

PEDRO R. PIERLUISI
PUERTO RICO

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
1213 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
(202) 225-2615 FAX: (202) 225-2154

SAN JUAN OFFICE:
157 AVENIDA DE LA CONSTITUCIÓN
ANTIGUO EDIFICIO DE MEDICINA TROPICAL
ALA DE ENFERMERÍA 2DO PISO
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO 00901
(787) 723-6333 FAX: (787) 729-7738

COMMITTEES:
ETHICS
JUDICIARY
NATURAL RESOURCES

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5401

August 24, 2011

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

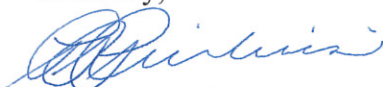
Dear Secretary Shinseki:

As you know, Ms. Wanda Mims, who has served as the Director of the VA Caribbean Healthcare System since 2009, has accepted a position as Director of the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System in southwestern Florida. As a result, the Department of Veterans Affairs is currently reviewing candidates to replace Ms. Mims as Director of the VA Caribbean Healthcare System. Given the importance of this position to military veterans in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, I know you share my view that the candidate search should be conducted in as careful and comprehensive a manner as possible. Ms. Mims was an outstanding director and her successor will have large shoes to fill. I ask that the VA keep me informed of all important developments as the hiring process unfolds, and I am available to meet with you or your staff to discuss this matter if you would find it helpful.

The Director of the VA Caribbean Healthcare System is responsible for overseeing operations at the VA Medical Center (VAMC) in San Juan and multiple Outpatient Clinics (OPCs), Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) and Rural Health Centers throughout Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. According to the latest available data, there were over 10,000 inpatient admissions and over 910,000 outpatient visits at VA health facilities in Puerto Rico during Fiscal Year 2009. The San Juan VAMC is among the most heavily-utilized hospitals in the VA system, and is currently undergoing a major, multi-phased renovation process at a cost of approximately \$300 million. Additional VA health facilities are scheduled to be activated in the coming years, including major construction projects in Mayagüez and Ponce. In Ponce, a \$60.6 million Health Care Center (HCC) will replace the existing Outpatient Clinic. The new HCC will provide services that go well beyond those that are currently offered, and will reduce the need for veterans in the southwest part of the Island to travel to San Juan for care.

In light of the foregoing, the need for a capable and experienced director at the VA Caribbean Healthcare System is clear. I thank you for your attention to this important matter and appreciate your efforts to ensure that the health care system for veterans in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands undergoes a seamless transition in leadership.

Sincerely,



Pedro R. Pierluisi
Member of Congress