

Congressman Bob Latta
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs
Legislative Hearing "H.R.1302, VA Appeals Backlog Relief Act"
Statement for the Record
June 24, 2015

Mr. Chairman,

I thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement for the record for today's legislative hearing in the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, that includes strong bipartisan legislation I introduced, H.R. 1302, the VA Appeals Backlog Relief Act, which would help expedite the appeals claims process.

Our great nation is blessed to have the bravest men and women in the world serving in our armed forces and putting their lives on the line every day in order to defend the freedoms we hold so dear. The sacrifices they make are incredible and it is incumbent upon Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure they receive the timely care and benefits they have earned and deserve upon their return home.

The VA's lack of timely claims processing, and the massive backlog that has been created, has long been a major problem. Thanks to the quality work of this subcommittee, and the full committee, a good deal of progress has been made; however, there is still more work to be done, especially on the appeals side.

As it currently stands at the VA, there are at least 300,000 appeals claims pending, with nearly 60,000 pending VA Form 9's with an average pending time of well over 600 days. In my home state of Ohio, county veterans service officers and veterans service organizations have contacted me regarding the possibility of five to ten year wait times on appealed issues, with a major cause of the delay due to the lengthy time it takes the local VA Regional Office (VARO), once they have received a completed VA Form 9, to certify the case to the Board of Veterans Appeals. In response, and with the input of these officers and organizations, I introduced the VA Appeals Backlog Relief Act. This important legislation would make it mandatory for all appeals claims to be certified to the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) no later than 12

months after the VARO receives the completed VA Form 9, which is more than ample time to complete this process.

I commend the Chairman and Ranking Member for their hard work and dedication to helping our nation's veterans and thank them, and the subcommittee, for including H.R. 1302 as part of this legislative hearing. I would ask my colleagues for their continued support of H.R. 1302 so we can better fulfill our obligations to our nation's veterans.

Thank you.

-Congressman Bob Latta