

# SOUND OFF!



BULLETIN

#22

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

*"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"*

1 JUNE 2008

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**Disability Rights Advocates is one of our partners in the class action lawsuit. This letter is being forwarded to you at their request.**

May 29, 2008

## **Re: Investigation of Accessibility of VA Hospitals and Clinics**

Dear Veteran:

We are writing to inform you of an investigation Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) has recently initiated regarding accessibility issues at VA hospitals and clinics and to request information from you to aid us in this investigation.

Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) is a non-profit organization based in California that is dedicated to protecting the rights of people with all types of disabilities, including disabled veterans. DRA is one of the two law firms that is challenging the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) practices in failing to adequately treat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a case that recently went to trial in San Francisco. We also have a longstanding interest in ensuring disabled individuals' equal access to prompt medical care, and we have sued several private hospital chains to ensure that they remove architectural barriers to access, provide accessible medical equipment (such as exam tables and scales), and maintain policies to ensure appropriate treatment of people with disabilities.

We have found access barriers affecting people with mobility and sensory disabilities at major private hospital chains throughout the country. We are also aware of general concerns about the physical conditions of facilities at VA hospitals and clinics. Because of this, we have instituted an investigation of the accessibility of VA hospitals and clinics. We are working in conjunction with a number of veterans' organizations and activists to get the word out about this investigation, and to encourage veterans to tell us about their experiences with any VA facilities that they have visited, whether positive or negative.

If you have a physical disability (including mobility disabilities, vision, hearing and/or speech disabilities, and/or traumatic brain injury) and you receive or have received medical care at one or more VA hospitals and/or clinics in the past 3 years, we are interested in hearing about your experiences.

Our investigation includes the following issues:

1. **Physical access.** We are interested in hearing about your experiences with physical access at hospitals and clinics. This includes all physical access to buildings, including parking facilities, entrances, elevators, restrooms, waiting rooms, exam or treatment rooms, inpatient facilities, laboratories, cafeterias, gift shops, and pharmacies.

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2. **Medical equipment.** We are interested in hearing about your experiences accessing medical equipment, such as exam tables, exam chairs, scales, diagnostic testing equipment (such as x-ray machines, MRI machines, CT scans or Pet scans), rehabilitation equipment, or other diagnostic or treatment devices.
3. **Communication services.** We are interested in hearing about your experiences with communications access, particularly if you are a person with a sensory disability (vision/hearing/speech) or traumatic brain injury. This includes information about whether you were provided with medical and other information in accessible formats (such as Braille, large print, audio or accessible electronic formats), whether you were provided auxiliary aids and services to permit communication (such as interpreters or assistive listening systems), whether you could access information on VA websites, and whether your overall communications needs were met. It also includes information about whether VA staff worked with you to ensure that you understood your medical situation, and that you were able to give informed consent about medical procedures.
4. **Policies and practices of accommodation.** We are interested in hearing about your experiences with the people staffing the VA hospitals and/or clinics, and their ability to respond to your needs as a person with a disability. This includes information about whether the staff was knowledgeable and helpful in responding to any obstacles, information about whether you had difficulty accessing services such as being weighed or transferring to an exam table or chair, and information on whether you had to make requests for access every time you sought treatment, or whether there was a system in place to address your needs in advance.

If you have experiences with any VA hospitals and/or clinics that you would like to share with us, please call toll-free at 800/332-6177 (or TTY at 510/665-8716) or email [va.access@gdblegal.com](mailto:va.access@gdblegal.com) and we can schedule a time to talk at your convenience. Thank you for your interest and assistance.

Very truly yours,

Melissa W. Kasnitz  
Managing Attorney