REFORMING THE BENEFITS CLAIMS AND APPEALS PROCESS

The Issue:

In March 2016, PVA joined the Board of Veterans Appeals, VBA, and other major veterans service organizations to form a working group with the goal of reforming the appeals process. With the number of pending appeals recently passing 465,000 in December 2016, VA projects that the inventory will climb to over two million over the course of the next decade if the system remains unchanged. Ten years from now, veterans will expect to wait six years for a decision. PVA believes reform is necessary, but procedural reform and greater efficiency must not dilute substantive rights and benefits that veterans have earned and deserve.

Layer upon layer of substantive and procedural rights have been added over time to this unique system of administrative law governing veterans’ disability claims. But these developments also produced unintended inefficiencies and an inability to identify faults in the process. A long-term fix requires a comprehensive overhaul of the entire claims process, not just appeals. The legislation developed by this working group takes this approach. It consolidates and streamlines redundant processes, provides veterans with more information to help make strategic decisions, and increases protection of the claim’s effective date. Ultimately, the increased efficiency and information will produce faster decisions with a greater degree of accuracy, reducing mistakes that lead to avoidable delays.

It is incumbent upon the Administration to request, and for Congress to supply, the resources to implement the new framework and simultaneously tackle the ballooning inventory of appeals.

PVA’s Position:

• The Administration and Congress should support comprehensive reform of the benefit claims and appeals process to modernize and streamline the process in accordance with the draft legislation developed and agreed to in 2016 by senior leaders of VA, VBA, the Board of Veterans Appeals, VSOs and other stakeholders.