

STATEMENT OF
ROBERT ORIFICI, ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER, PRODUCT
DELIVERY SERVICE, OFFICE OF INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
"PACT ACT IMPLEMENTATION: MODERNIZING VA DISABILITY CLAIMS
THROUGH EFFECTIVE TECHNOLOGY"
JULY 13, 2026

Chairman Barrett, Ranking Member Budzinski, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss how VA is modernizing the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) and advancing technology to support faster, more accurate disability claims processing. Joining me today is Mr. Derek Herbert, Acting Chief Production Officer, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

Delivering on the Promise of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address the Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 (PACT Act)

Congress passed the PACT Act to ensure that Veterans exposed to toxic substances receive the benefits and healthcare they have earned. Recognizing that significant technology investment would be required to meet that commitment, Congress mandated a 5-year modernization plan. On March 28, 2023, VA submitted the 5-Year Benefits Systems Modernization Plan as prescribed under section 701(b) of the PACT Act. Implementation is now in its fourth year and on track.

Since its passage in 2022, the PACT Act produced a historic increase in Veterans seeking benefits, with over 3.5 million PACT-related claims received thus far. VA's

technology modernization has been critical to the Department's ability to deliver faster and more accurate outcomes to Veterans, through implementation of automation support tools for claims processing, enhancements to claims processing platforms, improving intake and submission accessibility, and modern workload distribution. For example, the rating backlog has sustained below 75,000 since May 6, 2026, which is a decrease of over 73% since January 20, 2025—a direct result of improved systems, smarter workflows, and the dedication of VA's workforce.

Modernizing VBMS to Support Claims Processors

VBMS is the core system supporting claims examiners in processing and rating disability compensation claims. Modernization transformed how claims processors access information and make decisions, with a strong focus on decision support and reducing manual burden.

One of the most impactful advancements has been the digitization of more than 1.2 billion Veteran claim evidence documents. VBMS now leverages Smart Search technology to enable VA to scan and locate relevant information within individual Veteran claim evidence folders. This vast, computable data foundation saves claims processors hours of manual review and supports more consistent, accurate decisions.

VA uses artificial intelligence (AI) to help claims processors and others make faster and better decisions. As always, all claims are decided by human VA employees, not through AI or automation. To accelerate PACT Act eligibility determinations, Toxic Exposure Risk Activity memos, which were previously completed by hand, now leverage AI tools to partially populate VBMS using verified data with links to source documents. This use of AI in VBMS has reduced the time to complete a memo by up to 40%, allowing VA to confirm eligibility for PACT Act claims much faster. VA also leverages automated decision support tools to obtain, review, and synthesize evidence and integrates the summary of that review into VBMS. Importantly, again, a trained claims processor makes the final decision on every disability compensation claim—not automation or AI. These tools support and accelerate human decision-making; they do not replace it.

Improving the Veteran Experience

Modernization extends beyond internal processing. VA has made significant improvements to how Veterans interact with its technology throughout the claim's lifecycle. Online forms have been updated to simplify the application process, and Veterans now receive updates via email, VA mobile app push notifications, and text messages—with engagement rates exceeding 50%. When additional evidence is needed, these plain-language requests help Veterans understand exactly what to submit, reducing delays and expediting a final decision.

In 2025, VA launched the Discover Your Benefits tool, a self-service resource that helps Veterans, Service members, and their families explore available benefits across VA and other Federal agencies—with a particular focus on the period surrounding separation from military service.

Strengthening Infrastructure and Reducing Costs

VA has made substantial infrastructure improvements under the PACT Act Section 701(b) Modernization Plan. The VBA Corporate Database, the central repository for definitive Veteran records, has migrated to the cloud, improving data security, system resiliency, and the ability to scale capacity in real time. Through automated, data-driven management of cloud resources, VA has already avoided approximately \$16 million annually in cloud costs, with initiatives underway to target an additional \$7 million in cost avoidance. VA remains committed to adopting multivendor strategies to drive competition to build the best possible benefit delivery products for Veterans.

Instead of our systems sending updates once a day, they now do so automatically as events occur. This improves accuracy, reduces delays and strengthens our ability to respond in real time. The deployment of the Modernized National Work Queue has built the strong foundation needed to allow for future enhancements to enabling field supervisors to manage and balance claims workload. Since 2023, VA has

decommissioned 16 legacy systems, transferring functionality and data to new, improved systems prior to retiring the older ones. Decommissioned systems include the 48-year-old Benefits Delivery Network and the 25-year-old Veterans Insurance Tracking and Reporting System. An additional 14 systems are planned for decommissioning by 2032.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the progress VA has made under the 5-year Benefits Delivery Information Technology Modernization Plan has already delivered real results, faster claims processing, stronger system reliability, improved decision support for our workforce, and a more seamless experience for Veterans and their families. We remain committed to completing this transformation and to maintaining a modern, Veteran-centered benefits delivery system.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the Committee for your continued support of programs that serve the Nation's Veterans. My colleague and I look forward to responding to any questions you and other Members of the Subcommittee may have.