



July 17, 2023

Congressman Mike Bost
Chairman
Committee on Veterans Affairs
364 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: Your committee continues to dishonor our Disabled Veterans by lack of action

Sir;

On June 27th of this year, my Deputy Josh Lear, Somalia Marine and 100% SC P&T VA disabled, and I came to Washington to meet with your Health team and discuss Veteran mental health issues for rural America. To say the least, we left disappointed that your committee is committed to continuing the last Chairman, Rep Takano's position on not taking care of our disabled Veterans.

I looked at your announcement for your selection, and you sir do not have the best interests in helping our most underserved Veterans, those who served this county with honor only to become disabled during their tour of Service and are now fighting to get the benefits they earned and deserve. As a former Army Combat Arms officer and graduate of West Point our word has always been our bond and we live our lives, even today, under the Motto of DUTY, Honor, Country. Let me remind you of your comments upon being selected;

"It is a deep honor to be selected by my colleagues to lead the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs," said Bost. "As chairman, I will fight to hold the Biden administration accountable, restore regular order, and ensure our veterans get the benefits and care they deserve. Growing up in a military family and then enlisting in the Marine Corps myself, this mission always been personal for me. Serving as chairman is a responsibility I do not take lightly; and I promise I will not let my veteran community down."

It is my hope that after reading this you and your committee will act quickly to address this issue and not continue the lack of action that has been standard practice on helping Veterans obtain the benefits they deserve.

ISSUE: SSDI Benefit for those Veterans who are 100% VA SC P&T disabled and those Veterans are also coded IU (individual unemployable)

BACKGROUND:

- Over four (4 years) ago my team became aware of my Deputy's financial situation being that he was 100% SC P&T Disabled. In our review with him and his wife, we found out that for the previous two (2) years he had applied for SSDI benefits through the SSA, but was getting no support to obtain this Veteran benefit he qualified for. He and his wife nearly lost their house and all of their belonging during the SSDI process and the SSA was not really interested in helping. We then got the local media involved and suddenly after two years and the SSA Judge telling him that he does not trust the VA doctors, and that he could get gainful employment folding napkins in a restaurant, the pressure to grant this benefit finally worked.



- We then questioned other Veterans in his situation and quickly found out that many other Veterans who were in this same situation had no idea that there were additional benefits to 100% SC P&T VA disabled Veterans because the VA will not tell you about SSA benefits.
- We quickly started a team to help other Veterans about this and contacted our Local Congressman, Barry Loudermilk, (GA 11). What we got after providing our findings, he informed us that “he did not have the clout to make any changes to fix this issue.
- WE also reached out to the American Legion Legislative team to see if they could help highlight this issue through legislative action. We were informed that the focus of the American Legion was on the Veterans Administration and not the Social Security Administration.
- Knowing that this issue affected over 1.4M Veterans, we connected with John Phillips, President of VETLANTA, where we collaborated on this issue.
 - The results of our collaboration included
 - White Paper Development on the issue
 - Arranging calls with VA and SSA leadership on educating them on the issue and to forge a go forward plan to address this issue.
 - Development of a one (1) sentence add-on those Veterans who are 100% SC P&T VA disabled that could be placed on their VA award letter
 - Arranging a briefing with then Chairman of the Congressional Veterans Affairs Committee, Rep Takano on this issue.
 - Notified the American Legion Washington Office on Legislative action of this issue
 - We here are the American Legion Post 45 in Canton, Georgia, have a special process and team approach that provides outreach and claims support for those Veterans who are 100% SC P&T disabled to make them aware of the additional benefits of obtaining SSDI as well as help them navigate the SSA maze they will be entering. In the past four years we have helped hundreds of Veterans who qualify and we do this at no cost to the Veteran.
 - Working with Josh Altman from Georgia Senator John Ossoff’ s team, who was an Infantry Officer in Afghanistan, to help shepherd new 2022-2023 SSDI claims from qualifying Veterans once they file with the SSA.
- Success – NONE
 - VA and SSA leadership committed to meeting and approving the sentence in the call of 2021 but this has never happened.
 - Rep Takano, He noted his awareness of the issue and nothing more.
 - VA and SSA have told us about their automation between VA and SSA and of their cooperation and yet this system only has a 35% pass rate for Veteran claims (SSA words not mine)
 - American Legion did not promote fixing this issue as it involved talking to the SSA and currently they only focus on benefits from the VA.
 - We were informed that the suggested addition of the one sentence would require an appropriation bill that would allow the ink required for the addition of the sentence to be paid for by the SSA and then move the funding to the VA.
 - Recently, our program conducted an audit of all 31 apartment complexes in Cherokee County Ga, which is the 6th largest Veteran community in the State of GA. Our findings of the over 9,000 apartments showed that ZERO/NO Veterans who are 100% SC P&T VA disabled Veteran living only on VA monthly benefit pay only, can QUALIFY for any of these apartments. If these Veterans were to get the additional SSDI benefit of \$1843 per month they would be able to qualify for 99% of them.



- Many Veterans who apply for SSDI are not getting the VA to send the SSA their Veterans medical records for review and this automatically is causing Veterans to be denied as the SSA disability process requires medical input from the Veteran's doctors. We have attempted to reach out to VISN 7 director David Walker to allow us to talk to the teams that interface with the SSA, but we have heard nothing from him about arranging this meeting.
- The VA and SSA have refused to provide our team with the internal SSDI process maps so that we could identify areas that need to be addressed
- Veterans living on fixed income like this are now exhibiting Mental Health issues. These Veterans are exhibiting mental health issues relating to the fact and they are not able to provide adequate housing for themselves and their family and they have no ability to change this.
- The only success is what our total team has been able to achieve finding, educating and escalating Veterans who qualify to the Senator's team level which brings action.
- Further attempts to get the Federal Government, SSA, VA, and American Legion and, now your committee to act continue to yield nothing.

CONCLUSION:

- What was thought to be such an easy, quick, and low cost solution to help our disabled Veteran's, who live on a fixed income, to get all the benefits they deserve and earned has turned out over the past 4 years to be another third rail that no one in Washington wants to fix. Maybe the fix is just too simple.

In closing Mr. Chairman, the ball is in your court to help Veterans get what they have earned through their service to this country. I am imploring you to break the lack of action on this topic, look to fix what is broken between the VA and SSA on this issue and keep your promise "Not to let the Veteran Community down".

Thank you.

Respectfully

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CC/enc:

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Congressman Barry Loudermilk – Georgia 11
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Vincent Troiola – American Legion National Commander