



State Administration and Veterans' Affairs Interim Committee

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69th Montana Legislature

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ANIA ALDUENDA, Secretary

Name	City/State	Representing	Time & Date	Subject	Comment
Lisa Bennett	Red Lodge, MT	Self	3:22 PM 1/12/2026	Recommendations for Changes to Title 13 laws	See Attachment 4
Daniel Eakin	Sidney, MT	Self	2:06 PM 1/11/2026	Christi Jacobsen Postcard	1. Mailings are a waste of taxpayer money. How much money did these postcards cost? 2. I object to using state funds to send out party propaganda, and I believe it may be illegal. Only citizens ARE allowed to vote. The truth is that noncitizens have been barred from voting in federal elections since 1924. And in 1996, Congress made noncitizen voting in federal elections a crime punishable by fines and imprisonment. 3. I have served as an election judge multiple times, and to my knowledge the only verifiable noncitizens attempting to vote were in 2022 when two Philippine ladies on work visas wanted to vote in Phillips County. That's it. 4. We have a good clerk and recorder who is fair and conscientious in her job. Voters must show some form of ID on Election Day, and with absentee votes, her office checks and verifies the signature of the ballot with the voter registration. 5. The most concerning part about the SAVE Act is that President Trump wants access to all of our private data.

Mary Patterson	Hot Springs, MT	Self	4:45 PM 1/10/2026	recent postcard mailing from Secretary of State, Christy Jacobsen.	I was appalled and outraged to receive Christi Jacobsen's postcard regarding her proposed voting verification program. The post card makes it seem like Montana has voter fraud, when in fact that is not the case. It was sent at great taxpayer expense to all boxholders implying that it isn't already the law that only citizens can vote. What this flyer does is set forth fear and distrust of Montana's election system unnecessarily. Our state and local election systems have already been tested and found above fraud or reproach. This postcard intentionally tries to muddy the water. Please vote NO on any new voter verification laws as they are NOT necessary.
Doug Ferrell	Trout Creek, MT	Self	12:13 PM 1/10/2026	Postcard from SOS Jacobsen	I want to express my concern about a misleading postcard I received from our SOS Christi Jacobsen with the headline "Only Citizens Should Be Allowed to Vote". In fact only citizens are allowed to vote, and there is no evidence of significant numbers of non-citizens who have voted. It appears our SOS has used her office and taxpayers money to spread fear and misinformation. I request that this committee take steps to avoid this kind of misuse of government resources. Thank you, Doug Ferrell, Trout Creek, MT.
Shelley Eisenrich	Hot Springs, MT	Self	5:06 PM 1/9/2026	Federal SAVE Act Bill	Montana should not be a part of the SAVE Act. This is deceptive in that it implies that non-citizens are able to vote (they are not), creates fear and distrust of our elections systems (which have proven to be safe, legal and legitimate) and gives the government access to our private data, something I am very concerned about.
Mindy Ferrell	Trout Creek, MT	Self	4:28 PM 1/9/2026	Secy of State mailer	This past week, the Secy of State's Office sent out a misleading, fearmongering boxholder postcard that was paid for by taxpayer dollars. It spreads misleading information that implies that non-citizens can currently

					vote. They can't. I have been an Election Judge in literally every capacity of Sanders County's election process since 2016. Montana's and Sanders County's election process has been proven above reproach. Yet this postcard inflames an unnecessary fear that that is not the case. It also previews an implementation of governmental program requesting additional information be gathered and put into an already bloated and unsecure data base. The legislature should be able to better control the SOS purse strings to better protect and defend taxpayer investment. Misleading information such as this should not be allowed.
Colleen Hinds	Heron, MT	Self	1:14 PM 1/9/2026	Postcards sent out by Secretary of State, Christi, Jacobsen	This postcard implies that Montana's voting record has flaws! this is NOT true. it is already a law and closely followed by ALL county election judges: ,NO one can vote unless they are a citizen! To picture her as a partner of Donald \Trump is so base and misleading/ All voting is open to which ever political party each individual, wants,, not, just "R". And how much taxpayer money was spent on this smear/ fear tactic??? Please address this issue. Sincerely Colleen Hinds
Margaret Schmidt	Missoula, MT	Self	8:58 AM 1/8/2026	Do Not Add Montana to the SAVE Act	As a Montana voter, I urge to to keep Montana out of the SAVE Act. I do not want the federal government to access my private information. Non-citizen voting is a non-issue. So the SAVE Act is not necessary and certainly not worth violating Montanans' privacy. Thank you.

Attachment 4

I. Voter Roll Integrity & Transparency

- **Free Public Access:** Voter rolls must be provided to citizens at no cost (mirroring Florida's system), ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent public auditing of the government.
- **Enhanced Data Validation:** Rolls must include birthdates to help identify deceased voters, duplicate registrations, and name changes.
- **Annual Absentee Applications:** To ensure the most accurate mailing lists, all Montana absentee voters should be required to re-apply for their ballots **annually**, aligning with the standard for UOCAVA (military and overseas) voters.
- **Administrative Penalties:** Election administrators who fail to remove inactive or deceased voters within 30 days of notification must face specific civil penalties or fines. Additionally, a county attorney most certainly will not want to prosecute one of their own, so I advise it isn't the county attorney who is required to file the charges.

