



VFW Urges Blue Water Veterans to Contact a Service Officer

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With the legislative and judicial battles seemingly over for the Vietnam War's so-called "blue water" Navy veterans, the process for them to receive VA compensation is just beginning.

VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci said that contacting a VFW Service Officer should be a common course of action for all blue water veterans affected by Agent Orange exposure. This would include those who have never filed a claim, as well as those who have filed that were granted compensation and stripped of their benefits.

"This class of veterans was unjustly and arbitrarily excluded from compensation benefits for nearly 20 years," VFW National Veterans Service Deputy Director Michael Figlioli said. "We are pleased to see Congress and VA make them whole. VFW looks forward to assisting every one of them who seek our help, which is always free of charge and has no VFW membership requirement attached."

In June, President Donald Trump signed the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 into law (P.L. 116-23). It restores VA benefits to Vietnam War blue water sailors (those who served aboard ships off the coast of Vietnam) who had their disability eligibility arbitrarily taken away by VA in 2002. Those veterans also could be eligible for retroactive benefits.

The law, which goes into effect in January 2020, requires VA to contact veterans who filed a disability claim that originally was denied.

"The VA told us that they are being proactive in reaching out to the veterans who were given benefits then stripped in 2002," Gallucci said. "However, people will slip through the cracks. VA may not have identified everybody, so it's important for veterans who believe that they

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are covered by the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act or the Procopio decision to reach out to a VFW service officer.”

Also in June, the Department of Justice decided not to contest a federal case ruling that paved the way for VA to restore the availability of disability benefits to blue water Navy veterans. In the case of *Procopio v. Wilkie*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington, D.C., ruled that Alfred Procopio Jr., a Life member of VFW Post 6587 in Spring Lake Park, Minn., is eligible for VA disability benefits. The Vietnam War Navy veteran claims his diabetes and prostate cancer diagnosis is linked to Agent Orange exposure off the Vietnamese coast while serving aboard the USS Intrepid in 1964-67.

The court’s decision also means that VA can no longer deny disability benefits to eligible blue water Navy veterans. To qualify for Agent Orange-related benefits, a veteran must have one or more of the conditions VA presumes to have been caused by exposure.

The 14 presumptive diseases on the list are:

- Chronic B-cell Leukemia
- Hodgkin’s Disease
- Multiple Myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma
- Prostate Cancer
- Respiratory Cancers
- Soft Tissue Sarcomas
- AL Amyloidosis
- Chloracne
- Diabetes Mellitus Type
- Ischemic Heart Disease
- Parkinson’s Disease
- Early onset Peripheral Neuropathy
- Porphyria Cutanea Tarda

For help with a disability claim, find a VFW service officer at [vfw.org/NVS](https://www.vfw.org/NVS).