepared and approved as required by VA policy.

**Recommendation 3.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, ensure that a bill of collection for \$5,536.00 is issued [REDACTED] (b)(6)

**Recommendation 4.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, [REDACTED]

## Issue 3: Whether Dr. Ratliff Submitted Improper Travel Vouchers

The Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) states that agencies are to limit payment of travel costs to those that are necessary to accomplish the mission in the most economical and efficient manner. 41 CFR § 301-2.2, 301-70.1. It states that an employee on a TDY assignment must travel to the TDY destination by the “usually traveled route” unless the agency authorizes a different route as officially necessary. 41 CFR § 301-10.7. It further states that if an employee travels by an indirect route, or interrupts travel for his or her personal convenience, the reimbursement will be limited to the cost of travel by a direct route or on an uninterrupted basis and that the employee is responsible for any added costs. 41 CFR § 301-2.4.

Dr. Ratliff told us that, at times, while conducting official TDY travel, he used airports other than the one at his permanent duty station in Montgomery, Alabama, for his own

personal convenience to combine official and personal travel. His travel records showed that he occasionally flew in and out of airports in Nashville, TN; Jackson, MS; or Birmingham, AL, instead of the airport at Montgomery and that he submitted travel vouchers requesting reimbursement for excessive mileage when he was responsible for any added costs associated with this indirect travel. We identified eight trips in which Dr. Ratliff received a total of \$913.16 in mileage reimbursements when he was entitled to only \$188.00, a difference of \$725.16. The following are three examples:

- On November 5, 2006, Dr. Ratliff flew from Jackson, MS, to San Antonio, TX, yet his permanent duty station was in Montgomery, AL. He requested reimbursement of \$89.00 for 200 miles traveled in his POV for this indirect travel when he was entitled to \$22.25.
- On April 20, 2007, Dr. Ratliff flew from Jackson, MS, to Tampa, FL, yet his permanent duty station was in Montgomery, AL. He requested reimbursement of \$97.00 for 200 miles traveled in his POV for this indirect travel when he was entitled to \$24.25.
- On June 26, 2007, Dr. Ratliff flew from Jackson, MS, to Baltimore, MD, yet his permanent duty station was in Montgomery, AL. He requested reimbursement of \$97.00 for 200 miles traveled in his POV for this indirect travel when he was entitled to \$24.25.

Federal Travel Regulation permits Dr. Ratliff to seek reimbursement only for the number of miles from his permanent duty station in Montgomery, which is 26 miles roundtrip, or his residence near Montgomery, which is about 50 miles roundtrip, to the Montgomery airport. While nothing in the regulation precludes the agency from authorizing an employee to fly out of an airport not located near their permanent duty station for personal convenience, it does not have the authority to reimburse the employee for expenses incurred as a result of taking an indirect route for personal convenience. (Comptroller General Decision, Lawrence O. Hatch, B-211701, Nov. 29, 1983.)

## Conclusion

We concluded that Dr. Ratliff submitted improper travel vouchers when he requested mileage reimbursement for the use of his POV to drive indirect routes to his TDY sites so that he could combine personal and official travel. Dr. Ratliff was responsible for any added costs associated with his personal travel or for mileage associated with his indirect routes for his personal convenience; thereby, Dr. Ratliff requested and received \$725.16 in improper reimbursements.

**Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, take appropriate administrative action against Dr. Ratliff for submitting improper travel vouchers and requesting excessive mileage reimbursements.

**Recommendation 6.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, ensure that a bill of collection is issued to Dr. Ratliff to recover the \$725.16 in improper travel reimbursements paid to him.

#### **Issue 4: Whether Dr. Ratliff Misused Government Resources**

The Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch require employees to protect and conserve Government property and prohibits the use of such property for other than authorized purposes. 5 CFR § 2635.704. VA policy authorizes the use of agency owned telephones to make personal local calls only when they do not adversely affect the performance of official duties by the employee or the employee's organization, they are of reasonable duration and frequency, and they could not have reasonably been made at another time. VA Directive 6001. VISN 7 Network policy states that Blackberry units are primarily intended for official Government use, and by reference to VA Directive 6001, limits personal use. It also states that Blackberry use within the Network shall be justified primarily for the purpose of conducting official Government business within the scope of official duties when no other means of communications are available, and it prohibits their use while the user is actively driving an automobile. VISN 7 Blackberry Management and Use Policy, Memorandum 10N7-147, March 8, 2006.

