



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
VA Maine Healthcare System
1 VA Center
Augusta, ME 04330**

NOV 16 2012

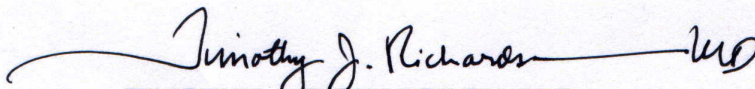
In Reply Refer To: 402/11

Dear Sir or Madame:

I am the Chief of Staff at the VA Maine Healthcare System in Augusta, Maine. In 2012, I collaborated with educators at the University of Maine at Augusta to bring Elliot Cherry's performance piece, A Finished Heart, for presentation to Nursing students and staff from my VA Medical Center. I attended this performance on October 11, 2012, and participated in a facilitated discussion after Mr. Cherry's performance. I know from this discussion and from my own personal experience, the power of this performance piece. By providing this moving end-of-life story in the context of a same-sex relationship, I believe Mr. Cherry's performance will have a lasting impact on the future health care providers who experienced the event.

At VA Maine, I have been involved in an interactive reading program, *Literature & Medicine*, for more than ten years. Mr. Cherry's performance piece is similar to literature in the manner in which it touches health care professionals at all levels, from young students to experienced providers. It will lead to increased empathy and cultural competency resulting in improved health care quality. The quality of Mr. Cherry's performance piece is outstanding, and I strongly recommend it to other health care institutions.

Sincerely,


TIMOTHY J. RICHARDSON, M.D.
Chief of Staff

A MEMBER OF THE VA NEW ENGLAND HEALTHCARE SYSTEM