

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-4321**

October 20, 2020

The Honorable James P. Gfrerer  
Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology  
Office of Information and Technology  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Richard A. Stone, M.D.  
Executive in Charge  
Veterans Health Administration  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

John H. Windom  
Executive Director  
Office of Electronic Health Record Modernization  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
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Travis Dalton  
President  
Cerner Government Services  
Cerner Corporation  
2800 Rockcreek Parkway  
North Kansas City, MO

Dear Assistant Secretary Gfrerer, Dr. Stone, Mr. Windom, and Mr. Dalton:

During the September 30, 2020, hearing of the Subcommittee on Technology Modernization, we had an important discussion about advancing health record portability to empower veterans to direct their own seamless care. I would like to return to this subject because I believe it must be the animating purpose for all of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) and Cerner's efforts in Electronic Health Record Modernization.

I asked when we will be able to say to every veteran in the United States that they will be able to move seamlessly between the Veterans Health Administration and private health care providers, as they individually determine, and get access to all of their health information without running into technical hurdles. I do not believe this is a far-off aspirational goal. In fact, the technology and know-how already exist, and groundbreaking health systems and technology companies are already doing it.

I would like to attempt to put into technical terminology, which the time constraints of the hearing did not permit, how VA and Cerner can ensure veterans are able to access VistA and Cerner data on VA, Cerner, and third-party applications they trust on an equal playing field. Cerner back-end systems and data powering Cerner-developed applications should be exposed via standards-compliant Application Program Interfaces (APIs), currently FHIR APIs using the SMART on FHIR authorization standards, which are configured to accept existing VA credentials when issuing security tokens. Doing so will meet or exceed the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology's timelines for application access and will permit freedom of choice in health applications. Additionally, building on the CURES Act and forthcoming rules to prevent information blocking, this will soon enable community providers

under the MISSION Act to have application access without special intervention, greatly increasing their ability to innovate.

The MISSION Act was an important reform that cleared away some of the administrative restrictions and bureaucratic impediments that had built up in VA community care over the years. Veterans now have more autonomy, at least on paper, to determine where best to seek care. However, even though the law has recognized for decades that all U.S. citizens own their health records, the reality of control over those health records has lagged that ideal. In VA and elsewhere, health records exchange is still largely directed between the government and the community provider, not the veteran.

Patient-centric mobile applications are revolutionizing health care where data is unlocked and made available with appropriate cybersecurity safeguards. I have no doubt we share the same ultimate goal, and I hope to see VA and Cerner lean into this future. To that end, I ask that you consider the approach I describe above and indicate whether you agree to pursue it.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to have your staff contact Hannah Arvey, legislative aide, in my office at [hannah.arvey@mail.house.gov](mailto:hannah.arvey@mail.house.gov) and William Mallison, minority staff director for the Subcommittee on Technology Modernization, at [william.mallison@mail.house.gov](mailto:william.mallison@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,



**CHIP ROY**

Member

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs