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April 22, 2026

The Honorable Douglas A. Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you to your team for appearing as witnesses before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Oversight Hearing that was held on April 15, 2026.

As a follow-up to the hearing, Ranking Member Mark Takano has requested Ms. Margarita Devlin, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits, respond to the attached questions for the record.

The Committee requests a written response no later than May 13, 2026, so they may be made part of the record. If you have any questions, please let my staff know.

Sincerely,



MIKE BOST
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

cc: The Honorable Mark Takano, Ranking Member, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Enclosures: Questions for the Record submitted by Ranking Member Mark Takano

Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Oversight Hearing

**“Faster Decisions, Stronger Outcomes: VA's Work to Streamline the
Disability Claims Backlog”**

Wednesday, April 15, 2026, 10:15 AM

360 Cannon House Office Building

QUESTIONS

Funding for Mandatory Overtime

- In the past, Congress specifically authorized and appropriated money for overtime pay for employees at the Veterans Benefits Administration. But it has not done so in several years.
 - a. Please provide detail, on how VBA is currently funding overtime pay for claims processors, including the specific funding account from money is being drawn for this purpose, and the specific statutory reference that permits the funding in this account to be used for this purpose.*
 - b. If the funding of overtime pay involves a transfer of fund from one account to another, please provide both the amount transferred, the source account of the funding and the destination account.*
 - i. Please provide this Committee with a copy of the notice sent to the Committee on Appropriations regarding said transfer.*

c. If the source account for overtime pay includes funding from Cost of War Toxic Exposure Fund please provide this Committee with VBA's analysis of the percentage of overtime work that is reimbursable from the COWTEF, and the total amount of money charged to COWTEF for this purpose.

CVSO Grant Program

- Sec. 302 of the Dole Act (P.L. 118-120) authorized VA to make grants to states, counties and tribes to bolster the numbers of accredited veterans' service officers.
- The law was passed in January 2025, and authorized grants for fiscal years 2026 and 2027. Yet VA has not implemented the grant program, and VA doesn't expect to do so until fall of this year.
 - *When does VA plan to issue the initial Notice of Funding Availability for this program?*
 - *What has been the source of the delay?*
 - *Does VA anticipate any further hiccups in getting this money out the door?*

Partial Claims

- VBA has increased its use of partial decisions, making a decision on some of the contentions in a claim, but deferring others.
- However, partial claims present complication when calculating throughput times for any given claim.

- a. How does VBA account for partial decisions when calculating the claims backlog and average days to completion.*
- b. When VBA issues a partial decision, does VBA terminate the End Product code for the initial claim, and consider the claim to be closed for purposes of backlog/average days to completing metrics?*
- c. If so, how are the remaining contentions treated for calculation purposes? Is a new End Product code created and tracked separately from the already decided contentions?*

Non-rating Claims

- The backlog of non-rating claims has grown from over 62,000 in 2022 to near 322,000 as of this month.
 - Why is this backlog growing so rapidly, and what is being done about it?*
 - Has VBA dedicated a sufficient number of employees to this task?*

- Many employees on the non-rating claim teams are working upwards of 30 hours of overtime per week.
 - *What is VBA doing to prevent burnout among the employees on the non-ratings claim teams?*

TERA only opinions

- One of the recurring processing errors that has cropped up post-PACT Act, are ratings decisions that fail to consider all the possible theories of service connection that may lead to a veterans' claim being granted.
- We hear from many service officers that VBA is often denying claims after only having considered the results of a veterans' Toxic Exposure Risk Assessment, even for contentions that have nothing to do with toxic exposure.
 - *Is VBA tracking this type of error, and if so, how are you addressing it?*

48-Hour Review Period

- In 2021 VA did away with its 48-hour review period that allowed service officers to review pending decisions 48 hours before they were finalized. During these reviews Veteran Service Officers could catch and correct errors before they were cemented and harder to fix.
 - *What were VA's reasons for getting rid of a successful, proactive system, and replacing it with a new reactive one?*

- Given the anxiety denied claims can cause for a veteran, especially one based on a processing error, it's clear the 48-hour review process served veterans better than the current one.
 - *Will VBA commit to a return to the 48-hour review system?*
 - *Failing that, will VBA commit to working with service officers to make the Claim Accuracy Request system proactive instead of reactive, so it works better for veterans?*

VBA Reorganization

- As part of its reorganization in September 2025, VBA realigned many of its quality control functions, in particular the Decision Review Operations Centers. And in the wake of that many Quality Review Specialists have either been reassigned to frontline claims processing, or moved to the DROCs.
 - *Has VA assessed the effect on quality of its realignment and these reassignments of staff?*
 - *What were the results of that assessment?*
- One of the many tradeoffs between quantity and quality, is that the employees who were supposed to be reviewing claim accuracy and training others to be better, have been moved to frontline claim processing work.
 - *Does VBA believe it has enough people doing quality reviews, either at the Regional Office level or the national level?*
 - *How many VSR and RVSR vacancies exist system-wide?*