

“(A) whether a decision has been reached with respect to such a claim and notice of the decision; or

“(B) if no such decision has been reached, notice of—

“(i) whether the application submitted by the claimant is complete;

“(ii) whether the Secretary requires additional information or evidence to substantiate the claim;

“(iii) the estimated date on which a decision with respect to the claim is expected to be made; and

“(iv) the stage at which the claim is being processed as of the date on which such status is checked.

“(C) REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED.—In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall review—

“(1) best practices and lessons learned within the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

“(2) the use of the technology known as ‘VistA’ by other Government entities and private sector organizations who employ information technology and automated decision support software.

“(d) REDUCTION OF CLAIMS PROCESSING TIME.—In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall ensure that a plan is developed that, not later than three years after implementation, includes information technology to the extent possible to reduce the processing time for each compensation and pension claim processed by the Veterans Benefits Administration. The performance for claims processing under this plan shall be adjusted for changes to the numbers of claims filed in a given period, the complexity of those claims, and any changes to the basic claims processing rules which occur during the assessment period.

“(e) CONSULTATION.—In carrying out this section, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall consult with information technology designers at the Veterans Benefits Administration, the Veterans Health Administration, VistA managers, the Secretary of Defense, appropriate officials of other Government agencies, appropriate individuals in the private and public sectors, veterans service organizations, and other relevant service organizations.

“(f) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than April 1, 2010, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the review and comprehensive plan required under this section.”

TEMPORARY AUTHORITY FOR PERFORMANCE OF MEDICAL DISABILITIES EXAMINATIONS BY CONTRACT PHYSICIANS

Pub. L. 108-183, title VII, §704, Dec. 16, 2003, 117 Stat. 2672, as amended by Pub. L. 110-389, §105, Oct. 10, 2008, 122 Stat. 4149; Pub. L. 111-275, title VIII, §809, Oct. 13, 2010, 124 Stat. 2894; Pub. L. 112-191, title II, §207, Oct. 5, 2012, 126 Stat. 1440, provided that:

“(a) AUTHORITY.—Using appropriated funds, other than funds available for compensation and pension, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may provide for the conduct of examinations with respect to the medical disabilities of applicants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary by persons other than Department of Veterans Affairs employees. The authority under this section is in addition to the authority provided in section 504(b) of the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-275; 38 U.S.C. 5101 note).

“(b) PERFORMANCE BY CONTRACT.—Examinations under the authority provided in subsection (a) shall be conducted pursuant to contracts entered into and administered by the Under Secretary for Benefits.

“(c) EXPIRATION.—The authority in subsection (a) shall expire on December 31, 2013. No examination may be carried out under the authority provided in that subsection after that date.

“(d) REPORT.—Not later than four years after the date of the enactment of this Act [Dec. 16, 2003], the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the use of the authority provided in subsection (a). The Sec-

retary shall include in the report an assessment of the effect of examinations under that authority on the cost, timeliness, and thoroughness of examinations with respect to the medical disabilities of applicants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary.”

PILOT PROGRAM FOR USE OF CONTRACT PHYSICIANS FOR DISABILITY EXAMINATIONS

Pub. L. 104-275, title V, §504, Oct. 9, 1996, 110 Stat. 3341, provided that:

“(a) AUTHORITY.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, acting through the Under Secretary for Benefits, may conduct a pilot program under this section under which examinations with respect to medical disability of applicants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary that are carried out through the Under Secretary for Benefits may be made by persons other than employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Any such examination shall be performed pursuant to contracts entered into by the Under Secretary for Benefits with those persons.

“(b) LIMITATION.—The Secretary may carry out the pilot program under this section through not more than 10 regional offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“(c) SOURCE OF FUNDS.—Payments for contracts under the pilot program under this section shall be made from amounts available to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for payment of compensation and pensions.

“(d) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than three years after the date of the enactment of this Act [Oct. 9, 1996], the Secretary shall submit to the Congress a report on the effect of the use of the authority provided by subsection (a) on the cost, timeliness, and thoroughness of medical disability examinations.”

EXPEDITED TREATMENT OF REMANDED CLAIMS

Pub. L. 103-446, title III, §302, Nov. 2, 1994, 108 Stat. 4658, as amended by Pub. L. 105-368, title V, §512(c), Nov. 11, 1998, 112 Stat. 3342, provided that Secretary of Veterans Affairs was to take necessary actions to provide for expeditious treatment, by the Board of Veterans' Appeals and by regional offices of the Veterans Benefits Administration, of any claim that had been remanded by the Board of Veterans' Appeals or by the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims for additional development or other appropriate action, prior to repeal by Pub. L. 108-183, title VII, §707(c), Dec. 16, 2003, 117 Stat. 2673.

VETERANS' CLAIMS ADJUDICATION COMMISSION

Pub. L. 103-446, title IV, Nov. 2, 1994, 108 Stat. 4659, as amended by Pub. L. 104-275, title V, §503(a), Oct. 9, 1996, 110 Stat. 3341, established Veterans' Claims Adjudication Commission which was directed to conduct comprehensive evaluation and assessment of Department of Veterans Affairs system for disposition of claims for veterans benefits and of system for delivery of such benefits, together with any related issues determined to be relevant to study, for purpose of determining means of increasing efficiency of system, means of reducing number of claims under system for which final disposition is pending, and means of enhancing ability of Department of Veterans Affairs to achieve final determination regarding claims under system in prompt and appropriate manner, and further provided for membership and powers of Commission, personnel matters, definitions and funding, and for submission of preliminary report to Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Congress not later than one year after Nov. 2, 1994, submission of final report not later than Dec. 31, 1996, and for termination of Commission 90 days after submission of final report.

