April 5, 2019

RE: Children & Grandchildren with Spina Bifida or Certain Birth Defects due to Their Parents or Grandparents’ Exposure to Agent Orange

Dear VVA Leadership:

I am writing this letter to ask for your help with an important initiative that Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is currently working on concerning children and grandchildren of Vietnam Veterans who may have a birth defect due to their parents or grandparents’ exposure to Agent Orange. Please feel free to share this letter with any individuals who may be able and willing to assist.

VVA is requesting that if you or someone you know is submitting or has recently submitted a claim for a child or grandchild who has spina bifida or other birth defects to please contact Kelsey Yoon. Kelsey may be reached via phone at 301-585-4000, ext. 149 or via email at kyoon@vva.org (encrypted emails can be sent to kelsey.yoon@va.gov).

VVA is committed to increasing awareness and improving the process of receiving available benefits for children born with spina bifida or other birth defects due to a parent’s exposure to Agent Orange during service. VVA also understands the importance of ensuring that grandchildren and great grandchildren applications are properly preserved and tracked in the event that legislation is enacted that recognizes the multigenerational effects of Agent Orange exposure. To this end, VVA is currently working with VA to improve all aspects of VA’s benefits, healthcare, and vocational services provided to eligible claimants with birth defects linked to Agent Orange. VVA is also working with VA to improve the data preservation of multigenerational claims submitted to the Denver RO. Some example initiatives that VVA is currently working on are attached to this letter.

Thank you for your support and consideration. For more information about VVA’s work in this area, please reach out to Kelsey Yoon, Senior Attorney Advisor, Rick Weidman, Executive Director of Policy & Government, or Mokie Porter, Director of Communications. Rick Weidman may be reached at rweidman@vva.org and Mokie Porter may be reached at mporter@vva.org.

Sincerely,

//s// KY

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A sampling of VVA’s current initiatives pertaining to improving benefits and services for children and grandchildren with spina bifida or certain birth defects

**Communication, Information, & Outreach Efforts**

- Providing recommended changes to VA Form 21-0304 (Application for Benefits for Certain Children with Disabilities born of Vietnam and Certain Korean Service Veterans).

- Drafting informational scripts to be used at VA hotlines and drafting proposed edits to VA websites to improve the quality and accuracy of information available to potential and current claimants.

- Improving the timeliness and quality of information provided by the Denver RO.

- Developing and implementing a targeted outreach plan with the goal of improving the application process and connecting eligible, approved claimants with all benefits afforded to them under the law.

**Eligible Claimants Assistance**

- Advocating for the implementation of a social worker or claims advocate that is assigned to each case to help a claimant navigate through the eligibility and benefits process of VBA and VHA.

- Advocating for VA to conduct a comprehensive audit of Chapter 18 claimants on both the VBA and VHA side and make findings of audit public.
  - Application Process: How many applications are processed and considered eligible and ineligible on a monthly basis? For applicants that are ineligible, what are the reasons?
  - Eligible Claimants: What resources are eligible claimants using? Why are eligible claimants not using the healthcare program? (As of April 1, 2017, only 858 of 1,115 eligible claimants submitted bills to use the healthcare program).

- Improving Data Collection Efforts. VA does “not routinely maintain” the following data:
  - Number of new individuals eligible to use the program each month.
  - Number of eligible individuals that have never submitted bills.
  - Number of eligible individuals that submit bills that are rejected and reason for rejection.
  - How many payments are made each month for preauthorization services.

**Multigenerational Claims Tracking**

- Tracking multigenerational applications processed by the Denver RO. Advocating for VA to provide VVA data pertaining to multigenerational applications received prior to February 2017.

- Advocating for VA to develop written guidelines for how multigenerational applications are processed and preserved.

- Ensuring that applications are appropriately labeled and easily identifiable for future data analysis efforts. Specifically, ensure that applications uploaded to the “unidentifiable mail queue” are easily retrievable in batches for data analysis.

- Research. Identify ongoing research initiatives of VA that could impact (and expand) the eligibility of benefits to claimants to ensure that VA is preserving useful information.

For more information about the above listed projects, please reach out to Kelsey Yoon, Senior Attorney Advisor, at 301-585-4000 ext. 149 or kyoon@vva.org. Rick Weidman, Executive Director for Government & Policy, at 301-585-4000 ext. 127 or rweidman@vva.org, or Mokie Porter, Director of Communications, at 301-585-4000 ext. 146 or mporter@vva.org.