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Location, Location, Location! VA Claim Response Times Vary by Area

Despite the fun and excitement offered by metropolitan cities, if you're waiting on your VA disability compensation claim you might prefer Lincoln over Los Angeles.

A recent analysis conducted by the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) fully details the wait times on VA disability compensation claims by geographic location. The wait time for an initial decision at the slowest Regional Office (RO) can exceed a year (Waco, Texas – 403 days), while the wait time at the fastest RO can take just a few months (Lincoln, Nebraska – 116 days). In a nutshell, the analysis shows that veterans in sparsely populated states encounter relatively quick resolution of their compensation claims while veterans in cities wait for what seems like forever.

The CIR analysis also identifies the most backlogged Regional Offices (RO). These are as follows, in descending order: Waco, Texas (1); New York, New York (2); Indianapolis, Indiana (3); Phoenix, Arizona (4); Los Angeles, California (5); Chicago, Illinois (6); Reno, Nevada (7); Roanoke, Virginia (8); Oakland, California (9); and Baltimore, Maryland (10). Interestingly, the notoriously slow St. Petersburg, Florida RO is absent from the list.

This geographic inequity of VA wait times is fully detailed in an interactive map on the CIR website, which displays the 58 VA Regional Offices (ROs) and the number of backlogged claims by week. The map updates every Monday based on any additional information obtained in the prior week.

If you are a veteran interested in the wait times applicable to a particular Regional Office, you can click on a city listed on the interactive map. It will show you the number of pending claims, average wait time for an initial decision, average wait time on appeal, and the number of veterans waiting 125 days or more.

For example, the Roanoke RO, which is the eighth-slowest RO, currently has 27,790 veterans awaiting decisions on their disability compensation claims. On average, veterans with claims pending at this RO wait 332 for a decision on an initial claim. In comparison, the RO located in Fort Harrison, Montana has only 1,870 veterans awaiting decisions. There, the average wait time for decisions on an initial claim is 125 days.

There's no doubt that this information is interesting to veterans. For those veterans who are waiting on their

claims, it's nice to at least know what kind of wait time to expect.

But at the same time, there's nothing these veterans can do with this information to shorten their wait times. A claim is assigned to an RO based on the physical location of a veteran. It is not as though a veteran located in California (where the average wait time at all three California ROs exceeds nine months) can elect to have his claim processed elsewhere. Instead, he must wait for the assigned RO to reach his claim in the queue, and in the meantime face mounting bills that could be alleviated by a disability compensation award. Not even a snazzy interactive map can help with that.

CIR is the nation's oldest non-profit investigative reporting organization. Its findings were gleaned from VA online resources and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests made by those who contributed to CIR's analysis. To access the CIR's analysis and the interactive map, visit <http://cironline.org/veteransclaims#story>.

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