§ 5102. Application forms furnished upon request; notice to claimants of incomplete applications

(a) FURNISHING FORMS.—Upon request made by any person claiming or applying for, or express-

ing an intent to claim or apply for, a benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary, the Secretary shall furnish such person, free of all expense, all instructions and forms necessary to apply for that benefit.

(b) **INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS.**—If a claimant's application for a benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary is incomplete, the Secretary shall notify the claimant and the claimant's representative, if any, of the information necessary to complete the application.

(c) **TIME LIMITATION.**—(1) If information that a claimant and the claimant's representative, if any, are notified under subsection (b) is necessary to complete an application is not received by the Secretary within one year from the date such notice is sent, no benefit may be paid or furnished by reason of the claimant's application.

(2) This subsection shall not apply to any application or claim for Government life insurance benefits.

(Added Pub. L. 106-475, §3(a), Nov. 9, 2000, 114 Stat. 2096; amended Pub. L. 108-183, title VII, §701(a), Dec. 16, 2003, 117 Stat. 2670.)

PRIOR PROVISIONS

A prior section 5102, Pub. L. 85-857, Sept. 2, 1958, 72 Stat. 1225, §3002; renumbered §5102, Pub. L. 102-40, title IV, §402(b)(1), May 7, 1991, 105 Stat. 238; Pub. L. 102-83, §4(a)(1), (b)(1), (2)(E), Aug. 6, 1991, 105 Stat. 403-405, related to application forms, prior to repeal by Pub. L. 106-475, §3(a), Nov. 9, 2000, 114 Stat. 2096.

Another prior section 5102 was renumbered section 8302 of this title.

AMENDMENTS

2003—Subsec. (c). Pub. L. 108-183 added subsec. (c).

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 2003 AMENDMENT

Pub. L. 108-183, title VII, §701(c), Dec. 16, 2003, 117 Stat. 2670, provided that: "The amendments made by this section [amending this section and section 5103 of this title] shall take effect as if enacted on November 9, 2000, immediately after the enactment of the Veterans Claims Assistance Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-475; 114 Stat. 2096)."

§ 5103. Notice to claimants of required information and evidence

(a) **REQUIRED INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE.**—(1) The Secretary shall provide to the claimant and the claimant's representative, if any, by the most effective means available, including electronic communication or notification in writing, notice of any information, and any medical or lay evidence, not previously provided to the Secretary that is necessary to substantiate the claim. As part of that notice, the Secretary shall indicate which portion of that information and evidence, if any, is to be provided by the claimant and which portion, if any, the Secretary, in accordance with section 5103A of this title and any other applicable provisions of law, will attempt to obtain on behalf of the claimant.

(2)(A) The Secretary shall prescribe in regulations requirements relating to the contents of notice to be provided under this subsection.

(B) The regulations required by this paragraph—

(i) shall specify different contents for notice based on whether the claim concerned is an

original claim, a claim for reopening a prior decision on a claim, or a claim for an increase in benefits;

(ii) shall provide that the contents for such notice be appropriate to the type of benefits or services sought under the claim;

(iii) shall specify for each type of claim for benefits the general information and evidence required to substantiate the basic elements of such type of claim; and

(iv) shall specify the time period limitations required pursuant to subsection (b).

(b) **TIME LIMITATION.**—(1) In the case of information or evidence that the claimant is notified under subsection (a) is to be provided by the claimant, such information or evidence must be received by the Secretary within one year from the date such notice is sent.

(2) This subsection shall not apply to any application or claim for Government life insurance benefits.

(3) Nothing in paragraph (1) shall be construed to prohibit the Secretary from making a decision on a claim before the expiration of the period referred to in that subsection.

(4) Nothing in this section shall require the Secretary to provide notice for a subsequent claim that is filed while a previous claim is pending if the notice previously provided for such pending claim—

(A) provides sufficient notice of the information and evidence necessary to substantiate such subsequent claim; and

(B) was sent within one year of the date on which the subsequent claim was filed.

(5)(A) This section shall not apply to any claim or issue where the Secretary may award the maximum benefit in accordance with this title based on the evidence of record.

(B) For purposes of this paragraph, the term "maximum benefit" means the highest evaluation assignable in accordance with the evidence of record, as long as such evidence is adequate for rating purposes and sufficient to grant the earliest possible effective date in accordance with section 5110 of this title.

(Added Pub. L. 106-475, §3(a), Nov. 9, 2000, 114 Stat. 2096; amended Pub. L. 107-14, §8(a)(12), June 5, 2001, 115 Stat. 35; Pub. L. 108-183, title VII, §701(b), Dec. 16, 2003, 117 Stat. 2670; Pub. L. 110-389, title I, §101(a), Oct. 10, 2008, 122 Stat. 4147; Pub. L. 112-154, title V, §504(a), Aug. 6, 2012, 126 Stat. 1191.)

PRIOR PROVISIONS

A prior section 5103, Pub. L. 85-857, Sept. 2, 1958, 72 Stat. 1225, §3003; Pub. L. 99-570, title XI, §11007(a)(1), Oct. 27, 1986, 100 Stat. 3207-170; renumbered §5103, Pub. L. 102-40, title IV, §402(b)(1), May 7, 1991, 105 Stat. 238; Pub. L. 102-83, §4(a)(1), (b)(1), (2)(E), Aug. 6, 1991, 105 Stat. 403-405, related to incomplete applications, prior to repeal by Pub. L. 106-475, §3(a), Nov. 9, 2000, 114 Stat. 2096.

Another prior section 5103 was renumbered section 8303 of this title.

AMENDMENTS

2012—Subsec. (a)(1). Pub. L. 112-154, §504(a)(1), substituted "The" for "Upon receipt of a complete or substantially complete application, the" and "provide to" for "notify" and inserted "by the most effective means