



June 12, 2017
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Federal-Postal Coalition, which is comprised of five million federal and postal employees, retirees across the country, I urge you to oppose S. 1094, the “Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017,” which will be considered on the House floor tomorrow.

This legislation purports to improve the operation of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), but fails to address its key problems,¹ such as filling the 49,000 vacancies that currently exist at the VA. Instead, the bill would undermine longstanding civil service protections that ensure VA employment is based on merit, and not political affiliation, or blind loyalty to superiors. In so doing, it would set a dangerous precedent for important civil service protections that apply to the entire federal workforce, and that provide a safeguard against corruption, mismanagement and political favoritism.

Notably, this legislation overrides negotiated grievance and arbitration procedures in existing collective-bargaining agreements entered into by the Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition, the standard of evidence that the agency must satisfy to remove an employee for misconduct would be significantly lowered. This likely would result in large-scale firings and an increase in targeting of frontline employees, many of which are veterans, for unjust reasons, including politics and retaliation for reporting mismanagement.

Equally as troubling as the lowering of the evidentiary standard, is the inability of a Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) Administrative Judge to mitigate the penalty proposed by the agency. The purpose of mitigating penalties is to ensure that agencies do not impose unduly harsh punishment for offenses that do not merit it. With the lowering of the evidentiary standard, and the inability of the reviewing body to mitigate a penalty, unjust firings will result.

For the reasons outlined here, we ask that you oppose S. 1094 when it comes to a vote on Tuesday.

Sincerely,

Kori Blalock Keller
Chair, Federal Postal Coalition

The Federal Postal Coalition represents over five million active and retired postal and federal employees and is comprised of the following:

American Federation of Government Employees, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, American Foreign Service Association, American Postal Workers Union, FAA Managers Association, Federal Managers Association, Federally Employed Women, International Association of Fire Fighters, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, Laborers International Union of North America, National Active and Retired

¹ See GAO-17-30, “Veterans Health Administration: Management Attention Is Needed to Address Systemic, Long-Standing Human Capital Challenges,” available here: <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-30>.

Federal Employees Association, National Air Traffic Controllers Association, National Association of Assistant United States Attorneys, National Association of Government Employees, National Association of Federal Veterinarians, National Association of Letter Carriers, National Association of Postal Supervisors, National Council of Social Security Management Associations, National Education Association, National Federation of Federal Employees, National Postal Mail Handlers Union, National Rural Letter Carriers Association, National Treasury Employees Union, National Weather Service Employees Organization, Organization of Professional Employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Patent Office Professional Association, Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, Professional Managers Association, Senior Executives Association, United Postmasters and Managers of America

