



NOTES FROM VBA AND VETERAN LEADERS MEETING – JANUARY 14, 2020

The call was facilitated by Michael Stoddard, VBA VSO Liaison, Under Secretary for Benefits. Caleb Stone from William & Mary represented the NLSVCC.

- **Office of Administrative Review Update (Brienne Ogilvie)**
 - Legacy inventory down to 38,611 claims—a few years ago, it was 270,000+.
 - About 25,000 of these remanded cases impacted by the coronavirus.
 - HLR Form Comments at Federal Register
 - <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/12/15/2020-27467/agency-information-collection-activity-decision-review-request-higher-level-review>
 - The Form is available upon request from the Department, email to nancy.kessinger@va.gov. Please refer to "OMB Control No. 2900-0862" in your request.
 - Ogilvie did note that veterans who want to go to Board will be advantaged by staying in the legacy system but stated that other vets should opt into AMA for faster decisions.
- **VSO Support of Mail Automation Brief/Q & A (Andrea Lapinski)**
- **Musculoskeletal Rating Update (Famakinwa Olumayowa)**
 - **Changes effective 2/7/2021**
 - New compartment syndrome rules.
 - VA still keeping the multiple ratings for knees, ie, flexion, extension, and instability.
 - IVDS still there, but limited application.
- **Closing**
 - Caraway: “Currently the only mechanism officially recognized to submit to the Board of Veterans' Appeals is fax and mail. We are working on DU capabilities but that functionality has yet to be approved. Will advise when this changes.”



NOTES FROM VBA AND VETERAN LEADERS MEETING – FEBRUARY 11, 2021

The call was facilitated by Michael Stoddard, VBA VSO Liaison, Under Secretary for Benefits. Caleb Stone from William & Mary represented the NLSVCC.

- **Musculoskeletal Rating Update**
 - **Changes effective 2/7/2021.**
 - Final Rule made into CFR, but it apparently didn't get into eCFR. VA is working on a fix.
 - These changes not considered "liberalizing," so VA's position is that standard effective date rules will apply.
- **BDD/IDES Update**
 - Expect things to be back to pre-Coronavirus levels of inventory for IDES in April—there's been a backlog.
 - BDD claims are still being processed, though the examination backlog is making it more difficult and it is possible that a servicemember could be separated before exams are complete. Servicemembers should still apply anyway. Vets can submit on VA.gov.
 - Still identifying ways in which VSOs can electronically review records before BDD claims filed—right now, this is a problem. DOD has not committed to providing STRs yet.
- **CARES Act Home Loan Update**
 - 3.5 million loans, 210K on CARES forbearance, 40K who asked for forbearance still current on loans
 - Depending on delinquency status, refinancing, repayment agreements, loan modifications, or deferment may be options. Being no more than 30 days behind on payments gives a veteran a lot more options.
 - A proposed rule went out a couple of months ago concerning the "partial claim" program.
 - The presenter wanted to stress that "forbearance" doesn't equal forgiveness.
 - <https://www.benefits.va.gov/HOMELOANS/cares-act-frequently-asked-questions.asp>
 - 1-877-827-3702 is the number for all VA home loan matters.
- **Compensation Forms Update (20 mins)**
 - 21-4138 is expired, but VA still accepts it—expiration date not relevant for veterans, but it's for the VA to update. Version history is what matters.
 - VAF 21-10210
 - Presenter acknowledged that incorrectly putting April 2020 on the September 2019 form has led to issues. He also acknowledged that some ROs have been incorrectly kicking back 21-526EZs from Sept. 2019 because they are "out of date." Trying to put out training.
 - DBQs are going to be back on the website as per recent law. A future briefing will address VA's progress here.
- **Closing**
 - The start date for pension eligibility based on Vietnam service will soon be November 1, 1955, not the current February 28, 1961 date. This change only applies to pension, not compensation.
 - Tom Murphy came on as the acting USB. Says that examinations continue to be a chokepoint—says that VA is looking for reasons to rate a claim without exams.



- He recognizes that the NPRC/NARA is a significant source of frustration for advocates. Says that VA got them to offer their employees overtime and create other incentives to get NARA employees to work--\$150 million is about to go toward scanning the records at NPRC for every living veteran.
- **Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Fax Sunsetting**
 - VR&E turned off its fax line on February 28. Below is the new contact information going into VA correspondence on these issues:

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. Centralized Mail</p> | <p>Send all VR&E related correspondence to:</p> <p>Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Intake Center Department of Veterans Affairs P. O. Box 5210 Janesville, WI 53547-5210</p> |
| <p>2. Direct Upload</p> <p>Secure Electronic Transmission</p> <p>VSOs: Please direct correspondence to VR&E</p> | <p>a. Users with VA network access, VA email address, and valid PIV badge, use VA Single Sign-On to access: https://dmhs.digitalcontentservices.com/</p> <p>b. Users with no VA network access, PIV card, or VA email address can access via AccessVA: https://eauth.va.gov/accessva/ using ID.me credentials.</p> <p>*In advance, go to ID.me to set up an account for credentials: https://www.id.me/individuals/government</p> |

- **VBA has not yet issued an update in these briefings regarding when the VA will finally turn off the VBA disability compensation fax line.**