



NOTES FROM VBA VSO NATIONAL SERVICE DIRECTORS MEETING – JAN. 9, 2019

The call was facilitated by Michael Stoddard, VBA VSO Liaison, Under Secretary for Benefits. There was also an option to attend the meeting in person in Washington, D.C. Caleb Stone from William & Mary represented the NLSVCC.

- **Introduction**

- Veterans Claims Intake Center had issues December 23rd – Jan 6th
 - This call was garbled at the beginning, so I struggled to understand what was being said. Stoddard seemed to believe that no one had correspondence lost, but as an editorial note, it might be best to check if you submitted anything during to Janesville during this period.
- VBA Quarterly Webcast on January 30 will discuss Colmery Act (concerning GI Bill Benefits)

- **New Veteran Benefits Banking Program**

- 20 minutes of (often duplicative) discussion of the partnership with Association of Military Banks of America – see December call notes for further details.
- Again, VA technical difficulties led to the majority of this presentation being inaudible before it was fixed.

- **Blue Water Navy Claims**

- Centralized RO personnel at 8 different Regional Offices are handling these claims.
- Records Research Specialist Teams with access to Ship Locator Tool reviews if those RO personnel can't confirm a grant.
- Revisions to M21-1 made on December 31.
- Expect to propose rule formally implementing statute by June 2020, but wasn't required to do so to operationalize.
- Have received 11,950 new claims from veterans, about 1,000 new claims from survivors.
- USB meeting with ROs every Tuesday and Thursday to monitor quality and try to get in front of any mistakes.
- The presenter acknowledged that there are a lot of claims already in the system, but did not have exact numbers regarding how many.
- Quality Team is now reviewing for errors, but it won't have official numbers for a few weeks.

- **VA Form Redesign**

- VA Forms 20-0996 (HLR), 20-0998 (Appellate Rights)
 - VBA also looking at VA 20-0995 (Supplemental Claim), but not expecting to make changes.
- The goals for the 20-0996 Form Redesign:
 - Better explain the available decision review options based on the type of decision
 - Emphasize specifics related to each decision review lane, allowing Veterans to make better and informed decisions
 - Reduce VA jargon on the form
- The goals for the 20-0996 Form Redesign:
 - Update the POA contact box to separate out phone numbers and email address for efficient scheduling of informal conferences



- Update language to make information on the form easier to understand
- Appeals Management Office Team wants to set up focus groups with VSOs to solicit additional feedback, which will probably be based in Washington, D.C., Nashville, and Seattle.
- Looking for Veterans and VSOs, focusing on have previously filed a claim with VA and received a decision on a supplemental claim or higher-level review within the last 90 days (October – December 2020).
- Mike Stoddard will act as conduit to AMO team – can email him with thoughts to pass along to team or with focus group participation thoughts.
- VSOs in meeting said that the HLR form doesn't have enough room for argument (which is correct).
- After the meeting, Stoddard sent a link to VBA's mandated Appeals Modernization Act reporting, which can be found at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/ama/>.
- Stoddard also highlighted this selection from the December 2019 report without much elaboration:

(X) Of the cases that involve HLR, the percentage of decisions that are:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overturned in whole or in part, • upheld, • returned for correction of an error 				
FY	Decision Review Type	Overturned Percent	Upheld Percent	Error Percent
2019	Higher Level Review	83.4%	12.4%	0.6%
2020	Higher Level Review	69.5%	8.4%	22.7%