II. Ballot Chain of Custody & MCA 13-13-241 Reform

- **Prohibiting Early Separation & Ensuring Supervised Chain of Custody:** To eliminate current "security vacuums," **MCA 13-13-241(1)** must be amended to prohibit election administrators from opening outer signature envelopes or separating them from inner secrecy envelopes until the official public counting period begins. Currently, envelopes are opened up to 25+ days early, which destroys the identifying link between the voter and the ballot. To maintain a secure chain of custody, a bipartisan team of election judges and authorized poll watchers must be physically present from the exact moment an envelope is opened until the ballot is tabulated. Ballots and envelopes must never be left unattended or stored overnight without on-site bipartisan supervision to prevent tampering.
- Furthermore, the signature verification process must be fully transparent, either through direct observation by a bipartisan panel of judges or via a live-stream camera feed accessible to the public and all poll watchers. Finally, a formal, documented challenge process must be established to ensure any questionable envelopes are marked as "provisional" and set aside for further validation before being included in the final count.
- **The "Phantom Envelope" Reconciliation:** The total number of ballots counted must exactly match the number of unique signature envelopes

received. This addresses the 4,592-vote "phantom" gap discovered in the Missoula 2020 election.

- **Professional Signature Analysis:** Access to physical signature envelopes for professional analysis must be legally protected to verify findings such as the dozens of nursing home ballots in Missoula that appeared to be signed by the same person.

III. Observer Rights & Law Enforcement (MCA 13-13-120)

- **Poll Watcher Rights Enforcement:** Although **MCA 13-13-120** legally permits poll watchers to see all entries of election results, administrators frequently block this access.
- **Law Enforcement Training:** The law must be corrected so that on-site law enforcement (Police/Sheriffs) actively enforces these observer rights rather than deferring entirely to election administrators who may be in violation of the law.
- **Mandatory POST Training:** Election law investigation must be a mandatory, 8-hour POST-certified training for all Montana Sheriffs.

IV. Precinct-Level Structure & Size Parity

- **The 10% Population Rule:** To ensure fair representation and manageable hand-counting, the population of all precincts within a county must remain within a **10% variance** of each other.
 - **Legal Precedent:** Federal courts in Illinois (*Hulme v. Madison County*, 2001) have established that a total population deviation of **10% or less** is the threshold for a plan to be considered "presumptively constitutional".
- **Abolish Central Counting:** All ballots must be hand-counted at the precinct level by local citizens to ensure immediate, observable transparency.
- **Anonymity in Small Districts:** In districts with fewer than 25 voters, offices must be placed on a separate "Ballot C" to prevent the Cast Vote Record (CVR) from being used to identify individual voters.

V. Transparency & Record Retention

- **Mandatory Video Retention:** Law must mandate the retention of all election-day security and counting footage for a minimum of 60 days. In Missoula, requested video "disappeared" or was deleted only 42 days after the election.
- **Record Fee Caps:** Establish a statutory cap on fees for public records to prevent administrators from charging exorbitant sums (e.g., \$7,000+) to block transparency.
- **Adjudication Logs:** Logs of "adjudicated" or "resolution" ballots must be public records to show how contested ballots were handled.

VI. Judicial & Mental Capacity Alignment

- **Harmonized Terminology:** Align the "unsound mind" language in **MCA 13-1-111** with the "incapacitated person" language in **Title 72**.
- **Mandated Capacity Findings:** Judges in guardianship hearings must be required by law to determine if the individual specifically retains the mental capacity to vote.
- **Automated Data Sharing:** The Clerk of Court must be mandated to automatically share these judicial determinations with election offices to update voter rolls.

VII. Protection of Citizen Challenger Rights

- **Batch Challenges:** Amend **MCA 13-13-301** to allow citizens to submit a list of voter challenges on a single form rather than requiring individual notarized affidavits for every name.
- **Ending Intimidation:** Remove felony perjury threats for honest clerical errors by volunteers to end the "chilling effect" on citizen oversight.

Federal Legislative Request

To: Senator Steve Daines, Congressman Ryan Zinke, Congressman Troy Downing, and Senator Tim Sheehy.

Proposal: The National Mail-In Ballot Accountability & Tracking Act We request the introduction of federal legislation requiring **full end-to-end tracking of all absentee and mail-in ballots** nationwide. This system must include:

1. **Unique Tracking Identifiers:** Every ballot must have a unique, non-identifying barcode tracked through every step of the postal and administrative process.
2. **Public Tracking Portal:** Voters and observers must be able to verify when a ballot was printed, mailed, received, and separated for counting.
3. **Real-Time Reconciliation:** Federal standards must mandate that the number of ballots counted **must exactly match** the number of unique tracking affirmations received, eliminating "phantom envelope" discrepancies.

Public Comment submitted by Dave Kesler at the January 12, 2026 SAVA Meeting

VA Oversight Legislative Committee

Subject; Trent Sickles

1/12/26

Let me preface with, I have a tremendous respect and admiration for the service of our veterans. Our veterans and service members as well as those who care for them, deserve the best care and treatment available and in a quick and orderly fashion. In light of their service some leniency should be afforded but truth and justice should always prevail, as our constitution intends. There is no excuse for not doing the job you're hired to do, or intimidating or harassing staff, Veteran or not.

I don't know the man I'm about to tell you about and am only relaying what I've been told by the staff under him, who are too afraid of retaliation to come forward on their own. Their fear of retaliation was tangible and obviously real. What I'm relaying is what they've told me.

