



UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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The Veterans First Act: **Reforming Disability Benefits Claims and Appeals** *Bipartisan bill cuts through bureaucracy to ensure veterans get the benefits they deserve*

The backlog of disability claims has long been a problem at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and on top of that, the VA currently faces a backlog of 445,000 appeals primarily related to claims for disability benefits. The bipartisan *Veterans First Act* improves the benefits process at the VA to make it easier for veterans to receive the benefits they deserve.

Title III – Disability Compensation and Pension

- Makes it easier for survivors of veterans to get benefits without filing a formal claim.
- Increases the monthly special pension the VA provides to Medal of Honor recipients.
- Requires the VA to carry out a fully-developed appeals pilot program, which will allow the VA to start testing the concept of a heavily streamlined process and will not preclude a more comprehensive reform package when it is ready.
- Allows the Board of Veterans' Appeals to increase use of video hearings, making it easier for veterans to get a hearing on their appeal.
- Extends the VA's authority to provide compensation and pension examinations through contractors.
- Increases transparency at the VA by requiring the VA to make average appeal wait time information public.
- Increases oversight of the VA regional offices through a Government Accountability Office review.
- Requires the Department of Defense to submit to Congress a report on the participation of veterans service organizations in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which helps service members transition from active duty to veteran status.
- Requires the VA to report to Congress the number of claims a full-time employee can process in a year as well as a report outlining the procedures the VA will use to determine the appropriate staffing levels at regional offices once the VA transitions to a new work load management process for claims processing.
- Monitors the VA's progress in implementing the Veterans Benefits Management System.

Title VII – United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims

- Temporarily expands the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims from 7 to 9 judges through 2020.
- Extends certain life insurance benefits to judges of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.
- Modifies requirements for serving as the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims so that a judge generally must have 3 years remaining on his or her term in order to qualify.

Title VIII – Burial Benefits

- Allows for active duty designees, including the Women's Air Force Service Pilots and Merchant Marines, to be inurned at Arlington National Cemetery.
- Specifies that medallions may be provided in lieu of a government furnished headstone or marker for deceased individuals who served in the Armed Forces after World War I.
- Requires the VA to complete a study on the scope of issues related to unclaimed remains of veterans.