While investigating allegations of improper travel, a review of Dr. Ratliff's VA-issued Blackberry cellular telephone records reflected that he used it to make and receive thousands of personal calls between June 2006 and March 2008. Dr. Ratliff told us that he made the majority of these calls after his official duty hours, while driving to work, or while on official travel. He attributed the high number of calls to poor calling conditions and explained that many times the cellular signal was weak and calls often "dropped." He said that this, at times, required several calls for one conversation. Dr. Ratliff further said that he thought personal use of the VA-issued cellular telephone was permitted "as long as it did not interfere with the Government or cost the Government money." However, Dr. Ratliff's assumption was contradicted by a Regional Counsel staff attorney's opinion on the matter, because the attorney told Dr. Ratliff that his personal use of the VA-issued phone was excessive in light of VA Directive 6001 and recommended that he use his personal cell phone for personal calls.

Records reflected that Dr. Ratliff used his VA-issued Blackberry cellular telephone for more than 2,480 personal calls, or in excess of 15,490 total minutes calling time. Dr. Ratliff identified these to us as personal calls. Records also disclosed that more than 30 percent of the calls were made during Dr. Ratliff's duty hours. We found, in an analysis of that 30 percent, that Dr. Ratliff used over 53 hours (the salary equivalent of \$4,152.03) of his duty time to make personal calls. In addition, records for 6 billing periods, September 2007 to February 2008, showed that there were 803 text messages, incurring an additional cost of \$120.45 to the Government. Dr. Ratliff identified all of

the messages as being sent to or from personal friends. He told us that he was unaware that there was a cost associated with text messages and that he thought his VA cellular telephone calling plan allowed for unlimited text messaging.

## Conclusion

We concluded that Dr. Ratliff misused his VA-issued Blackberry cellular telephone when he used it to make thousands of personal calls, far exceeding the “limited personal use” privilege allowed for in VA policy in both frequency of calls and in misuse of 53 hours of his VA duty time during which the calls were made or received. We also concluded that Dr. Ratliff incurred \$120.45 in additional costs to the Government for his personal use of the text messaging feature of his VA assigned Blackberry device.

**Recommendation 7.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, take appropriate administrative action against Dr. Ratliff for misusing his VA-issued cellular telephone for excessive personal calls.

**Recommendation 8.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, ensure that a bill of collection for \$120.45 be issued to Dr. Ratliff to reimburse the Government for additional costs incurred for personal text messages.

## Issue 5: Whether VA Officials Interfered with an OIG Investigation

VA regulations state that employees will furnish information and testify freely and honestly in cases respecting employment and disciplinary matters. Refusal to testify, concealment of material facts, or willfully inaccurate testimony in connection with an investigation or hearing may be ground for disciplinary action. 38 CFR § 0.735-12 (b). VA policy states that intentional falsification, misstatement, or concealment of material fact in connection with employment or any investigation, inquiry or proper proceeding; refusal to cooperate in same; or willfully forgoing or falsifying official Government records or documents provides for penalties of reprimand to removal. VA Handbook 5021, Part I, Appendix A.

During the course of our investigation, we received an additional allegation that Ms. Bealer interfered with our investigation when she directed VA employees that we interviewed to provide her the questions asked during their respective interviews. Ms. Bealer admitted that she sent an electronic mail message to several employees, instructing them to tell her what questions the OIG asked, but she said that she was unaware that it was improper. She said that she asked for the information for no other reason than she was “being nosy and wanted to know if there were any other issues.”

Ms. Bealer gave us a copy of the electronic message she sent on April 10, 2008, the day after we completed our on-site interviews at CAVHCS. She addressed the message to

five employees, and she wrote, "Please send me a ROC (Report of Contact) of the questions that you were asked during your interviews with the IG teams. DO NOT INCLUDE YOUR RESPONSE. I just want to brief the Network Director." Ms. Bealer said that shortly after sending the message, a recipient told her that any information pertaining to the interviews was to be kept confidential. She said that it was then that she realized her mistake. She said that she unsuccessfully tried to recall the message and told the recipients not to respond, but three employees already sent her their replies. She said that she sent the message on her own initiative and that no one in her chain of command asked her to gather the information.

Ms. Bealer said that she also sent an electronic message on April 9, 2008, to Dr. Ratliff, the subject of the investigation, and the Network Director, providing the questions we asked her. She said that Dr. Ratliff initially did not respond to her message, and the Network Director replied to her message by simply stating "interesting." However, we found an electronic mail message indicating that Dr. Ratliff replied to Ms. Bealer, and he asked, "Who else did they interview." Ms. Bealer later told us that she "probably" answered Dr. Ratliff, telling him the names of the employees that she knew were interviewed. We found an earlier message, dated April 5, in which Ms. Bealer told Dr. Ratliff the names of employees we planned to interview, based on our request for her assistance in scheduling those interviews. Dr. Ratliff told us that he asked Ms. Bealer who we interviewed, because he was curious.

