

From:

My name:

My address:

Date:

To: My Elected Representative

Senator/Representative Name:

Senator/Representative Address:

I am writing to express my grave concern regarding the 600,000 American veterans who are currently waiting to receive the disability benefits that, due to a service-connected disability suffered, they have earned. Sadly, this backlog will only increase as more of the 1.7 million troops who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan become eligible for benefits.

Disability benefits are not only an entitlement – but an essential lifeline – for many veterans, and the failure to provide them in a timely way has had a terrible impact. While waiting and waiting for benefits, many veterans, particularly in this economy, suffer home foreclosures, bankruptcy, and financial ruin. A retroactive award of disability benefits – months and often years down the road – won't restore those homes, won't repair destroyed credit, and won't undo the other serious consequences of a personal financial meltdown. Moreover, the consequences of these delays extend far beyond the financial. Extreme anxiety, depression, homeless and suicide are but a few of the tragic consequences of the failure to treat our disabled veterans with dignity. Of course, the consequences also extend beyond the individual veteran. The impact extends to spouses, children, and other family members who suffer from the stress and economic burden caused by the failure to award their veteran husbands, wives, parents, sons and daughters the benefits that they need to survive.

This must change, and change now. The VA admits to taking at least six months to reach an initial decision on an average benefits claim. According to news reports and, as set forth below, a recent lawsuit, that delay is actually a year or more. While veterans await resolution on their claims, they receive no benefits whatsoever from the VA. We understand that appeals of initial decisions average more than four years, with some stretching 10 years or more. More than half of those appeals, when finally heard, result in reversals of benefits denials.

On November 10, Vietnam Veterans of America and the Veterans of Modern Warfare, in an attempt to Band-Aid a disability claims system that the General Accountability Office and the Congress have deemed broken (but that neither the Executive nor Congress has fixed), filed suit against the VA in Washington, D.C. federal court That Band-Aid would take the form of a court order that requires the VA to provide initial decisions on every veteran's disability benefits claim within 90 days, and to fully resolve appeals of those initial decisions within 180 days. The organizations have asked the Court to grant interim benefits equal to a 30% disability rating payment to any veteran disability benefits applicant who does not receive a decision within these timeframes. That payment – a mere \$356 a month for a veteran with no dependents—is not much, but it's a lifeline to those awaiting their benefits decisions.

Behind each of the 600,000 claims awaiting response is a veteran who once proudly wore our nation's uniform. These men and women served with honor. They simply want the benefits to which they are entitled. Our veterans deserve at least that much, and the VA's failure to fulfill its responsibilities brings great dishonor to our nation. Please make a strong public statement in support this lawsuit, and please do everything in your power to help end the unnecessary and unconscionable delays experienced by our nation's veterans.

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