

VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION

WEEKLY UPDATE

Week Ending — 03/22/2024

Division Operations

Meetings:

- March 19: VA&R Division Director attended the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) monthly update meeting with Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) to discuss current issues and solutions within VBA operations. VSOs were also provided the opportunity to contribute our own questions and concerns.
- March 19: VA&R Division Director and other leadership from the Washington, D.C. Government Affairs office met with Dr. Martinez-Lopez, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs to discuss the current issues with Department of Defense providing health care within the United States and U.S. territories.
- March 20: VA&R Division Director participated in a roundtable discussing the Deborah Sampson Act and women veterans. This roundtable was hosted by the U.S. House Committee on Veterans Affairs (Democrats) and included other Veterans Service Organizations.

Health Policy Team Operations

Meetings:

- March 18: The Health Policy Team (HPT) met with Warrior Canine Connection to discuss the implementation of the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) Act of 2021, important role that service dogs play in the lives of veterans, and advocacy opportunities.
- March 19: HPT attended the monthly Women Veterans Veteran Service Organization (VSO) Working Group to discuss organizational updates, current/upcoming legislation, and issues related to women veterans.
- March 19: HPT virtually attended the Toxic Exposure in the American Military coalition meeting (TEAM) to discuss the Honoring our PACT Act of 2022 implementation, and the trajectory of toxic exposure.
- March 20: HPT met with Sync.MD to discuss their innovative platform to securely share electronic health records and how it can help veterans.
- March 20: Health Policy Deputy Director Joshua Hastings and Health Policy Analysts Matthew Cardenas and Nicole Bathan met with Sync.MD CEO Eugene Luskin to discuss his record sharing platform and how to work further with The American Legion.
- March 20: HPT met with Microdose to discuss working together and possibly setting up a booth at the 2024 National Convention and the development of a white paper that will focus on how CBD can help veterans manage their pain and mental health.
- March 20: HPT and leadership attended to Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) Honor Guard Gala to support fundraising efforts.
- Mar 20: HPT virtually attended PTSD Consultation Program Lecture Series regarding PTSD and Physical Health presented by Paula Schnurr, PhD.
- March 21: Virtually attended House Committee on Veterans Affairs (HCVA) hearing on the Toxic Exposure Fund, and continued funding for the PACT act.

Legislative Bill Reviews:

- **H.R. 3303 – the Maternal Health for Veterans Act - Support**

- To provide support for programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs relating to the coordination of maternity health care, and for other purposes.

Supporting Resolutions

- [Resolution No. 13: Newborn Care Through the Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#)
- [Resolution No. 147: Women Veterans](#)

- **H.R. 544 – The Veteran Infertility Treatment Act of 2023 – Support**

- To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide coverage for infertility treatment and standard fertility preservation services, and for other purposes.

Supporting Resolutions

- [Resolution No. 162: In Vitro Fertilization](#)

- **S. 2801 – The Veteran Families Health Services Act of 2023 – Support**

- To improve the reproductive assistance provided by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs to certain members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their spouses or partners, and for other purposes.

Supporting Resolutions

- [Resolution No. 16: Reproductive Assistance and Pregnancy Counseling](#)
- [Resolution No. 147: Women Veterans](#)
- [Resolution No. 162: In Vitro Fertilization](#)

- **H.R. 7514/S. 3886 Waiving Arbitrary and Inconsistent Veteran home Requirements (WAIVER) Act (Recommend Support)**

- To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to waive certain domestic content procurement preferences with respect to certain State home projects, and for other purposes.

Supporting Resolutions

- [Resolution No. 41](#) State Veterans Home Funding for Construction Grants
- [Resolution No. 377](#) Support for Veteran Quality of Life

Benefits & Claims Team Operations

Meetings:

- March 14: Benefits Policy Team (BPT) participated in the regularly scheduled meeting with Bergmann & Moore regarding training, including on-going training ending March 24 and planning for the DSO Symposium later this year.
- March 15: BPT attended a meeting of the Star Act Working Group where representatives of The Military Coalition (organization supporting the enactment of the Major Richard Star Act) reported on their efforts to secure passage, including the results of their recent “Hill Day” visits.
- March 18: BPT attended a regularly scheduled VSO meeting on VBA Claims, Appeals and Legislative Issues.
- March 19: BPT attended a PACT Act Dashboard Updated Demo during which the VBA demonstrated the new interactive functionality to be available later this spring and which will enable users to generate custom reports at the state or Congressional District level.
- March 19: VA&R Director and Deputy Director of Benefits & Claims (DDBC) met with Bergmann & Moore representatives discussing the upcoming Inaugural DSO Symposium in Leesburg, VA.
- March 20: BPT monitored the House Veterans Affairs Committee’s Disability and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) Subcommittee hearing on “Lost in Translation: How VA’s Disability Claims and Appeals Letters Should Be Simplified.”
- March 21: DDBC attended quarterly Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and Veterans Service Organization (VSO) virtual meeting. VBA updated VSOs with most recent performance data and program updates.
- March 21: BPT attended virtually the House Veterans Affairs Committee’s Disability and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) Subcommittee hearing on Toxic Exposure Fund Improvement Act.

Claims & Appeals Team Operations

Accreditations:

- Applications received from TAL Departments 29
- Certifications submitted by TAL Washington Office 29
- Certifications approved by VA's Office of General Counsel 8

The American Legion Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) Unit:

- AMA appeals pending (125+ days) 1
- Informal Hearing Presentations (IHPs) prepared 189
- Memos generated 2
- Phone inquiries 172
- Internal quality reviews 4
- Individual training 4 hours
- Team training 0 hours
- Hearings 3
- Board dispositions 70
 - o Appeals granted 22 (31.4%)
 - o Remanded 38 (54.3%)
 - o Denied 7 (10.0%)
 - o Other 3 (4.3%)
- Largest retroactive awards won for veteran \$109,201

Senior Veterans Disability Claims Specialist:

- Compensation & Pension Claims 18
- Other Issues 1
- Contacts 19

Pension & Debt Management:

- New Claims 23
- Supporting Submissions 18
- Sensitive Claims 4
- Rating Reviews/Audits 61
- Contacts 174
- Debt Notices Received 66
- Insurance Questions 0
- Waivers Granted 2
- Pension Notification Letters Processed 373
- Largest debt waiver won for veteran \$7,580

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End of VA&R weekly update – 03/22/2024