It has recently come to my attention that Veterans have had problems receiving care due to defective equipment purchases, ineffective and retaliatory actions by the department head and what I consider department wide sexual harassment by the Radiology department head. In talking with multiple VA Radiology employees I was told that after multiple employee interviews the Dept head was suspended for 9 of the last 12 months and not allowed direct contact with Radiology department personnel and since his return his behavior has not changed. As of today he is 72 days late in completing performance reviews for the roughly 25 staff he supervises, costing them up to \$2000 each in performance bonuses. I'm told he wears extremely tight pants and stands in front of them both individually or in groups "hip thrusting" or "slow motion twerking", making the staff so uncomfortable I'm told 2 women have quit their jobs.

I was told that in August, the Radiology Department Manager rented an MRI machine for the next 5 years and is paying roughly the purchase price of the machine each year. So he's paying five times the cost of a new machine and in 5 years he's back to square one with no machine. I'm told he was advised strongly by his staff with experience with this model, not to rent this particular machine and to purchase another type machine better suited to what the VA MRI machine would be used for. The cost I'm hearing is roughly \$1.75 Million per year. I'm also told this machine only has one, part time, contract operator and the machine isn't working correctly so it's virtually not in use. After 5 months this is unacceptable and robbing our Veterans of needed services.

I'm told that a CT repair technician was called to service one of the two CT machines, scheduled an appointment, showed up when scheduled time only to find the Department director didn't check the machine use schedule and the technician was sent home to Great Falls without accessing the CT machine for the updates and repairs.

I've been told he ordered a portable CT machine, against staff recommendations, had it installed with a diesel generator. He oversaw the installation, staff even witnessed him "stepping off" the location to ensure it would fit. I was told that two of the CT techs had to be taken to the ER because his generator CO2 poisoned them while working.

Each year the staff at the VA receives a performance bonus of up to \$2000 or 40 hrs paid time off. It's each department head's job to complete an assessment on each of the employees under them and sign off on the bonuses by October 31. As of today it's been 72 days since these evaluations were to be completed and they're still not done, robbing the roughly 25 employees under him of their earned bonuses. The staff has emailed multiple times and gets promises back but is ultimately blown off. After his ~~90-day~~ suspension and being escorted out of the building twice by police it appears this is retaliatory infliction of hardship on the staff I assume he blames for his disciplinary actions. Please see pages 3-8 for more details on the bonuses delays.

9 months

I talked with three of the Radiology department ladies and each one told me mirroring accounts of his "hip thrusting" and that it made them extremely uncomfortable. It was described in various words that all describe him thrusting his genitalia/hips forward and back, generally toward the women he was speaking to. He was also described as regularly spreading his legs, sticking his butt out and "squatting" or "twerking in slow motion" in front of them. I'm no doctor, maybe there's a medical explanation but I cannot find an excuse to behave that way in front of any woman in any professional setting, or anywhere else for that matter.

Medical imaging is shown to provide up to 80% of patient diagnosis so this is not an area where inefficiencies, incompetence or sexual harassment can be tolerated. His reported dereliction of duty, incompetence and harassment is causing our Vets to wait up to a year sometimes, or go out the the private hospitals that are also backlogged. This is unacceptable but also correctable by replacing the derelict employee.

Thank you for helping protect our veterans and those that serve them in the facilities in MT and for your time and consideration into this matter. I believe we are all on the same page here. We want to root out fraud, waste, and abuse, streamline the process of care, and the best outcomes for everyone involved.

Dave Kesler III
Philipsburg, Mt. 59858
406-491-2650

Printed from email received from employee wishing to remain anonymous

Hey Dave,

Here are the easiest issues to highlight with Trent in Radiology.

-Paying for an MRI machine monthly that currently isn't running correctly so isn't seeing any patients. Resulting in patients having to go to Care in the Community.

-Employee performance evals have yet to be completed by Trent, were due 10/31. Resulting in employees missing out on time off/monetary awards for their hard work.

-Not abiding by and actively working against employees reasonable accommodations approved by HR and the employee's medical provider.

-Allowing numerous formal complaints about specific employees conduct to go unchecked for years. Resulting in those specific employees making Radiology a toxic environment for everyone.

-Missing deadlines on almost every task given to him, even by other departments, regardless of the importance of the task.

-Voluntarily acting as the subject matter expert on numerous contracts that he had no business heading, and in turn royally screwing them up. Resulting in a huge amount of wasted money.

-Intimidation of female employees when he doesn't get his way.

I'm sure there is more, those are just the highlights I could think of off the top of my head. There was a formal investigation done by one of his interim supervisors and the Union about a year (maybe more) ago that dealt with a lot of this. He was put on a 9 month detail then brought back to the department and nothing has changed.

EMPLOYEE EMAIL 2

Regarding the intimidation there was a formal EEO complaint that got escalated to National but took so long that it essentially "timed out". We don't have anything other than hearsay for the weird sexual stuff but there's more than one person who has the same facts about it.

The Union was actually on our side for that investigation. Trent is supervisor so he couldn't be backed by the union. His last boss who was around for that actually recommended termination but the lazy leadership above him couldn't be bothered.

When the time comes there are definitely receipts of \$ amount wasted. I just want to make sure that's all done above board- I still need my job.

