



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers



NFFE News Story

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NFFE FIGHTS TO PROTECT VA MEMBERS FROM CONGRESSIONAL ATTACKS

While federal employees are forced to endure attack after attack from the current anti-worker Congress, one agency has experienced a particularly toxic stream of attacks in recent years. Following a national scandal in 2014, nurses and doctors at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have been under constant attack from Congress. While many of the attacks have been shrouded in the thin veil of “accountability measures,” NFFE has fought these measures for what they really are: attempts to erode the constitutional due process protections of federal employees undergoing disciplinary proceedings. Now, Congress appears poised to take the attacks one step further with the impending vote on S. 2921, a bill overhauling how rank-and-file employees are treated by management—but not without a fight from NFFE and our allies on Capitol Hill.



NFFE is fighting the most recent Congressional assault on worker rights for VA employees

Two important factors must be considered in the discussion of VA reform: First, the “accountability measures” in this legislation would not have prevented the falsifying of patient waiting lists that ignited calls for reform. Second, the rank-and-file VA medical professionals—those providing direct care for our nation’s cherished veterans—were not responsible for the recent scandals at the VA. The VA employees NFFE represents, many of them veterans themselves, are among the most dedicated employees in the federal workforce. They are fully committed to the mission of providing veterans with the highest quality care, and treating each patient with dignity and respect. The measures put forth by S. 2921 are punitive in nature, and will ultimately fail to achieve the desired reforms while simultaneously inviting a culture of fear among our veterans’ caregivers.

One provision of the bill would arbitrarily extend probationary periods by 60 days unless action is taken by an employee’s supervisor. Probationary employees are incredibly vulnerable to retaliation, discrimination, and other prohibited personnel practices, all the while maintaining no appeal rights or right to advance notice of termination. The extension of probationary periods would serve no purpose other than to silence potential whistleblowers. Accountability at the VA will not increase by making employees vulnerable to adverse action for a longer period of time; rather, accountability will be eroded.

Another provision of the bill would expedite the firing process of VA employees. As we have seen with previous legislative attempts to dismantle constitutionally-protected due process rights of federal employees, this legislation would place a burden so great on the employee to appeal adverse disciplinary decisions that the Chair of the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) has questioned the very constitutionality of such measures. A rushed termination process hampers the agency as much as it does the employee; making legitimate adverse actions more difficult. Again, accountability will be diminished, not increased.

Supporters of this bill claim to want to increase accountability at the VA, but the provisions of this bill will do more to erode accountability than increase it. NFFE will fight for our VA members on Capitol Hill against this damaging bill.