

Justification for Emergency Approval of VAF 21-0845

Based upon recommendations made by the former President's *Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors, the Wounded Ill*, VA continues to look at ways to improve and modernize our disability and compensation systems for severely wounded and injured soldiers and veterans. As a result, we recently developed a form to remove obstacles that prevent VA from sharing claims information with the family members of severely injured service members who are unable to communicate with VA due to their injuries. This form allows a claimant or beneficiary to authorize release of certain claims information to an agent or person(s) whom they designate. We believe this form will aid family member(s) in making well-informed decisions regarding a seriously ill or injured claimant/beneficiary. It will also allow them to have updated information on certain decisions made regarding claims and payments. This form also comports with former President Bush's Interagency Task Force on Returning Global War on Terror Heroes, which was a government-wide action plan established to improve care for America's troops and veterans.

This information collection is new and unique. We have developed it to meet the needs of our most severely disabled veterans. We have the immediate ability to record the access information from this form into our electronic database. Without the authorization that this form provides, under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, we are only allowed to give dependents or loved ones the current payment to a beneficiary.

We believe our emergency approval request meets the criteria of 5 CFR Chapter III, Sec. 1320.13(a) *Emergency Processing*, which states:

- (ii) Is essential to the mission of the agency; and
- (2) The agency cannot reasonably comply with the normal clearance procedures under this Part because:
 - (i) Public harm is reasonably likely to result if normal clearance procedures are followed

Therefore, we request emergency approval of this form. If this approval process takes the normal length of time for clearance, it is likely to impede progress in informing family members of severely injured veterans of the status of their claims. These veterans are often unable to speak and/or write and they are unable to telephone us to ask questions about their claims or benefits. VA is vulnerable to criticism of hindering family members who take the responsibility to care for our most disabled customers.