From:Busscher, Darla D. <Darla.Busscher@va.gov>

Sent:Wednesday, December 10, 2025 4:45 PM

To:Chandler, Seth D. <Seth.Chandler@va.gov>; Jost, Tamara R. <Tamara.Jost@va.gov>; Combs, Alice NMI. <Alice.Combs@va.gov>

Cc:Young, Lucas A. <Lucas.Young1@va.gov>; Bradbury, Yvonne T. <Yvonne.Bradbury@va.gov>; Busscher, Darla D. <Darla.Busscher@va.gov>; Cheeseman, Eric D. <Eric.Cheeseman@va.gov>; Conley, Catherina M. <Catherina.Conley@va.gov>; Eckhart, Carmin L. <Carmin.Eckhart@va.gov>; Fleury, Nathan B. <Nathan.Fleury@va.gov>; Foley, Amber J. <Amber.Foley@va.gov>; Hansing, Jami L. <Jami.Hansing@va.gov>; Hauge, Lacey A. <Lacey.Hauge@va.gov>; Henson, Lisa M. <Lisa.Henson2@va.gov>; Hyndman, Sidney P. <Sidney.Hyndman@va.gov>; Kelly, Melissa <Melissa.Kelly10@va.gov>; Kuhlman, Hilary L. <Hilary.Kuhlman@va.gov>; Nelson, Michelle <Michelle.Nelson9@va.gov>; Osterman, Kristiana N. <Kristiana.Osterman@va.gov>; Phillips, Jason L. <Jason.Phillips@va.gov>; Raynor, Bobbi J. <Bobbi.Raynor@va.gov>; Ward, Digna <Digna.Ward@va.gov>; Zuraff, Ceara A. <Ceara.Zuraff@va.gov>

Subject:Performance Evaluations

Dear Dr. Chandler, Tamara, and Alice:

We are writing to bring to your immediate attention a serious and ongoing issue within our department concerning performance evaluations. The evaluations were due today, and once again, they have not been submitted by Trent Sickles. To our knowledge no evals have been completed for Fort Harrison radiology. We have no knowledge of the other radiology clinics within MTVA.

This delay is not an isolated incident but rather part of a persistent pattern of missed deadlines and neglected responsibilities. Such repeated oversights directly affect our eligibility for monetary or time-off awards, undermining our chances of recognition despite our hard work and dedication. Also, we were instructed to “give grace” and let past issues be “water under the bridge” and once again, it was made evident, that our efforts are not being fully valued by our supervisor.

What adds to our frustration is the fact that Trent Sickles was previously removed from the department unexpectedly without explanation. Since his return, the same problems have reoccurred, indicating no meaningful improvement or commitment to the responsibilities of his role. This continued negligence is severely impacting our morale and productivity, strengthening the belief that our efforts and contributions are undervalued by leadership. There is also growing concern among many of us that these decisions may be perceived as retaliatory in nature.

The situation is unacceptable and must be addressed asap. We request immediate action to ensure that the current evaluations are completed and submitted without further delay. Furthermore, we need a clear plan and commitment to meeting all future deadlines to prevent such issues from recurring.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this issue. We hope for a quick resolution.

Thank you,

Darla, Jami, Lisa, Luke, Eric, and Hilary

Darla Busscher, R.T.(N)(ARRT)
Nuclear Medicine Technologist
Diagnostic Imaging
Fort Harrison VA Medical Center
3687 Veterans Dr.
Fort Harrison, MT 59636-9703

406.447.7614 (O)

406.410.2177 ©

From: Sickles, Trent <Jefferson.Sickles@va.gov>

Sent: Tuesday, December 30, 2025 11:42 AM

To: Hansing, Jami L. <Jami.Hansing@va.gov>; Bradbury, Yvonne T. <Yvonne.Bradbury@va.gov>; Busscher, Darla D. <Darla.Busscher@va.gov>; Cheeseman, Eric D. <Eric.Cheeseman@va.gov>; Conley, Catherina M. <Catherina.Conley@va.gov>; Eckhart, Carmin L. <Carmin.Eckhart@va.gov>; Fleury, Nathan B. <Nathan.Fleury@va.gov>; Foley, Amber J. <Amber.Foley@va.gov>; Hauge, Lacey A. <Lacey.Hauge@va.gov>; Henson, Lisa M. <Lisa.Henson2@va.gov>; Hyndman, Sidney P. <Sidney.Hyndman@va.gov>; Kelly, Melissa <Melissa.Kelly10@va.gov>; Kuhlman, Hilary L. <Hilary.Kuhlman@va.gov>; Osterman, Kristiana N. <Kristiana.Osterman@va.gov>; Nelson, Michelle <Michelle.Nelson9@va.gov>; Phillips, Jason L. <Jason.Phillips@va.gov>; Raynor, Bobbi J. <Bobbi.Raynor@va.gov>; Visser, Patricia <Patricia.Visser@va.gov>; Young, Lucas A. <Lucas.Young1@va.gov>; Zuraff, Ceara A. <Ceara.Zuraff@va.gov>

Cc: Popwell, Richard E. <Richard.Popwell@va.gov>; Jost, Tamara R. <Tamara.Jost@va.gov>; Combs, Alice NMI. <Alice.Combs@va.gov>

Subject: RE: 2025 APPRAISAL UPDATE 11 DEC 2025

Good morning!

This was the topic of discussion with Dr. Popwell this morning during our daily huddle and my efforts have been focused on beefing up the appraisals where I can. At a minimum, I can tell you that everyone has been rated fully successful for 2025. I'm doing my best to recognize exceptional performance under the established standards, and this has proven quite challenging. This week and the next will be spent finalizing them and getting the 1:1 meetings scheduled.

V/R,

Trent Sickles, CRA

Diagnostic Imaging Administrator

Montana VA Health Care System

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Office: (406) 447-7605

Cell: (406) 422-2353

From:Hansing, Jami L. <Jami.Hansing@va.gov>

Sent:Tuesday, December 30, 2025 10:53 AM

To:Sickles, Trent <Jefferson.Sickles@va.gov>; Bradbury, Yvonne T. <Yvonne.Bradbury@va.gov>; Busscher, Darla D. <Darla.Busscher@va.gov>; Cheeseman, Eric D. <Eric.Cheeseman@va.gov>; Conley, Catherina M. <Catherina.Conley@va.gov>; Eckhart, Carmin L. <Carmin.Eckhart@va.gov>; Fleury, Nathan B. <Nathan.Fleury@va.gov>; Foley, Amber J. <Amber.Foley@va.gov>; Hauge, Lacey A. <Lacey.Hauge@va.gov>; Henson, Lisa M. <Lisa.Henson2@va.gov>; Hyndman, Sidney P. <Sidney.Hyndman@va.gov>; Kelly, Melissa <Melissa.Kelly10@va.gov>; Kuhlman, Hilary L. <Hilary.Kuhlman@va.gov>; Osterman, Kristiana N. <Kristiana.Osterman@va.gov>; Nelson, Michelle <Michelle.Nelson9@va.gov>; Phillips, Jason L. <Jason.Phillips@va.gov>; Raynor, Bobbi J. <Bobbi.Raynor@va.gov>; Visser, Patricia <Patricia.Visser@va.gov>; Young, Lucas A. <Lucas.Young1@va.gov>; Zuraff, Ceara A. <Ceara.Zuraff@va.gov>

Cc:Popwell, Richard E. <Richard.Popwell@va.gov>; Jost, Tamara R. <Tamara.Jost@va.gov>; Combs, Alice NMI. <Alice.Combs@va.gov>

Subject:RE: 2025 APPRAISAL UPDATE 11 DEC 2025

I would like to touch base regarding our past due performance evaluations. We were told that they would be done 12/15 and it is now 15 days later and we, at Fort Harrison, have not seen any evaluations. If you could give us an idea of when these will be ready, that would be greatly appreciated. There is not a lot of grace left to give as it is affecting our time off or monetary potential that could be awarded.

Jami Hansing and the rest of the Rad Crew

From:Sickles, Trent <Jefferson.Sickles@va.gov>

Sent:Thursday, December 11, 2025 4:48 PM

To:Bradbury, Yvonne T. <Yvonne.Bradbury@va.gov>; Busscher, Darla D. <Darla.Busscher@va.gov>; Cheeseman, Eric D. <Eric.Cheeseman@va.gov>; Conley, Catherina M. <Catherina.Conley@va.gov>; Eckhart, Carmin L. <Carmin.Eckhart@va.gov>; Fleury, Nathan B. <Nathan.Fleury@va.gov>; Foley, Amber J. <Amber.Foley@va.gov>; Hansing, Jami L. <Jami.Hansing@va.gov>; Hauge, Lacey A. <Lacey.Hauge@va.gov>; Henson, Lisa M. <Lisa.Henson2@va.gov>; Hyndman, Sidney P. <Sidney.Hyndman@va.gov>; Kelly, Melissa <Melissa.Kelly10@va.gov>; Kuhlman, Hilary L. <Hilary.Kuhlman@va.gov>; Osterman, Kristiana N. <Kristiana.Osterman@va.gov>; Nelson, Michelle <Michelle.Nelson9@va.gov>; Phillips, Jason L. <Jason.Phillips@va.gov>; Raynor, Bobbi J. <Bobbi.Raynor@va.gov>; Visser, Patricia <Patricia.Visser@va.gov>; Young, Lucas A. <Lucas.Young1@va.gov>; Zuraff, Ceara A. <Ceara.Zuraff@va.gov>

Cc:Popwell, Richard E. <Richard.Popwell@va.gov>; Jost, Tamara R. <Tamara.Jost@va.gov>; Combs, Alice NMI. <Alice.Combs@va.gov>

Subject:2025 APPRAISAL UPDATE 11 DEC 2025

Good afternoon, Rad Crew!

Performance appraisals have been especially challenging this year, and many are in various stages of HRD review. I continue to work on these and I am committed to completing all submissions by this coming Monday, the 15th. I will be scheduling times to meet and discuss these next week as they are finalized. Dr. Popwell has expressed an interest in joining these meetings (when his schedule allows) as an opportunity to meet in person with the FHM team members. Billings and Missoula will be completed through Teams meetings.

In response to the concern brought forward regarding monetary award or selection of comp time, I will have three days after the finalized appraisal is returned to discuss the performance rating and determine if the employee would like to receive the monetary award or the Time Off Award (when applicable). Thank you for hanging in there a little longer as I finish up this week.

