

Appeals Modernization

VFW's Concerns:

An all-out push by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) over the past years has reduced the disability compensation and pension workload by over 164,000 claims, while the backlog of claims over 125 days old fell by over 146,000. In doing so, VBA continued to define its “workload” and “backlog” as only initial disability and pension claims, diverting nearly all its people to working on those cases.

As a result, the significant backlog reduction came at the expense of more difficult work. Appeals soared by over 28,000 during this period, bringing the total number of appeals pending to more than 470,000. Appeals continue to average more than three years before the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) makes its first decision. Initial pension claims continue to rise, and disability claims with eight or more conditions remain unreasonably high at nearly 43,000. Pending dependency claims remain unreasonably high at over 231,000 — up from 40,000 just a few years ago.

Since the first discussions on appeals reform with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the VFW has been very clear that any changes to the system must be coupled with aggressive initiatives to adjudicate legacy appeals in a timely manner through both legislative authority and proper resourcing.

VFW's Solutions:

- Congress must pass H.R.2288 or S.1024, the *Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017*, which would reform the VA claims appeals process to build a veteran-centric process that is easy to navigate and protects a veteran's rights every step of the way.
- Congress and VA must properly resource VBA and BVA to ensure they are able to timely adjudicate appeals from veterans who do not opt into the new appeals process, and the potential influx of supplemental claims and higher level review requests at VA Regional Offices. VA must be empowered to manage its workload if the new framework to expected to succeed.