



VA REGIONAL OFFICE, MONTGOMERY, ALA.

Date: Dec. 3-4, 2019

Attendees: Claims Services Coordinator Melinda Staton

Purpose: To Conduct a R.O.A.R. Visit and Provide Feedback to VA Regional Office Executive and Senior Leadership

Discussion:

The American Legion visited the Montgomery, Ala., Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO) from Dec. 3-4, 2019. This year's focus for the Regional Office Action Review (ROAR) continues to be the impact of the National Work Queue (NWQ) and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) work-credit system on the adjudication of veterans' claims.

The purpose of this visit was to review the service-connected disability compensation claims-processing function. Before the implementation of NWQ, the Montgomery, Ala., VARO was primarily responsible for service-connected disability compensation claims for veterans residing in Alabama. The point of contact for this visit was Luran Cox, Assistant Director of the Montgomery Regional Office. The Public Affairs staff provided a tour of the facility which was followed by employee interviews.

Productivity and Quality

The Montgomery RO did not provide current inventory and error data in conjunction with this visit. The number of claims completed in FY19 were 716 appeals production and 2,096 VSC end-product completions. The average days pending for rating cases during FY19 were 2.4 for initial development, 2.6 for SUPP, 2.6 for RFD/AWD/AUTH, and 2.8 non-rating cases.

The American Legion was not able to conduct a quality review of the Montgomery RO casework because the RO did not provide the 50 cases requested in conjunction with the visit to the office. We look forward to conducting a better assessment of the quality of work at the Montgomery RO in the near future.

Employee Feedback

The American Legion staff member interviewed 10 Veterans Service Center employees during the ROAR visit. Topics included: NWQ, leadership access, timeliness and accuracy of information, production standards and work-credit system, employee training and employee/leadership relations.

The Montgomery RO employees shared a sense of value for the mission of helping veterans and family members obtain benefits. Their approach to assisting veterans is to maintain awareness of the person filing the claim instead of seeing the claim as a number. This helps them to maintain a focused determination to ensure the claim is processed and adjudicated efficiently and correctly from start to finish.

The interviewees expressed that they feel the management team appreciates and values the employees. Leadership shows appreciation through trust (not micromanaging), providing help when needed and fostering teamwork. Employees expressed that leadership demonstrates a passion and strong commitment to employees through their willingness to listen and adapt new ideas to improve the claims process.

Work Credit System

Overall, employees opined that the work-credit system is fair but not balanced in the amount of credit assigned for specific tasks. The majority of interviewees believe there is still the tendency to focus more on production over quality, instead of placing equal value on both.

Training

Montgomery RO employees receive training at least once each month. The RO employees complete training through the Talent Management System and by reviewing weekly manual updates. Some employees reported that they take the initiative to review previous training material on their own time to maintain quality and production.

Some VBA-wide areas of concern for Montgomery RO employees include: insufficient service treatment record review, lack of notes in the VBMS system, insufficient medical exam/medical opinion and an overall lack of standardization in processes across regional offices. The employees expressed that they are comfortable discussing these and other concerns or issues with leadership.

The American Legion appreciates the accommodations of the Montgomery Regional Office. On behalf of The American Legion, I thank you and your staff for your hospitality and support during our ROAR visit.

Respectfully Submitted by,

Melinda Staton
Claims Services Coordinator
The American Legion