



December 4, 2023

The Honorable Craig Hickman
The Honorable Jessica Fay,
Co-Chairs, Committee on Government Oversight
c/o Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability
82 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Subject: Impact of the OPEGA Assessment on the Maine Veteran's Homes

Dear Members of the Government Oversight Committee,

I have learned that Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA) reported to the Committee on October 18th that the State Auditor had reviewed our file and made two key findings: one, that many sections of the file OPEGA provided his office focused solely on personnel management decisions (and need not be restudied with another audit) and two, that matters related to alleged fraud have been sufficiently and adequately addressed in BerryDunn's review of the case completed in February 2023.

Because the second finding goes to the heart of the complaint raised to your committee by a former employee, it is instructive that the State Auditor wrote:

We believe reperforming the work already conducted by BerryDunn and reviewed by both Verrill and PretiFlaherty will only provide the Committee with the information already within its possession...Our preliminary analysis, however, is that lacking evidence that substantiates the original charge of fraud, our work will only replicate that already in your possession.

I have included that quotation because while we have consistently demonstrated a willingness to cooperate with OPEGA—to include inviting the Director to interview MVH staff to gain a fuller context surrounding the complainant's specific statements—one accounting firm, two law firms, and now the State Auditor have not found evidence of fraud.

In addition, your committee has specifically refined OPEGA's scope of work to just include an assessment of internal controls over MVH supply and services spending, accounts payable accrual and processing timelines, and how these controls support and inform MVH spending.

While I understand your desire to review these areas, and reiterate MVH's continued cooperation with OPEGA, the Committee must recognize that delaying a determination on this review has placed efforts to secure funding from the state and other sources at considerable risk, may cause irreparable harm to our organization's reputation, and is diverting crucial and limited resources away from caring for veterans. I respectfully request that the Committee:

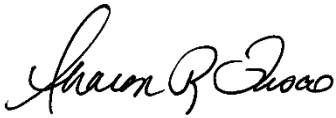
- Conclude this review as swiftly as possible to avoid unnecessary and potentially devastating consequences.
- Require that OPEGA take the time to meet with MVH employees to review the complaint.

As I wrote to you on October 16th:

Ultimately, I believe you and I want the same thing – complete information and full context to the concerns raised. Whether completed by an external accounting firm, State Auditor, or OPEGA itself, we look forward to making key staff available for interviews and having an opportunity to explain how MVH operates, how we’ve dealt with the tremendous challenges of the past three years, and our recent efforts to create additional internal controls.

To this end, I am hopeful the committee will work with OPEGA and MVH to find a swift pathway to resolving the complaint so that we can go on with the most important business of caring for those who served.

Sincerely,



Sharon Fusco
Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Director Schleck
Members of the Government Oversight Committee