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Description of document: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Reduction in Force Memo 2025

Requested date: 05-March-2025

Release date: 09-April-2025

Posted date: 21-April-2025

Source of document: Department of Veterans Affairs
Freedom of Information Act Services (005R1C)
811 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420
[Department of Veteran Affairs FOIA Public Access Website](#)
Email: osvafoia@va.gov
FOIA.gov

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Washington DC 20420

April 9, 2025

In Reply Refer To: 001B
FOIA Request: 25-13203-F

This is the Initial Agency Decision to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Office of the Secretary, U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs (OSVA) dated March 5, 2025, referred to this FOIA Office on March 7, 2025, and assigned FOIA tracking number **25-13203-F**. You requested "A copy of the March 4, 2025 memo issued by the DVA Chief of Staff Christopher Syrek regarding Reduction on Force (RIFs). VIEWS 12864784."

Initial Agency Decision

For your information, OSVA searches and processes records only for the Office of the Secretary. Please be advised that a search was performed within our office, and one record totaling 4 pages was found to be responsive to your request with excisions made pursuant to FOIA Exemption 6 (5 U.S.C. §§ 552 (b)(6)). Lastly, because your search was less than 2 hours, you were not assessed any fees.

FOIA Exemption 6 exempts from disclosure of personnel files where the release of which would cause a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. This requires a balancing of the public's right to disclosure against the individual's right to privacy. The privacy interests of the individuals in the records you have requested outweigh any minimal public interest in disclosure of the information. Any private interest you may have in that information does not factor into the aforementioned balancing test. Specifically, the information being withheld, as indicated on the enclosed documents, under FOIA Exemption 6, consists of names, identities, email addresses, VA usernames, phone numbers, cellular numbers, of federal civilian employees and private citizens; we do however release the names of VA Senior Executives.

Federal civilian employees and private citizens retain a significant privacy interest under certain circumstances, such as in instances where the release of their information could represent a threat to their well-being, harassment, or their ability to function within their sphere of employment. The federal civilian employees and private citizens whose information is at issue have a substantial privacy interest in their personal information. In weighing the private versus the public interest, except names of VA Senior Executives, we find that there is no public interest in knowing the names, identities, email addresses, VA usernames, phone numbers, cellular numbers, of federal civilian employees and private citizens. The coverage of FOIA Exemption 6 is absolute unless the FOIA requester can demonstrate a countervailing public interest in the requested information by demonstrating that the individual is in a position to provide the requested information to members of the general public and that the information requested contributes significantly to the public's understanding of the activities of the Federal

Additionally, the requester must demonstrate how the public's need to understand the information significantly outweighs the privacy interest of the person to whom the information pertains. Upon consideration of the records, I have not been able to identify a countervailing public interest of sufficient magnitude to outweigh the privacy interest of the individuals whose names are redacted. The protected information has been redacted and (b)(6) inserted.

"Withholding a telephone number or e-mail address, alone, is not sufficient to protect that [privacy] interest; alternate means of contacting and harassing these employees would be readily discoverable on the Internet if this court ordered their names disclosed." Long v. Immigration & Customs Enf't, 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 160719 (D.C. Cir. 2017).

In this case, OSVA withheld the names of employees as well as their VA email addresses. In addition, the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, provides that a federal agency or department (hereinafter "agency ") may withhold responsive records only if: (1) the agency reasonably foresees that disclosure would harm an interest protected by one of the nine exemptions that FOIA enumerates; or (2) disclosure is prohibited by law. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(8)(A)(i). The foreseeable harm standard was applied while reviewing these records and applying FOIA exemption 6.

FOIA Mediation

As part of the 2007 FOIA amendments, the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) was created to offer mediation services to resolve disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies as a non-exclusive alternative to litigation. Using OGIS services does not affect your right to pursue litigation. Under the provisions of the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, the following contact information is provided to assist FOIA requesters in resolving disputes:

VA Central Office FOIA Public Liaison:

Name: VACO FOIA Service

Email Address: FOIAHelp@va.gov

Office of Government Information Services (OGIS)

Email Address: ogis@nara.gov

Mailing address:

National Archives and Records Administration

8601 Adelphi Road

College Park, MD 20740-6001

FOIA Appeal

This concludes OSVA's Initial Agency Decision to request **25-13203-F**. Please be advised that should you desire to do so; you may appeal the determination made in this response to:

Appeal by email: OGCfoiaappeals@va.gov
Office of General Counsel (024)
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

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If you should choose to file an appeal, please include a copy of this letter with your written appeal and clearly indicate the basis for your disagreement with the determination set forth in this response. Please be advised that in accordance with VA's implementing FOIA regulations at 38 C.F.R. § 1.559, your appeal must be postmarked no later than ninety (90) days of the date of this letter.

