

Supporting Statement for VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits

OMB 2900-0747

A.JUSTIFICATION:

1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection of information.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), through its Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), administers an integrated program of benefits and services, established by law, for Veterans, service personnel, and their dependents and/or beneficiaries. Public Law 110-389, Section 221(a) directs the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to expeditiously process fully developed compensation and pension claims within 90 days after receipt of the claim. The law requires the claimant and the representative submit a certification in writing that is signed and dated by the claimant stating that, as of such date, no additional information or evidence is available or needs to be submitted in order for the claim to be adjudicated. VBA expanded the program to all 57 regional offices under the title “Fully Developed Claim Program.” VA Form 21-526EZ is used to collect the information needed to process a fully developed claim for disability compensation and related compensation benefits.

VA Form 21-526EZ, *Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits*, is modified to add the following:

- Instruction clarifications and non-substantive language added
- Item 1: Added new checkboxes to delineate between the options for filling out the form
- Section I:
 - Added pre-discharge claims only question
 - Reformatted identification information to be in same place
 - Added checkbox for if VA employee
- Added Section II: Change of Address
- Clarified existing homeless questions and added Section III: Homeless Information
- Reformatted and clarified existing Section IV: Claim Information
- Section V: Service Information
 - Added checkboxes delineating service branch
 - Added checkboxes for component
 - Added question for additional periods of service
- Reformatted and added questions that clarified Section VI: Service Pay (Retired pay, Separation pay, Severance pay)
- Reformatted and added questions that clarified Section VII: Direct Deposit Information

Note: These changes have not increased or decreased the burden. The burden estimate remains the same.

2. Indicate how, by whom, and for what purposes the information is to be used; indicate actual use the agency has made of the information received from current collection.

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VA Form 21-526EZ is used to collect the information needed to process a fully developed claim for disability compensation and related compensation benefits. This form is required as part of the FDC Program Transformation Initiative.

- 3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g. permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.**

VA Form 21-526EZ, is available on the One-VA web site in a fillable electronic format. VBA is currently hosting this form on a secure server. Validation edits are performed to assure data integrity. There currently is a utility process in place that will allow the data submitted on the form to be incorporated with an existing centralized legacy database.

- 4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item 2 above.**

Program reviews were conducted to identify potential areas of duplication; however, none were found to exist. There is no known Department or Agency which maintains the necessary information, nor is it available from other sources within our Department.

- 5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities, describe any methods used to minimize burden.**

The collection of information does not involve small businesses or entities.

- 6. Describe the consequences to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.**

This form was redesigned into a “user friendly” form, incorporating plain English, to comply with the President’s Memorandum of June 1, 1998, Plain Language in Government Writing.

- 7. Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted more often than quarterly or require respondents to prepare written responses to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it; submit more than an original and two copies of any document; retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records for more than three years; in connection with a statistical survey that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study and require the use of a statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB.**

There is no special circumstance requiring collection in a manner inconsistent with 5 CFR 1320.6 guidelines.

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- 8. A. If applicable, provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the Federal Register of the sponsor's notice, required by 5 CFR 1320.8(d), soliciting comments on the information collection prior to submission to OMB. Summarize public comments received in response to that notice and describe actions taken by the sponsor in responses to these comments. Specifically address comments received on cost and hour burden.**

The Department notice was published in the Federal Register on March 17, 2017, Volume 82, No. 51, pages 14276 and 14277. Two comments were received in response to this notice.

Comment 1:

VBA received a comment from Katherine Diccio stating; This is a cumbersome, confusing, stressful, multi-decade process. To resolve at least part of this problem the "collection of the file" needs to be simplified. There should be an online process for the construction of "the file." It should function something like a college application, job application, etc. When the Vet logs on they should be able to see EVERY form that they have submitted. The Vet should be able to see each request by the review committee, each record submission by their health care providers, and the next point of the process. Once their file is considered "completed" the portal should inform them of the time tables for next steps in real time. Information given now is something like: "This process normally takes 2 years, in this region we are looking at 4 yrs after the file's completion." There should be an anticipated file completion date, an anticipated file review date, etc with a contact person if the deadlines are not met. This would make less stressful for the Vets and allow the regions to more accurately track their case loads. Hire tons of Pathways Interns to support every level of implementation of a consistent process throughout the county to get the backlog more under control. It should not take a decade of reviews, lost records, appeals, transfers, etc to get homeless Vets decisions to take to their state's disability boards.

