

Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017

(Bill S.1024)

Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-GA), Ranking Member Jon Tester (D-MT) and Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee have introduced S. 1024, the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017, a companion bill to the recently passed House bill, H.R. 2288. This legislation would significantly improve the ability of veterans to receive more timely and accurate decisions on their claims, and appeals of denied claims for earned benefits.

This bill contains a new processing framework that would make positive and fundamental changes in the way VA adjudicates appeals and claims and would create multiple options for veterans to redress benefit decisions. For example, if a veteran continuously pursues one of the other options within one year of the most recent decision, the veteran would be able to preserve the earliest effective filing date. This legislation also would allow veterans to present new evidence and obtain hearings before the Board of Veterans' Appeals or the Veterans Benefits Administration, if they so desired. The bill also calls for robust reporting and accountability requirements to ensure the transition to this new system does not adversely affect any veterans' claims or appeals.

Over the past few years, the number of appeals awaiting decisions has risen dramatically - to over 450,000 - and the time for an appeal decision ranges between three and five years, a delay that is simply unacceptable. If faithfully implemented, and if fully funded by Congress in the years ahead, this legislation would enable veterans to get more timely and accurate decisions on their claims and appeals.

Please urge your Senators to cosponsor and support S. 1024 and to bring these bills to the floor for a vote.