Sincerely,

REGINA
OLANEGAN

Digitally signed by
REGINA
OLANEGAN
Date: 2025.04.09
12:08:23 -04'00'

Regina Olanegan
OSVA FOIA Officer

Attachment: 4 pages

Date: March 4, 2025

From: Chief of Staff (00A)

Subj: Department of Veterans Affairs Agency Reduction in Force (RIF) and Reorganization Plan (ARRP) (VIEWS 12864784)

To: Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials

1. This memorandum initiates the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Department-wide review of mission, organization, and structure in order to achieve efficiencies dictated by President Trump's February 11, 2025, Executive Order Implementing the President's "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE) Workforce Optimization Initiative (Workforce Optimization) and the subsequent February 26, 2025, Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance document on RIF and Reorganization Plans. VA, in partnership with our DOGE leads, will move out aggressively, while taking a pragmatic and disciplined approach to identify and eliminate waste, reduce management and bureaucracy, reduce footprint, and increase workforce efficiency. Additionally, a portion of the savings garnered will be reinvested in the Veterans we serve and the systems required to support our workforce and execute our mission. Following a thorough review of mission and structure, the Department will affect a VA-wide RIF in August to resize and tailor the workforce to the mission and revised structure.

2. This effort will require the entirety of VA staff and organizations to work together in a collaborative fashion, as well as to coordinate actions with DOGE and the Administration as a whole, to achieve the desired results within the allotted time. For planning purposes, the Department's initial objective is to return to our 2019 end-strength numbers of 399,957 employees. Furthermore, VA Administrations and Staff Offices will need to detail sufficient personnel to support this effort as outlined in this memorandum to focus on implementation and to synergize VA efforts.

3. Implementation Timeline.

a. Information Gathering (due March 10, 2025): Administrations and Staff Offices will gather required information as outlined in Attachment 1. Additionally, a separate memorandum on RIF procedures will be released, which will include required information and actions.

b. Line of Effort (LOE) 1: Administrations and Staff Offices will conduct an internal review and analysis of their organizations with required products to be delivered by April 10, 2025, to provide responses to OMB and OPM Phase 2 requirements by April 14, 2025.

Subj: Department of Veterans Affairs Agency Reduction in Force and Reorganization Plan (ARRP) (VIEWS 12864784)

c. LOE 2 (Intra-Department): A Department-wide review will be completed by May 9, 2025.

d. VA will publish its Reorganization Plan in June 2025 with a subsequent Department-wide RIF prior to the end of fiscal year 2025, as required by OMB and OPM.

e. Throughout all phases of the operation, there will be ongoing reviews and interim briefings and decision points. Additional implementation guidance is forthcoming.

4. Program Implementation.

a. VA Reorganization Implementation Cell (VA RIC): The Office of Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness (HRA/OSP) will stand-up the VA RIC to serve as the program manager and focus on implementation actions. The VA RIC will expand to execute necessary functions for the reorganization. The following Administrations and Staff Offices are required to detail a minimum of one individual at a grade level of General Schedule-14 or higher to support the VA RIC activities and serve as the liaison to their organization: Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, National Cemetery Administration, HRA/OSP, Office of Information Technology, Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction, Office of Enterprise Integration, Office of General Counsel, Office of Management, and Board of Veterans' Appeals. Name(s) should be submitted to

(b)(6) @va.gov by March 5, 2025. The start date will commence on March 6, 2025 (location will be provided by March 5). Initial details will be for a period of 120 days. In addition, VA liaisons to DOGE will be integrated into VA RIC operations ensuring positive and continuous communications with the Administration through all phases of the operation.

b. Administrations and Staff Offices will designate a senior leader (Senior Executive Service level) to serve as a central point of contact for time sensitive issues, or where senior-level contact is needed to resolve issues. Name(s) should be submitted to (b)(6) @va.gov by March 5, 2025.

c. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and other Key Officials will serve on the Executive Review Group (ERG). Membership will also include Senior Advisors and VA DOGE liaisons. The ERG will address issues and make recommendations to the Secretary for decision. The Secretary or his designee will chair the ERG.

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5. The Secretary will chair an initial senior level meeting on March 5, 2025. Invitation is forthcoming.


Christopher D. Syrek

Attachment

**Initial Data Call - Information/Data Gathering
(February 28 – March 10)**

- Provision of Organization Charts and Structures for all organizations down to lowest level.
- Provision of unit manpower documents by organization.
- List of statutorily mandated functions / entities – certification that these have been interpreted to cover only what functions they explicitly require.
- List of regulatory directed functions.
- List of organizations and total number of positions:
 - That provide direct service to Veterans;
 - That support operations; and
 - Those that are management overhead.
- List of positions:
 - Essential positions that excluded from potential reduction / RIF; and
 - NOT mandated as essential during a lapse in appropriations (using the Agency Contingency Plans submitted to OMB in 2019).
- Installations: List of installations across the Department with assigned personnel and capacity (excess).
- Technology/Systems: Identification of all systems utilized by the Department for its mission to include costs, contract, and associated personnel.
- Initial input of any identified organization, unit, or mission should be eliminated or consolidated; and which specific subcomponents or functions, if any, should be expanded to deliver on the President's priorities.
- The suggested plan for Congressional engagement to gather input and agreement on major restructuring efforts and the movement of fundings between accounts, as applicable, including compliance with any Congressional notification requirements.

Additional implementation guidance is forthcoming.