TO: Patrick Magnuson – Dirksen, Room 125
Joanne Hoff – Dirksen, Room 125
Sue Quantius – Capitol HVC 227
Kiya Batmanglidj – Capitol HVC 227
Chad Schulken – Hart, Room 125
Matt Washington – Longworth, Room 1016

SUBJECT: Transmittal of Report Requirements

As requested in the Joint Explanatory Statement for the Committee of Conference accompanying P.L. 115-244, I am transmitting the following:

- A report on Appointment Scheduling

Jerome E Pannullo, ACTING December 20, 2018

Jerome E Pannullo
Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary

Date

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES

REPORT TO CONGRESS ON APPOINTMENT SCHEDULING

Report Language: The conferees understand that the new electronic health record (EHR) contract includes an appointment scheduling system component that will be rolled out across the VA network in conjunction with the EHR system over a ten-year time period. While supportive of the implementation of a single EHR that includes all elements, including appointment scheduling, the conferees are disturbed that some regions of the country will not benefit from the scheduling system for a decade. An improved scheduling system must be one of VA's top priorities to address the continuing problem of delayed appointments. The conferees urge VA to consider alternatives that would permit all regions of the country to receive the benefits of a modern scheduling system in advance of the nationwide EHR system roll-out. The conferees understand that VA may consider decoupling the scheduling system from the rest of the EHR implementation, permitting its nationwide implementation far sooner. If that alternative is not adopted, VA is encouraged to consider implementing the commercial off-the-shelf scheduling solutions it is currently piloting. If evaluations of these pilots indicate that they provide significant interim or long-term benefits, the conferees urge their expansion to additional geographic areas. The conferees direct VA to report within 90 days of enactment of this Act whether it has decided to separate the scheduling component within the EHR contract and implement it separately on a faster track. If the Department declines to take this action, the conferees direct the agency to notify the Committees within 150 days of enactment of this Act of its alternative plans to accelerate nationwide implementation of an improved scheduling system.

Report Citation: Conference Report, P.L. 115-244, page 35

Discussion: Pursuant to P.L. 115-244, the Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is required by law to provide you with its response associated with the conference report language as to whether the VA will separate the scheduling component within the Electronic Health Record (EHR) contract and implement it separately and on a faster track or has 150 days (2/18/2019) to notify Congress of its alternative plans to support a Commercial Off the Shelf (COTS) scheduling system in advance of the full VA EHR deployment.

The VA intends to separate the scheduling component within the EHR Cerner contract and implement it on a faster track. VA believes that there is a return on investment in productivity and efficiency realized by accelerating the scheduling system. This will improve access for Veterans and streamline workflow for staff. Infrastructure costs are not expected to change; however, resources will be required sooner than the 10-year deployment schedule currently planned. Examples of additional costs may include, funding for Cerner software modifications and integration with our current scheduling platform, Organizational Change Management and program management costs. Our goal is to minimize additional funding requirements as planning ensues.

To mitigate the risks, VA will not begin these deployments until after the full Electronic Health Record implementation is achieved at the two sites in VISN 20. The first standalone scheduling module is tentatively planned for deployment in 2020 and the last such deployment in 2023.

VA thanks the HAC and SAC for their support of early implementation of the Cerner scheduling product.