

106TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1680

To provide for the improvement of the processing of claims for veterans compensation and pension, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER 1, 1999

Mr. ASHCROFT (for himself and Mr. FEINGOLD) introduced the following bill;
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To provide for the improvement of the processing of claims for veterans compensation and pension, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Benefits Ad-
5 ministration Improvement Act of 1999”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) The Veterans Benefits Administration of
9 the Department of Veterans Affairs is responsible

1 for the timely and accurate processing of claims for
2 veterans compensation and pension.

3 (2) The accuracy of claims processing within
4 the Veterans Benefits Administration has been a
5 subject of concern to Congress and the Department
6 of Veterans Affairs.

7 (3) While the Veterans Benefits Administration
8 has reported in the past a 95 percent accuracy rate
9 in processing claims, a new accuracy measurement
10 system known as the Systematic Technical Accuracy
11 Review found that, in 1998, initial review of vet-
12 erans claims was accurate only 64 percent of the
13 time.

14 (4) The Veterans Benefits Administration could
15 lose up to 30 percent of its workforce to retirement
16 by 2003, making adequate training for claims adju-
17 dicators even more necessary to ensure veterans
18 claims are processed efficiently.

19 (5) The Veterans Benefits Administration needs
20 to take more aggressive steps to ensure that vet-
21 erans claims are processed in an accurate and timely
22 fashion to avoid unnecessary delays in providing vet-
23 erans with compensation and pension benefits.

1 **SEC. 3. IMPROVEMENT OF PROCESSING OF VETERANS BEN-**
2 **EFITS CLAIMS.**

3 (a) **PLAN REQUIRED.**—Not later than 90 days after
4 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of
5 Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Vet-
6 erans' Affairs of the Senate and the House of Representa-
7 tives, the Majority Leader of the Senate, and the Speaker
8 of the House of Representatives a comprehensive plan for
9 the improvement of the processing of claims for veterans
10 compensation and pension.

11 (b) **ELEMENTS.**—The plan under subsection (a) shall
12 include the following:

13 (1) Mechanisms for the improvement of train-
14 ing of claims adjudicators and for the enhancement
15 of employee accountability standards in order to en-
16 sure that initial reviews of claims are accurate and
17 that unnecessary appeals of benefit decisions and
18 delays in benefit payments are avoided.

19 (2) Mechanisms for strengthening the ability of
20 the Veterans Benefits Administration of the Depart-
21 ment of Veterans Affairs to identify recurring errors
22 in claims adjudications by improving data collection
23 and management relating to—

24 (A) the human body and the impairments
25 common in disability and pension claims; and

1 (B) recurring deficiencies in medical evi-
2 dence and examinations.

3 (3) Mechanisms for implementing a system for
4 reviewing claims-processing accuracy that meets the
5 Government's internal control standard on separa-
6 tion of duties and the program performance audit
7 standard on organizational independence.

8 (4) Quantifiable goals for each of the mecha-
9 nisms developed under paragraphs (1) through (3).

10 (c) CONSULTATION.—In developing the plan under
11 subsection (a), the Secretary shall consult with and obtain
12 the views of veterans organizations and other interested
13 parties.

14 (d) IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretary shall imple-
15 ment the plan under subsection (a) commencing 60 days
16 after the date of the submittal of the plan under that sub-
17 section.

18 (e) MODIFICATION.—(1) The Secretary may modify
19 the plan submitted under subsection (a).

20 (2) Any modification under paragraph (1) shall not
21 take effect until 30 days after the date on which the Sec-
22 retary submits to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of
23 the Senate and the House of Representatives, the Majority
24 Leader of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of
25 Representatives a notice regarding such modification.

1 (f) REPORTS.—Not later than January 1, 2000, and
2 every 6 months thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to
3 the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and
4 the House of Representatives, the Majority Leader of the
5 Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives
6 a report assessing implementation of the plan under sub-
7 section (a) during the preceding 6 months, including an
8 assessment of whether the goals set forth under subsection
9 (b)(4) are being achieved.

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