



## VA REGIONAL OFFICE, PROVIDENCE, R.I.

**Date:** Sept. 10 - 11, 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 Providence, R.I., Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO) from Sept. 10-11, 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 Providence VARO was primarily responsible for service-connected disability compensation claims for veterans residing in Providence, R.I. The point of contact for this visit was Mark Ramos, Change Management Agent for the Providence Regional Office. Ramos provided a tour of the facility which was followed by employee interviews.

### Productivity and Staffing

Number of claims completed as of Sept. 9, 2019, rating 13,188, non-rating 16,101, DRAS 13,969 and appeals at RO 1,189. As of Sept. 9, 2019, the rating time in queue was 2.6 days, non-rating 4.6 days and DRAS 2.3 days. The average length of experience for RVSRs at the RO is 44.3 months and for VSRs 34.5 months. Employees state that the effect of the National Work Queue is not having sufficient case load at a time, specifically in the rating, award and authorization cycle.

### Top 3 Rating Errors for FY18:

1. Examinations
2. Evaluations
3. Effective date

### Top 3 Authorization Errors for FY18:

1. Dependency
2. Withholding/reduction
3. Administrative decision/award

The team is committed to reducing and eliminating these errors through training (instructor led training and TMS) and quality review huddles.

### Employee Feedback

The American Legion interviewed nine RO employees during this site visit. Topics included NWQ, leadership access, timeliness and accuracy of information, production standards and work-credit system, employee training and employee/leadership relations.

The interviewees find satisfaction in assisting veterans and family members with their VA claims. They are committed to working to ensure claims are processed timely, correctly and efficiently. Employees who have been tasked with training enjoy the opportunity to help new employees learn the claims process, to include members of the Warrior Training Advancement Course (WARTAC).

Employees also receive training through the Talent Management System (TMS), monthly consistency studies, weekly updates and local huddles with coaches. The RO conducts training frequently and on an individual, as-needed basis to ensure employees are productive and efficient. However, the employees would like more scenario-based training and in-person training with more time to ask questions.

### Work Credit System and Quality

The Providence VARO employees are meeting the current work-production requirements. However, a majority of those interviewed felt that the work-credit system is not fair or balanced. The employees feel that VACO is only focused on production and that quality is not a priority. Employees also expressed frustration with the current deferral process and explained the current point system does not accurately reflect of the actual amount of work.

There continues to be inconsistencies in the way VA Regional Offices complete tasks. The employees' overall sentiment is that there is no incentive to develop and adjudicate claims properly because an RO employee may only see a claim once during its lifecycle then be transferred to a different location. This indicates a "someone else's problem" attitude that VBA must address if it is to successfully cure shortfalls of NWQ. Failure to do so will perpetuate continuous errors and the delay of the veterans benefits.

### Leadership and Employee Relations

The employees feel valued and believe that leadership provides them with timely information which enables them to work efficiently and maintain standards. The Providence RO



fosters a positive work environment built on open communication and mutual respect that affords employees opportunities to discuss issues or concerns with leadership. The leadership team provides consistent feedback, practices active listening, and allows employees to work without micro-managing.

The Providence RO leadership is committed to maintaining a strong working relationship with The American Legion with the goal of providing better ongoing support to veterans. The RO employees suggested The American Legion work toward updating the electronic systems and software used to assist veterans with claims submission and liaison with VBA.

The American Legion appreciates the accommodations of the Providence 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