

STATEMENT OF SCOTT LEVINS
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NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
ON THE
21st CENTURY VETERANS BENEFITS DELIVERY ACT

May 13, 2015

Thank you, Chairman Isakson, for giving me the opportunity to discuss the 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is deeply committed to serving our nation's veterans and supporting the needs of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

NARA's National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) provides storage and reference services on the military personnel and medical records of nearly 60 million veterans. The center responds to approximately 5,000 requests each day. Most requests come directly from veterans and their next of kin; however, NPRC also receives approximately 1,500 requests per day from the VA for the temporary loan of original records needed to adjudicate claims.

The VA has a liaison office co-located at the NPRC facility and the two agencies work closely to ensure VA's prompt access to essential records. During the first six months of fiscal year 2015 NPRC responded to over 221,000 requests from the VA. The average response time for these requests was 2.4 workdays.

Recognizing the importance of providing timely access to records, NPRC has worked with the VA to develop a process that enables the electronic transmission of requests, prompt delivery of responsive records, bar code tracking of records, and electronic status updates. Our systems are designed to accommodate the receipt and processing of bulk electronic files created by the VA, which include hundreds (sometimes thousands) of new requests each day. The VA is also able to submit individual requests electronically. Automatic email notifications are sent to acknowledge the receipt of new requests. If our systems determine that a responsive record is temporarily unavailable, the request is placed on backorder for thirty days or until the record is returned to file, whichever is sooner. In instances where a responsive record is not immediately available (approximately 5% of requests), electronic notifications are made to the VA.

In addition to providing status updates through an electronic portal available to VA users, we also have given the VA direct access to our Case Management and Reporting System. This access enables VA staff to delve deeper into order fulfillment details concerning specific requests and to run ad hoc queries and reports concerning work volumes and response times.

The 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act directs NARA to appoint a liaison to the VA and to develop joint procedures to ensure that records requests from the VA are fulfilled or completed within 30 days of receipt. We are not opposed to the provisions relating to NARA in the Act; however, NARA already has a designated liaison with the VA and the NPRC is consistently exceeding the response time and notification standards outlined in the 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act. Since March 31, 1999, NPRC has designated a staff member to serve as a liaison with the VA to maintain continuous, effective communication concerning fluctuations in workload, troubleshooting system issues, or any other issues involving service delivery to the VA.

NPRC is committed to serving America's veterans and proud of its efforts to effectively support the VA's mission. We hope this information is helpful and appreciate your interest in this important subject.