

PCAFC interim final rule, but it was not thanks to the efforts of Congress, this Committee, or any Committee member's respective nonprofit organization.

We don't need handoffs, we need and deserve choice, and it's our choice to care for our Veterans at home; the program provides us the scaffolding to provide that care. This committee has had ample time, but the community sees little to no effort to support us; all we hear about is how we can be handed off. You have the ear of the current Secretary, the prior two Secretaries, Ms. Kabat as the National Director of Caregiver Program and now as Senior Advisor, therefore you have had ample time to provide recommendations, but we have not seen any action or recommendations regarding the erroneous discharges or false notes in our records. If you can't get the job done with your \$535 thousand dollar budget, there are others who are more than willing to make recommendations that will benefit this community in the way that's needed. Right the wrong or resign your seat on this committee.

Respectfully,

Robin Stitt

Good afternoon, members of the Committee.

My name is Robin Stitt, and I want to share that the services offered through the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers are a lifeline of support. When implemented correctly, the financial, emotional, and physical support is unmatched, but the program changed drastically with the 2020 final rule that resulted in false notes and erroneous discharges that caused the third purge in the history of the Caregiver Support Program.

Next, I would like to quote Senior Advisor Ms. Meg Kabat. She stated, "Social workers should rule the world", but I will have to disagree respectfully. Social workers at the Department of Veteran's Affairs have misinterpreted complex medical conditions when assessing eligibility for the PCAFC. This has resulted in many denials and discharges. Does VA policy allow for social workers to practice medicine in this manner? I think it would be worth looking into exactly what a social worker can and cannot ethically do in a clinical setting to ensure they are operating within their scope of practice.

This committee, with the guidance of Ms. Kabat, a Social Worker herself, made a recommendation to the Department of Veterans Affairs to ELEVATE Ms. Kabat to a senior position in the Office of the Secretary, where she is afforded oversight of all policy and program implementation at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

An Office of Inspector General Report audit titled "Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers: Management Improvements Needed" found that VHA lacked governance that ensured accountability for program management. Ms. Kabat was that management! Her performance as Senior Advisor mirrors her failures as National Director of PCAFC. It hasn't gone unnoticed within the caregiver community that Ms. Kabat is the common denominator between 2017, and 18, and the current purge is a direct consequence of the regulations she created as the National Director of the Caregiver Support Program. I'm recommending this committee request Ms. Kabat's reassignment from the Department of Veterans Affairs VA Caregiver Program and its regulation or policy, effective immediately, to allow for a fresh take on policy and implementation to align the Caregiver Support Program with Congressional intent correctly.

During the March 2022 Committee meeting, Mrs. Dole mentioned self-serving legislation titled the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act. It requires VA to provide a coordinated warm hand-off for veterans and caregivers denied or discharged from PCAFC to any other program for which they are eligible. A Congressional hearing was held and Steve Schwab, now a member of this committee, highlighted in his testimony the challenges caregivers are facing with the changes to PCAFC. Mr. Schwab stated that PCAFC should not be seen as the end-all-be-all of caregiving support that VA offers. He supports this legislation stating it "bolsters and expands the programs that are better suited for these families and lessen the pressure of being accepted into PCAFC". With all due respect, Mr. Schwab isn't a caregiver, so it would be inappropriate to presume to know what a "better-suited program" for these families would be. Adding a financial incentive to VA hospitals to enroll veterans in any other program than PCAFC is a stonewalling tactic that is deceitful at best and fiscally irresponsible at worst. It is also irresponsible to tell caregivers they are "back in" when referring to PCAFC discharges, as Mr. Schwab did in March 2022. Such misinformation soothed caregivers, as I imagine he intended it to, but it wasn't a sweet lie that caregivers needed. What we needed was change and new regulations. Only one organization was brave enough to take this on. Veteran Warriors petitioned the Department of Veterans Affairs in Federal court. This nonprofit overturned a portion of the regulation, and the lawsuit was cited thirty times in the