



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515

January 23, 2015

Allison A. Hickey  
Under Secretary for Benefits  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Hickey,

We write to express our deep concern regarding reports of unacceptably long wait times for benefit claims processing at the Veteran Administration's St. Petersburg Regional Benefits Office.

As you know, the St. Petersburg Regional Benefits Office is the only facility responsible for processing disability benefits for the over 1.5 million veterans living in Florida. As of Dec. 29, 2014 the St. Petersburg Office had over 34,000 claims pending -- 57 percent of which are deemed to be backlogged for more than 125 days. Our service men and women should not be forced to endure such lengthy wait times simply to receive an initial answer or response from the VA.

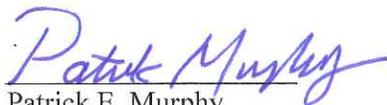
We were extremely troubled to learn that a recent VA Inspector General's interim report found considerable problems with the proper filing and storage of service records, resulting in severe delays in processing claims.

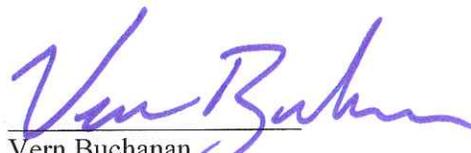
We urge the VA to take immediate steps to reduce processing times for Florida veterans. Our offices would like you to answer the following questions as you work toward addressing this problem:

1. What specific actions have been taken to reduce the existing backlog?
2. What plans do you have going forward to address the systemic problem that led to the backlog and thereby improve the benefits claims processing system overall?
3. Are current staff levels dedicated to processing claims sufficient?
4. Are there any other additional resources or technologies that would assist processing times and improve accessibility and customer service?

While there has been some progress in reducing the backlog of disability benefit claims over the past year, more must be done to serve the brave men and women of our Armed Forces who have served and sacrificed so much for us. Thank you for your attention to this matter and please do not hesitate to contact our offices if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

  
Patrick E. Murphy  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

  
Vern Buchanan  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS