

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4606

January 18, 2017

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Square NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald,

As you are aware, agencies all across government have been working to implement the Digital Accountability and Transparency (DATA) Act of 2014 (Pub.L. 113-101), in advance of the May 9, 2017 statutory deadline. When fully implemented, the DATA Act will play an unprecedented role in improving the government's financial transparency and creating opportunities for better agency management. However, I write with concern regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs progress to date.

In 2016, I wrote twice to heads of each of the twenty-four CFO Act agencies requesting information regarding implementation activities. I am pleased that I have received both initial and updated Implementation Plans from most. However, in reviewing these plans, discussing government-wide progress with officials from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Department of the Treasury, along with examining reports of both the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and various inspectors general, I have some concerns about your Department's progress and subsequent ability to meet the upcoming deadline in May.

Lapses in DATA Act implementation, such as submission of inaccurate, incomplete, and especially poor quality data, can create government-wide complications. Data quality is an important signal of the extent to which agencies are complying with both the letter and spirit of the law. I understand that delays and changes to government-wide guidance may have hampered this effort in the past. However, comprehensive technical guidance was issued in April of 2016 by OMB. Thus, you now must move forward with deliberate speed to implement the law in the way that it was envisioned.

I am fully cognizant of the myriad challenges you face in implementing the DATA Act, and understand that the transition to a new administration poses an additional challenge. However, as we move into 2017, and enter the final months leading to the implementation deadline, I urge you and your staff to continue to prioritize this essential effort, which will ultimately improve agency administration and governance at all levels.

If I can be of assistance in addressing implementation challenges at your agency, particularly during the transition in administration, please contact Rafi Martina on my staff at 202-224-2023

or Rafi_Martina@warner.senate.gov. I look forward to continuing to partner with your staff on this shared effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark R. Warner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

Cc: Edward J. Murray
Interim Assistant Secretary for Management and Interim Chief Financial Officer