*Dr. Ratliff's erasure of his VA-issued computer hard drive*

We found electronic mail messages that Dr. Ratliff sent referring to erasing the hard drive of his VA-issued computer, after the initiation of the OIG investigation. On April 18, 2008, Dr. Ratliff conversed, via electronic mail, with the Chief Information Officer (CIO) at the Birmingham VA Medical Center in which they discussed "spring cleaning" Dr. Ratliff's computer hard drive that day. In an electronic mail message, dated April 21, Dr. Ratliff told another VA employee that the Network CIO said that he wiped his hard drive clean every couple of months. He further stated, "The thought never occurred to me until my recent issues.... So now that I am truly paranoid I am going on a regular scheduled hard drive erasure. They are rebuilding my profile this AM..." Dr. Ratliff said he told the Network CIO about an employee who was falsely accused of having inappropriate material on his VA-issued computer, and the Network CIO replied that he routinely erased his computer "to avoid that kind of bull." Dr. Ratliff said that his conversation with the Network CIO prompted him (Dr. Ratliff) to ask the Medical Center CIO to erase his VA-issued computer.

Dr. Ratliff told us that he did not erase the hard drive to hide evidence of misconduct but that he wanted "to avoid just what we are doing right now; to avoid somebody coming in and going through all this stuff; looking at every little thing; and asking you to explain every little thing you did." The Medical Center CIO told us that he erased Dr. Ratliff's

computer hard drive at his request and that Dr. Ratliff, as the Medical Center Director, was his “number one” client to please. He said that he did not question Dr. Ratliff’s request to erase the hard drive, and at the time, he said he thought it was a good idea. He told us that he knew that there was an OIG investigation involving Dr. Ratliff, but he said he thought the investigation was limited to the telephone records Dr. Ratliff asked him to gather in March 2008. The IT technician who assisted the CIO in erasing the hard drive told us that from his experience, it was uncharacteristic for a Director to “wipe” his computer hard drive.

## Conclusion

We concluded Ms. Bealer improperly directed employees to provide her information concerning their respective interviews for this investigation. A reasonable person might conclude that her directive was intimidating to the employees interviewed and caused them to be reluctant to provide us further information. Similarly, other employees most likely became aware of Ms. Bealer’s directive, and this may have caused reluctance on their part to cooperate with our investigation. In addition, we found it grossly inappropriate for Ms. Bealer to provide Dr. Ratliff, the subject of our investigation, with detailed information concerning employees we intended to interview and what questions we asked them. Simply stated, it is inappropriate and totally unacceptable for high level managers to question witnesses about an ongoing investigation. It would be naïve to think that such activity would not chill cooperation with an OIG investigation. Further, an investigation may not yield honest and cooperative testimony when individuals know the questions in advance and have the time to tailor their answers. Such conduct by high level officials during an investigation cannot be tolerated.

Although we cannot determine whether Dr. Ratliff’s erasure of his VA-issued computer hard drive destroyed any evidence of misconduct, his actions were improper, because it gave the appearance that he either tried to destroy or conceal material evidence while he was under investigation. He was unable to provide, in our opinion, a legitimate reason for erasing the hard drive, and his contention that by doing so, he would avoid some future scrutiny by investigative officials was implausible. On the contrary, his actions raised suspicion and destroyed all evidence of his innocence. His actions were also unnecessary and wasted the time of IT officials in wiping the drive and then having to rebuild his system. This action is completely intolerable and unacceptable.

**Recommendation 9.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, take appropriate administrative action against Ms. Bealer for improperly directing employees to provide her information about an official ongoing investigation.

**Recommendation 10.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, take appropriate administrative action against Dr. Ratliff for erasing his VA-issued computer hard drive while under investigation.

**Recommendation 11.** We recommend that the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology, after consultation with the OIG Director, Computer Crimes and Forensics Lab, implement policy to prohibit the practice of arbitrarily erasing hard drives without justification and to maintain proper documentation of erasures.

## Comments

The Veterans Integrated Service Network Director and the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology concurred with the recommendations. The Director's response is in Appendix A. The Assistant Secretary told us that the Office of Information and Technology will develop VA policy to prohibit arbitrary erasing of computer hard drives and properly documenting erasures. We will follow-up to ensure all actions are fully implemented.