Response 1:

Upon review of the comment above, there is no specific question or comment based on this information collection request. This comment reflects upon VA's general processing of our forms. As such, VA is making every effort to continue to serve our respondents with the most up to date information on our data collections. It's a continued and sometimes lengthy process, however, we will continue to do so; to make sure our collections are easy to understand, read, and fill out accordingly, so they can be processed in a timely matter.

Comment 2:

VBA received a comment from Jonathan H. Davis, Deputy Director, Veterans Benefits Program, Vietnam Veterans of America. The attached document had suggestions in regards to this collection. A separate document was created to answer their comment accordingly. See attachment.

- 9. Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.**

No payments or gifts to respondents have been made under this collection of information.

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10. Describe any assurance of privacy to the extent permitted by law provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

The records are maintained in the appropriate Privacy Act System of Records identified as “Compensation, Pension, Education, and Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Records-VA (58VA21/22/28),” published at 74 FR 29275 on June 19, 2009, and last amended at 77 FR 42593 (July 19, 2012).

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature (Information that, with a reasonable degree of medical certainty, is likely to have a serious adverse effect on an individual's mental or physical health if revealed to him or her), such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private; include specific uses to be made of the information, the explanation to be given to persons from whom the information is requested, and any steps to be taken to obtain their consent.

There are no questions of a sensitive nature.

12. Estimate of the hour burden of the collection of information:

a. Number of Respondents is estimated at 34,813 per year.

b. Frequency of Response is once.

c. Annual burden is 14,505 hours.

d. The estimated completion time is 25 minutes.

e. The respondent population for VA Form 21-526EZ is composed of individuals gathering the necessary information for disability compensation claims, respectively, claimed under the FDC Program. VBA cannot make further assumptions about the population of respondents because of the variability of factors such as the educational background and wage potential of respondents. Therefore, VBA used general wage data to estimate the respondents’ costs associated with completing the information collection.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) gathers information on full-time wage and salary workers. According to the latest available BLS data, the median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers are \$954.40. Assuming a forty (40) hour work week, the mean hourly wage is \$23.86 based on the BLS wage code – “00-0000 All Occupations.” This information was taken from the following website:
(http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#00-0000, May 2016).

Legally, respondents may not pay a person or business for assistance in completing the information collection. Therefore, there are no expected overhead costs for completing the information collection. VBA estimates the total cost to all respondents to be \$346,089 (14,505 burden hours x \$23.86 per hour).

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- 13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to respondents or record-keepers resulting from the collection of information. (Do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in Items 12 and 14).**

This submission does not involve any recordkeeping costs.

- 14. Provide estimates of annual cost to the Federal Government. Also, provide a description of the method used to estimate cost, which should include quantification of hours, operation expenses (such as equipment, overhead, printing, and support staff), and any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information. Agencies also may aggregate cost estimates from Items 12, 13, and 14 in a single table.**

Estimated Costs to the Federal Government:

Grade	Step	Burden Time	Fraction of Hour	Hourly Rate	Cost Per Response	Total Responses	Total
9	3	60	1.00	\$22.11	22.110	34,813	\$ 769,715.43
Overhead at 100% Salary							\$ 769,715.43
11	3	30	0.50	\$26.75	13.375	34,813	\$ 465,623.88
Overhead at 100% Salary							\$ 465,623.88
12	3	15	0.25	\$32.06	8.015	34,813	\$ 279,026.20
Overhead at 100% Salary							\$ 279,026.20
Processing / Analyzing Costs							\$3,028,731.00
Printing and Production Cost							\$ 33,652.57
Total Cost to Government							\$3,062,383.57

Overhead costs are 100% of salary and are same as the wage listed above and the amounts are included in the total.

Note: The hourly wage information above is based on the hourly 2017 General Schedule (Base) Pay (https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/salary-tables/pdf/2017/GS_h.pdf). This rate does not include any locality adjustment as applicable.

The processing time estimates above are based on the actual amount of time employees of each grade level spend to process to completion a claim received on this form. The within-grade step (3) of each employee represents the average experience of employees within each grade.

- 15. Explain the reason for any burden hour changes since the last submission.**

There is no change in the reporting burden.

- 16. For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication. Address any complex analytical techniques that will be used. Provide the time schedule for the entire project, including beginning and ending**

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dates of the collection of information, completion of report, publication dates, and other actions.

The information collection is not for publication or tabulation use.

17. If seeking approval to omit the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

We are not seeking approval to omit the expiration date for OMB approval.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in Item 19, “Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions,” of OMB 83-I.

This submission does not contain any exceptions to the certification statement.

B. Collection of Information Employing Statistical Methods

No statistical methods are used in this data collection.