

CHAIRMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA

Review of Veterans' Disability Compensation: Forging a Path Forward

July 29, 2009

This morning we continue our work on VA's disability compensation process. Today's hearing will focus on improvements that can be made in reviewing disability compensation claims.

My goal is to ensure that claims are adjudicated accurately and in a timely fashion. Everyone involved realizes that there is no quick fix to solving all the problems with disability claims, but the Committee, teaming with the Administration and those who work with veterans, intends to do all it can to improve this situation. To bring optimal change to a process as complicated and important as this, we must be deliberative, focused, and open to input from all who are involved in this process. It is in that spirit that we have held previous hearings, and it is the backdrop for this hearing as well.

To be fair, claims processing is a complicated matter. There have been many changes to the claims processing landscape in recent years. Many of those changes have come from policies intended to make improvements piece-by-piece. Unfortunately, these piece-by-piece reforms have failed to produce the results veterans deserve.

While many claims processing issues are internal to VA, this Committee recognizes that the solutions go beyond VBA. This is especially true for transitioning servicemembers who look to VA and DoD to help them receive the care and benefits they have earned. The Disability Evaluation System pilot program is one example of VA and DoD working collaboratively to ease the transition of disabled servicemembers from military to civilian life. Today, I hope to hear from VA and DoD about the status of this program and their plans for its future.

Our goal is to provide veterans with accurate and timely resolution to their cases. No idea is too bold. We must act quickly, yet responsibly, to rectify this situation.

I again welcome everyone to today's hearing.

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