



March 15, 2017

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Senior Executives Association (SEA) and its members, who are career federal executives in the Senior Executive Service (SES), and those in equivalent senior career leadership positions, including those serving at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), I to urge you to **vote no on H.R. 1259, the VA Accountability First Act of 2017.**

While we all agree that accountability is crucial to the successful operation of the federal government, this legislation exclusively focuses on negative and unnecessarily punitive actions that will only lead to disruption of service delivery to our nation's heroes and will exacerbate the VA's challenges filling the 45,000 job vacancies at the agency, including in key roles such as Medical Center and VISN Directors. A 2016 [SEA survey](#) of VA senior executives found that nearly every respondent (97%) was concerned about the ability of the agency to fill these crucial career leadership roles.

For the VA to succeed in its sacred mission, Congress must cease advancing the losing premise of a workforce policy that "the beatings will continue until morale improves." SEA is aware of no successful major corporation in America that is able to attract top talent by touting how important it is to fire and demean its employees.

This proposal is devoid of any positive or incentivizing measures – which are staples of private sector professional development – that could improve actually the performance of VA employees.

SEA is particularly concerned with and vehemently opposes the last provision in Section 3 of this legislation that would allow a "temporary exemption from certain limitations on initiation from removal" for SES members. This dangerous provision is most troublesome as it could ultimately facilitate a politically driven purge of dedicated career leaders from the VA and jeopardize the integrity and apolitical nature of the federal workforce.

While this legislation does not fully address a comprehensive strategy to ensure the long term success of the VA, we are pleased to see that it includes an admission of Congress' error by including the provision to repeal the harmful and likely unconstitutional VA SES removal provision (Section 713 of Title 38) that was authorized under the Choice Act.

SEA welcomes the opportunity to engage with any member interested in meaningful, forward-thinking reforms, such as H.R. 1367, that will both ensure accountability and promote excellence at the VA.

I appreciate your consideration of SEA's views. Please contact SEA's Senior Legislative & Media Coordinator Nikki Cannon at 202-463-8400; ncannon@shawbransford.com with questions.

Sincerely,

BILL VALDEZ
President