V/R,

Trent Sickles, CRA

Diagnostic Imaging Administrator

Montana VA Health Care System

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Office: (406) 447-7605

Cell: (406) 422-2353

Date: December 4, 2025

From: Acting Chief Human Capital Management (106A)

Subj: Performance Award Guidance for Fiscal Year 2025 Ratings

To: Assistant Under Secretaries for Health, VHA Central Office Leaders, Veterans Integrated Service Network Directors (VISN 01-23), Medical Center Directors (00), and Chief Officers or Equivalent

1. VHA is communicating guidance for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 employee awards pursuant to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Memorandum, *Performance Management for Federal Employees*, dated June 17, 2025 (revised July 17, 2025), OPM Memorandum, *Guidance on Awards for Federal Employees*, dated August 11, 2025, Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness' Memorandum, *Performance Management and Monetary Awards and Bonus Guidance for Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026*, dated September 23, 2025, and Secretary Memorandum, *Performance-Based Awards Guidance for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Annual Ratings*, dated December 3, 2025.

2.. To recognize and reward our employees, VHA will implement standardized performance award amounts to recognize employee contributions for the FY 2025 rating cycle. These amounts must be used by all VHA components and no deviation from these amounts is authorized.

a. Mandatory award amounts are outlined in Attachment A. For employees with overall ratings of Fully Successful (with at least one critical element or category rated as Exceptional or Outstanding), Excellent, or Outstanding, the employee will be provided a choice between the cash amount or the number of hours of time off listed in the chart. Awards must be cash or time off and cannot be a combination of both.

b. For an employee with an overall rating of Fully Successful on an 0750/Executive Career Field (ECF) appraisal to be eligible to receive a cash or time off award, they must be rated Exceptional in at least one critical element. For an employee with an overall rating of Fully Successful on a proficiency to be eligible to receive a cash or time off award, they must be rated Outstanding in at least one category.

c. Supervisory Superior Performance award amounts will only be applicable if the employee meets the definition of a supervisory position¹ and is on a Department

¹ A supervisor is defined as directing the work of at least one subordinate employee and meets the definition in 5 USC 7103 (10) or (11):

(10) "supervisor" means an individual employed by an agency having authority in the interest of the agency to hire, direct, assign, promote, reward, transfer, furlough, layoff, recall, suspend, discipline, or remove employees, to adjust their grievances, or to effectively recommend such action, if the exercise of the authority is not merely routine or clerical in nature but requires the consistent exercise of independent judgment, except that, with respect to any unit which includes

Page 2.

Subj: Performance Award Guidance for Fiscal Year 2025

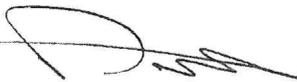
of Veterans Affairs (VA) Form 3482e appraisal (ECF) for at least 90 calendar days before the end of the rating cycle.

3. Any employee issued a decision to reprimand, suspend, demote, or remove that was effected in FY 2025 or FY 2026, prior to the issuance of Superior Performance awards, is ineligible to receive an award.

4. Only in rare circumstances will extraordinary performance or contributions to organizational goals during a rating period result in a Quality Step Increase (QSI) being granted. QSIs do not count against the award pool but should be calculated and approved based on each organization's current GOE budget. 5% of their budget for each VISN or Central Office organization may be used to provide QSIs for their organization and must establish controls on QSIs to ensure a limited number are approved within their organization for only those with sustained high-quality performance. VA Handbook 5017 must be followed for all QSIs and any associated combination awards to include the use of a separate approval authority.

5. VA Handbook 5013 requires performance appraisal ratings and supervisor performance awards to be processed by human resources (HR) offices in the HRSmart system as soon as possible, but no later than 90 calendar days after the end of the rating cycle. Performance awards should be processed by December 30, 2025, for any ratings communicated by the November 30, 2025, deadline.

6. If you have any questions regarding this guidance or VA's performance management and awards policy, please contact your servicing HR office. Questions from servicing HR offices can be directed to Krista Jablonski (Krista.Jablonski@va.gov), John Bercik (John.Bercik@va.gov), or Anne Burnham (Anne.Burnham@va.gov).



David Perry
Acting Chief Human Capital Management

Attachments:

Attachment A
OM Award guidance

firefighters or nurses, the term "supervisor" includes only those individuals who devote a preponderance of their employment time to exercising such authority;

(11) "management official" means an individual employed by an agency in a position the duties and responsibilities of which require or authorize the individual to formulate, determine, or influence the policies of the agency;

Attachment A: Mandatory Award Amounts

Grade	Fully Successful +1 CE Exceptional		Excellent / High Satisfactory		Outstanding	
	Non-Supervisor	Supervisor	Non-Supervisor	Supervisor	Non-Supervisor	Supervisor
	Or 8 Hours TOA		Or 24 Hours TOA		Or 40 Hours TOA	
GS-8 and Below, WG-1 to WG-6, WL-1 to WL 6	\$625	\$800	\$1,000	\$1,250	\$1,600	\$2,200
GS-9 to GS-11, WG-7 to WG-9, WL-7 to WL-9, WS-1 to WS-5	\$700	\$950	\$1,100	\$1,675	\$1,850	\$3,000
GS-12, WG-10 to WG-12, WL-10 to WL-12, WS-6 to WS-10, RN 1-3, PAs 1-3, and Optometrists or Chiropractors 11-13	\$875	\$1,025	\$1,400	\$1,875	\$2,550	\$4,000
GS-13, WS-11 to WS-12, Physicians, Dentists and Podiatrists, RN 4, PAs 4-5, and Optometrists or Chiropractors 14-15	\$950	\$1,100	\$1,675	\$3,000	\$3,100	\$5,200
GS-14, WS-13 to WS-15	\$1,000	\$1,350	\$2,200	\$3,600	\$4,150	\$6,700
GS-15, Chiefs of Staff, RN V	\$1,250	\$1,600	\$2,750	\$4,750	\$5,200	\$8,800

Public Comment submitted by Loy Chvilicek at the January 12, 2026 SAVA Meeting

IN THE NAME AND BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)
State of Montana)

After full consideration of the matter, and pursuant to the authority vested in the Secretary of State, I Corey Stapleton, Montana Secretary of State, hereby approve for use in any election in the State of Montana

ES&S EXPRESSVOTE (HW 2.1)

I further certify that upon examination, held August 28, 2019, that said voting systems meet the requirements set forth in Title 13, Chapter 17, Montana Code Annotated and the Administrative Rules of Montana 44.3.1701 through 44.3.1711.

