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COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

March 9, 2026

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins,

I write in response to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announcement on February 23, 2026,¹ that the veterans claims backlog is under 100,000 for the first time since May 2020. While this is a productive milestone, I would appreciate additional clarifying information to better understand the Department's current performance and ensure continued accountability on behalf of my constituents.

The enactment of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins (PACT) Act in 2022 led to an unprecedented number of claims, as more veterans were finally able to access the benefits earned through their service. This naturally led to a temporary increase in the claims backlog. As time has passed, it seems we have come to a natural decrease in the rate of submissions, allowing for a decrease in the backlog of claims.

While veterans deserve to have their claims reviewed as quickly as possible, they also deserve accurate claims review, with processors given enough time to ensure that their claim is done properly. In the most recent status report on the detailed claims dashboard dated February 28, 2026², the claims backlog stood at 94,611. As previously stated, I am glad to see that number continuing to decrease. However, I am troubled by another statistic on the same dashboard: three-month claim-based accuracy appears to be trending down and now stands at a startling 81.73%³.

To better understand the current situation and to support Congress's proper oversight and policy development, I respectfully ask that you please provide data and answers to the following questions:

1. The total number of claims that have been received since January 1, 2025.

¹ "VA benefits claims backlog under 100k for first time since 2020". VA News. Feb. 23, 2026.

<https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-benefits-claims-backlog-under-100k-for-first-time-since-2020/>

² Veterans Benefits Administration Reports, Detailed Claims Data.

https://www.benefits.va.gov/reports/detailed_claims_data.asp

³ Ibid.

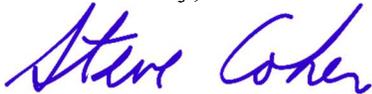
2. The number of claims where a claimant has requested a higher-level review since January 1, 2025.
 - a. Please provide a breakdown of these claims disaggregated by body system.
3. The number of claims that are currently pending at the Board of Veterans' Appeals as well as information regarding the number of claims that have been appealed to the Board since January 1, 2025.
4. To the extent that artificial intelligence or machine learning are being used to assist in the adjudication of claims decisions, either through the Automated Decision Support (ADS) program or the AI Claims Evaluation System (AICES) pilot:
 - a. How many claims to date have been processed utilizing ADS or AICES, broken down by program and year, since 2022?
 - b. How many of those claims have been found to have quality errors?
 - i. Please note which quality errors were discovered by staff prior to a rating decision and which were found either during a higher-level review, appeal, or other point in the process.
5. When quality errors have been identified by staff prior to decision finalization, how are staff able to report these errors for remediation?
6. Of claims decisions reached utilizing AI, how many have seen claimants file for higher level review or have appealed the decision to the Board?
 - a. How many of these are citing a clear and unmistakable error (CUE) on the presented evidence and how many were filed as general disagreement with the decision?
7. Please also provide a copy of VA policies relating to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in reviewing and approving claims.
8. Regarding staffing, the recent workforce dashboard noted that there have been 0 VBA hires in FY26⁴. This, coupled with a retention rate of 80%⁵, indicates a declining workforce available to process veterans' claims. Accordingly, for the calendar years 2024 through 2026, please provide the number of employees conducting claims processing as either Veterans' Service Representatives or Ratings Veterans' Service Representatives, and the number of employees assigned to Quality Review Teams or otherwise engaged in quality assurance. Additionally, please provide VA's current policies regarding mandatory overtime, remote work, and telework for these employees.

This information will help assess the impact of both increased demand on the VA and ongoing reforms regarding claims adjudication.

I appreciate your timely attention and look forward to your response.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

⁴ VA Workforce Dashboard. February 27, 2026. <https://department.va.gov/employees/wp-content/uploads/sites/63/2026/03/VA-Workforce-Dashboard-Issue-34.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.