

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Questions for the Record
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Legislative Hearing
Exploring VA's Oversight of Contract Disability Examinations
November 15, 2018

Questions for the Record from Congressman Walz

Question 1: I am pleased to see that there is an outside vendor confirming that licensing for the contracted examiners is in order; however, I am concerned that the necessary training is not being tracked appropriately for vendors.

- a. Please explain why we are not currently mandating proof that a contract examiner has actually completed their required training.
- b. Please tell me the solid timelines for VBA implementing substantiated tracing of contract examiner training.

VA Response: According to the contract Performance Work Statement (PWS), vendors must maintain and track all training and certifications for their personnel and their subcontractor(s). The Government may request information regarding training and certification at any time during the period of performance. Currently VBA obtains annual updates for all contract examiners utilized during the fiscal year, which includes the name of the examiner, the training course title, and dates that the contract examiners completed the required mandatory training.

All vendors are required by contract to certify each contract examiner has completed the VA Compensation Examination Certification Curriculum and other examiner specific training prior to the examiner conducting examinations. The vendors provide such certifications to VBA, to include the name of the examiner, the training course title, and dates that the contract examiners completed the required mandatory training.

VBA plans to begin auditing examiner training certifications by obtaining the completion certificates from the training system. Additionally, we are requesting access to vendor training tracking mechanisms so VBA may independently generate compliance training completion and certification reports. VBA expects to complete an initial validation sample of training compliance by the end of January.

As indicated during the hearing, VBA is in the beginning stages of researching and recommending an appropriate platform to deliver the VA Compensation Examination

Certification Program for nationwide vendor training. This platform will allow VBA to assign and deliver training materials, track examiner training and certification, and conduct surveys to gather feedback from examiners.

Question 2: Some of our VSO partners have raised the question if the 20 and 30-day timeliness goals for completion of VA exams are the right measure. They have also raised that changing the goal date may be warranted. Have you evaluated if the 20 and 30-day timeliness goal is the right target?

VA Response: VBA recently awarded new contracts which provides a 20-day timeliness standard for exams conducted within the continental U.S., and 30-day timeliness standard for exams conducted outside the continental U.S. and for Servicemembers prior to discharge. We will continue to evaluate vendor quality and timeliness in relation to this standard.

Question 3: While it is not a topic of this GAO report, we have heard reports that veterans are not always receiving their travel reimbursement checks from vendors. Some veterans report that they do not want to press the vendor for the owed reimbursement because they do not want to risk it effecting their claim. We owe it to the veteran and all tax payers to ensure that reimbursement checks are being appropriately distributed.

a. What processes do you have in place to ensure that vendors are actually providing the travel reimbursement checks?

VA Response: VBA has acquired a third party financial audit contract that utilizes industry standard practices to review all aspects of the financial operations of the contract exam program, to include the Veteran travel reimbursement. Additionally, the Program Office is working with Vendors to ensure that this process and the status of the travel reimbursement check is more transparent for Veterans.

Question 4: Please provide a month-by-month breakdown from January 2016 to November 2018, of the filled FTE positions for Contracting Officer's Representatives (CORs).

a. Please provide the timelines for when the COR positions were posted for hiring and when the hiring actually occurred.

b. Please detail if there were any directives during the January 2016 to November 2018 time period, that prevented the VA from hiring or on boarding the authorized 17 FTE of CORs.

VA Response: Please see the chart below. The staff was officially stood up in March 2016. Please note that for the positions that started in 2016, we have reached out to HR regarding the dates the positions posted. HR has indicated that the information is stored in a previous HR system and is working to retrieve the requested information.

VBA Compensation Service was restructured with an updated Organization Chart, that was signed in November 2017. This new organization chart provided us the ability to hire more staff, many of which were brand new positions that required new position descriptions and HR classification before being announced for recruitment. Following the recruitment process, we were able to onboard additional staff in June 2018.

A total of 14 CORs are authorized. The team is currently comprised of nine CORs and one supervisor. Five additional CORs will be hired in the next month.

Dates	Total CORs
April 2016	2
May 2016	3
June 2016 – August 2016	4
September 2016	5
October 2016 - January 2017	6
February 2017 - March 2017	5
April 2017 - January 2018	4
February 2018 - May 2018	3
June 2018 - July 2018	9
August 2018	11
September 2018 - Present	10

Staff Member (COR)	Position Posted	Hire Date	Current Status
1* *Supervisor		04/01/2016	Present
2	Reassigned	04/03/2016	Present
3		05/29/2016	Vacated position 02/06/2017
4		06/27/2016	Vacated position 07/21/2018
5		09/04/2016	Vacated position 04/21/2017
6		10/03/2016	Vacated position 02/18/2018
7	01/26/2018	06/10/2018	Present
8	01/26/2018	06/24/2018	Vacated position 09/30/2018
9	01/26/2018	06/24/2018	Present
10	01/26/2018	06/24/2018	Present
11	01/26/2018	06/24/2018	Present
12	01/26/2018	06/24/2018	Present
13	01/26/2018	07/08/2018	Present
14	01/26/2018	08/05/2018	Present
15	01/26/2018	08/19/2018	Present

Department of Veterans Affairs
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