A State certification is not:

- An endorsement of a manufacturer, voting system, or any of the system's components.
- A State warranty of the voting system or any of its components.
- A determination that a voting system, when fielded, will be operated in a manner that meets all Help America Vote Act requirements.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Great Seal of the State of Montana at Helena, Montana, this 3rd day of September, 2019.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Corey Stapleton".

COREY STAPLETON
Secretary of State





CHRISTI JACOBSEN
MONTANA SECRETARY OF STATE

February 2, 2022

Rep. Ed Hill
PO Box 5
Havre, MT 59501

Hello Representative Hill,

I hope you and yours are doing well in the new year.

Thank you for reaching out with your thoughts regarding election integrity. As you know, it's the mission of the Office of the Secretary of State to protect the integrity of elections, and the Legislature, Governor, and Secretary of State partnered and were successful in enhancing election transparency to improve voter confidence.

Bolstering election integrity was a priority and was achieved during the 67th Legislative Session:

- Photo ID.
 - Senate Bill 169 outlines the required identification for voter registration, voting and provisional voting.
- Voter maintenance.
 - Senate Bill 170 requires county election administrators to annually review and maintain their voter registration list. More than 30,000 ballots were undeliverable during the 2020 election, and this bill will clean up the voter roll.
- Late registration.
 - House Bill 176 revises late voter registration to noon the day before an election, providing election administrators with ample time to focus on voting during Election Day.
- Minor party qualifications.
 - Senate Bill 350 adjusts minor party qualifications and provides deadlines for removing names from a petition.
- Election security.
 - House Bill 530 requires county election administrators to annually assess their compliance with election security rules.

Keep in mind, the above bills were passed after the 2020 election.

MONTANA STATE CAPITOL • PO Box 202801 • HELENA, MONTANA 59620-2801
TELEPHONE: (406) 444-2034 • FAX: (406) 444-3976 • TTY: (406) 444-9068 • SOS.MT.GOV

ELECTIONWARE COUNTY/ELECTIONWARE STATE
FLORIDA (EVS 6.5.0.0)
11 2026
PRECINCT ONE, PRECINCT ONE



FAVORITE DOG BREED-----
LABRADOR

FAVORITE U.S. BEACH-----
DAYTONA BEACH, FLORIDA

FAVORITE WAY TO SPEND FREE TIME-----
BROWSING THE INTERNET
NO SELECTION

PROPOSITION 1-----
YES

PROPOSITION 2-----
YES

*Dual Factor
authentication*

Public Comment submitted by Mary Beveridge at the January 12, 2026 SAVA Meeting

SAVE Program Does Not Verify
US Citizenship ONLY Naturalized Citizens
(Immigrants)

ITIN INFO

Voter registration and ITIN numbers

- *No Match
May Be A
Red Flag.*
*SAVE
PROGRAM
Will Verify
ITIN #*
No Match Result: If the last four digits of an ITIN are submitted to the SSA database, it will likely result in a "no match" or an incorrect match (e.g., a false positive if those four digits match an actual SSN in the system, though the full record details would differ) because the SSA's enumeration records are based on a complete 9-digit SSN. Voter registration verification is only allowed to use the last four. The SSA cannot verify ITINs.
- Different Databases: The SSA database (used for the Help America Vote Verification, or HAVV, system) is designed to verify SSNs. An ITIN is an IRS-issued tax processing number for individuals who are not eligible for an SSN and is only for federal tax purposes.
- **The ITIN was created for tax purposes.** The ITIN was created by the IRS in July 1996 to allow foreign nationals and other individuals who are not eligible for an SSN to comply with U.S. tax laws.
- **ITINs are not SSNs.** The ITIN is a nine-digit number that always begins with the number nine and has a range of numbers from 50 to 65, 70 to 88, 90 to 92, and 94 to 99 for the fourth and fifth digits. The ITIN is formatted like an SSN: 9XX-XX-XXXX.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER AND INDIVIDUAL TAXPAYER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER MISMATCHES AND MISUSE March 10, 2024 Congressional Report

To address these concerns, the IRS sent letters to State departments of motor vehicles and governors warning them of the risks of using ITINs for identity verification purposes. The IRS indicated that it does not validate the authenticity of documents submitted to obtain an ITIN, require applicants to appear in person, or verify applicants' legal presence in the United States. In order to strengthen its controls over ITIN issuance, the IRS recently changed its rules to require more stringent documentation and verification in ITIN applications, as well as proof the ITIN is needed for tax purposes.

Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot

- If you do not receive your absentee ballot in enough time to meet your state's deadlines, use this ballot as a backup. If you send in this ballot and receive your state's ballot later, you should fill out and return your state ballot as well, noting that you had previously sent in this ballot. Your election official will count only one ballot.
- The following require you to register and request an absentee ballot before filling out this form: AL, AS, AR, CT, FL, GU, HI, ID, IL, IN, KS, LA, NH, NJ, NM, NY, PA, PR, RI, SD, TX, WI, WV, and WY. If your state or territory is listed, complete a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) online at FVAP.gov
- If you already registered and requested a ballot, send in the *Voter Information page* and the *Official Backup Ballot*.
- Please be aware that some states will accept this form as registration and as an absentee ballot request for future elections.

Use this form if you are:

- On active duty in the Uniformed Services or Merchant Marine
- An eligible spouse or dependent
- A U.S. citizen living outside the United States

You can vote wherever you are. This is how.

1. Fill out your *Voter Information page* completely and accurately.

- Your U.S. voting residence address is used to determine where you are eligible to vote absentee. For military voters, it is usually your last address in your state of legal residence. For overseas citizens, it is usually the last place you lived before moving overseas. You do not need to have any current ties with this address. DO NOT write a PO Box # in section 2.
- Most states allow you to provide a Driver's License number or the last 4 digits of your SSN. New Mexico, Tennessee, and Virginia require a full SSN. *WHY NOT IN MONTANA*
- If you cannot receive mail at your current mailing address, please specify a mail forwarding address.
- Many states require you to specify a political party to vote in primary elections. This information may be used to register you with a party.
- **Section 6 Requirements:** Puerto Rico requires your mother's and father's first name. If registering in Vermont you must acknowledge the following by writing in section 6: "I swear or affirm that I have taken the Vermont Voter's Oath." Additional state guidelines can be found at FVAP.gov.
- Remember to sign the bottom of the *Voter Information page*!

2. Carefully fill out and seal your *Official Backup Ballot*.

- DO NOT sign your ballot or include any personal information. Keep your ballot anonymous.
- If using a self-sealing form, remove the adhesive liner, fold and seal tightly.
- If you printed out the form, fold the voted ballot and seal it in an envelope marked "ballot enclosed".

3. Assemble your documents for mailing.

- Put your *Voter Information page* and *Official Backup Ballot* into the mailing envelope.
- You can find the address for your election office at FVAP.gov.
- All states accept this form by mail and many states accept this form by email and fax. See your state's guidelines at FVAP.gov.

Agency Disclosure Statement

The public reporting burden for this collection of information, OMB Control Number 0704-0502, is estimated to average 15 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or burden reduction suggestions to the Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, at whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dd-dod-information-collections@mail.mil. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.
DO NOT SUBMIT YOUR FORM TO THE E-MAIL ADDRESS ABOVE.

Privacy Advisory

When completed, this form contains personally identifiable information and is protected by the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended.

Questions?
Email: vote@fvap.gov

Voter Information

Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)

Print clearly in blue or black ink, please see back for instructions.

Have you already registered and requested an absentee ballot?

Some states allow you to use this form to register and request ballots for future elections. Visit FVAP.gov for more details.

1. Who are you? Pick one.

- For absent Uniformed Service members, their families, and citizens residing outside the United States.
- I am on active duty in the Uniformed Services or Merchant Marine **-OR-** I am an eligible spouse or dependent.
- I am a U.S. citizen living outside the country, and I intend to return.
- I am a U.S. citizen living outside the country, and my intent to return is uncertain.
- I am a U.S. citizen living outside the country, I have never lived in the United States.

Last name _____ Suffix (Jr., II) _____ Mr. Miss
 Mrs. Ms.

First name _____ Previous names (if applicable) _____

Middle name _____ Birth date (MM/DD/YYYY) _____

Social Security Number _____ Driver's license or State ID# _____

2. What is your U.S. voting residence address?

Your voting materials will not be sent to this address. See instructions on the other side of form.

Street address _____ Apt # _____

City, town, village _____ State _____

County _____ ZIP _____

3. Where are you now? You MUST give your CURRENT address to receive your voting materials.

Your mailing address. (Different from above) _____ Your mail forwarding address. (If different from mailing address) _____

4. What is your contact information? This is so election officials can reach you about your request.

Provide the country code and area code with your phone and fax number. Do not use a Defense Switched Network (DSN) number.

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Alternate email: _____ Fax: _____

5. What are your preferences for future elections?

- A. Do you want to register and request a ballot for all elections you are eligible to vote in? Yes No
- B. How do you want to receive voting materials from your election office? Mail Email or online Fax
- C. What is your political party for primary elections? _____

6. What additional information must you provide?

Alabama requires two witness signatures; Alaska, Virginia and Wisconsin, require one witness signature. Puerto Rico and Vermont need more information, see back for instructions. Additional state guidelines can be found at FVAP.gov.

7. You must read and sign this statement.

I swear or affirm, under penalty of perjury, that:

- The information on this form is true, accurate, and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand that a material misstatement of fact in completion of this document may constitute grounds for conviction of perjury.
- I am a U.S. citizen, at least 18 years of age (or will be by the day of election), eligible to vote in the requested jurisdiction, and
- I am not disqualified to vote due to having been convicted of a felony or other disqualifying offense, nor have I been adjudicated mentally incompetent; or if so, my voting rights have been reinstated; and
- I am not registering, requesting a ballot, or voting in any other jurisdiction in the United States, except the jurisdiction cited in this voting form.
- In voting, I have marked and sealed this ballot in private and have not allowed any person to observe the marking of this ballot, except those authorized to assist voters under State and Federal law.

Sign here

X

Today's date
(MM/DD/YYYY)