*(original signed by:)*

JAMES J. O'NEILL  
Assistant Inspector General for  
Investigations

## Network Director Comments

**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

**Memorandum**

**Date:** September 15, 2008

**From:** Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7 (10N7)

**Subject:** **Administrative Investigation - Preferential Treatment,  
Improper Travel Vouchers, Misuse of Resources, and  
Interference with an OIG Investigation, Central Alabama**

**To:** Assistant Inspector General for Investigations

**Thru:** Deputy Under Secretary for Health, Operations and  
Management (10N)

## **Network Director's Comments to Office of Inspector General's Report**

The following Network Director's comments are submitted in response to the recommendation(s) in the Office of Inspector General's Report:

### **OIG Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, take appropriate administrative action against Dr. Ratliff for improperly influencing the selection of an applicant and giving him preferential treatment and an unfair advantage over other applicants.

Concur                      **Target Completion Date:** 11/14/08

**Recommendation 2.** We recommend that the Director, (b)(6) Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, [REDACTED]

Concur                      **Target Completion Date:** 11/14/08

**Recommendation 3.** We recommend that the Director, (b)(6) Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, ensure that a bill of collection for \$5,536.00 [REDACTED]

Concur                      **Target Completion Date:** 11/14/08

**Recommendation 4.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7,  (b)(6)



Concur **Target Completion Date:** 11/14/08

**Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, take appropriate administrative action against Dr. Ratliff for submitting improper travel vouchers and requesting excessive mileage reimbursements.

Concur **Target Completion Date:** 11/14/08

**Recommendation 6.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, ensure that a bill of collection is issued to Dr. Ratliff to recover the \$725.16 in improper travel reimbursements paid to him.

Concur **Target Completion Date:** 11/14/08

**Recommendation 7.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, take appropriate administrative action against Dr. Ratliff for misusing his VA-issued cellular telephone for excessive personal calls.

Concur **Target Completion Date:** 11/14/08

**Recommendation 8.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, ensure that a bill of collection for \$120.45 be issued to Dr. Ratliff to reimburse the Government for additional costs incurred for personal text messages.

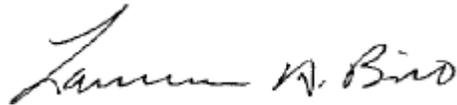
Concur **Target Completion Date:** 11/14/08

**Recommendation 9.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, take appropriate administrative action against Ms. Bealer for improperly directing employees to provide her information about an official ongoing investigation.

Concur **Target Completion Date:** 10/14/08

**Recommendation 10.** We recommend that the Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 7, take appropriate administrative action against Dr. Ratliff for erasing his VA-issued computer hard drive while under investigation.

Concur **Target Completion Date:** 11/14/08



Lawrence A. Biro

## Assistant Secretary Comments

**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

**Memorandum**

**Date:** July 31, 2008

**From:** Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology (005)

**Subject:** **Administrative Investigation – Preferential Treatment,  
Improper Travel Vouchers, Misuse of Resources, and  
Interference with an OIG Investigation, Central Alabama**

**To:** Inspector General (50)

1. The VA Office of Information and Technology (OI&T) acknowledges receipt of the Office of Inspector General's draft report and concurs with recommendation 11 to implement policy to prohibit the practice of arbitrarily erasing hard drives without justification and to maintain proper documentation of erasures.
2. OI&T's response and target completion date is enclosed. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your recommendation.
3. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Sally Wallace, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Privacy and Records Management (005R1), at 202-461-7450.



Robert T. Howard

### **Assistant Secretary's Comments to Office of Inspector General's Report**

The following Assistant Secretary's comments are submitted in response to the recommendation(s) in the Office of Inspector General's Report:

#### **OIG Recommendation(s)**

**Recommendation 11.** We recommend that the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology, after consultation with the OIG Director, Computer Crimes and Forensics Lab, implement policy to prohibit the practice of arbitrarily erasing hard drives without justification and to maintain proper documentation of erasures.

Concur **Target Completion Date:** Dec. 1, 2008

The Assistant Secretary of Information and Technology (OI&T) will initially develop a memorandum to OI&T Operations staff to address this issue. The memo will be issued by September 1, 2008.

This will be followed by the development of official VA policy. We expect the policy to be in VA concurrence by December 1, 2008.

## OIG Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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OIG Contact	Linda Fournier (202) 461-4500
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Acknowledgments	Charles Millard William Tully
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