



TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

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Press Release

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Subcommittee Looks to Texas Model to Address National Disability Claims Backlog

AUSTIN – On September 21, the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) heard invited testimony from Eliseo "Al" Cantu, Jr., Chair of the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), and James Richman, TVC Director of Claims Representation and Counseling, at a hearing in Washington, D.C., to discuss the Texas State Strike Force Teams established by Gov. Rick Perry, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst and Speaker of the House Joe Straus in July 2012.

"As of Monday, September 17, members of the State Strike Force Teams reviewed 2,525 case files of backlogged claims, identifying and executing all required additional development," said Richman during the hearing. "To date they have already delivered 852 claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), fully developed and ready to rate."

With the national disability claims backlog consisting of over 850,000 pending claims, the Subcommittee's goal was to examine state models that can assist the VA in alleviating the continuing backlog. TVC placed two State Strike Force Teams consisting of eight claims counselors each at the two VA Regional Offices in Houston and Waco. The teams take claims in the backlog and ensure that the claims have all information and evidence that is needed and then send the claims to the VA for immediate processing. Additionally, Fully Developed Claims Teams are located at the VA Regional Offices and in TVC offices throughout the state in order to improve access and assist Veterans in filing fully developed claims.

"By examining this process today, we are hoping that this State Strike Force Team will serve as a model to other states and perhaps even lead to the creation of a similar Federal Strike Force Team," said Rep. Jon Runyan, Chairman of DAMA, during his opening remarks.

Texas is recognized for aggressively leading the way on all Veteran issues. No other state has centralized their employment, education, and claims programs within one state

agency in order to advocate for their Veterans, and national leaders have referred to the “Texas-model” when advocating for the integration of Veterans services and innovation in the delivery of those services. In 2008, TVC and the VA partnered in a pilot project in an effort to reduce pending claims, and in 2009, Gov. Perry funded the Claims Processing Assistance Team (CPAT) in order to reduce more than 39,000 pending claims with an estimated delay of \$37 million in monthly payments to Veterans.

The State Strike Force and Fully Developed Claims Teams were developed after a July 2012 hearing of the Texas Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Military Installations, chaired by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, when TVC officials testified that since January 2010, the total pending caseload in Texas had more than doubled from over 50,934 claims and 15,644 appeals to 107,279 claims and 28,183 appeals, with 68,612 claims pending over 125 days. As a result of that hearing, and through the leadership of Gov. Perry, Lt. Gov. Dewhurst, and Speaker Strauss, the state of Texas committed \$1.5 million for the creation and implementation of the teams.

Texas Veterans Commission

The mission of the Texas Veterans Commission is to advocate for and provide superior service to Veterans and their families in the areas of disability claims assistance, employment services, education benefits and grant funding. Over 200 skilled counselors in 75 cities provide one-on-one guidance to Veterans and their families to ensure they receive all of the benefits to which they are entitled. For more information about the Texas Veterans Commission services click here: <http://www.tvc.texas.gov/Home.aspx>.

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