One of the most important responsibilities of the Accredited Representative is to ensure that the claimant receives due process under the laws and regulations of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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We provide fair representation, assistance, and counseling to ensure our claimants receive full due process.

In order to be recognized as an accredited representative of a National Service Organization the individual must:

- Certify to the Secretary (of the VA) that no fees will be solicited or collected in return for services provided for claims and/or appeals
- File the proper Power of Attorney (POA) form with the VA
  - Services rendered, by a retired military person, for claims occurring after exit from active duty are not a violation of the regulations pertaining to accredited representatives
POA

- **POA may be accepted from the following**
  - The veteran
  - An incompetent veteran’s legally constituted guardian, parent, spouse, near relative, or manager of institution where veteran is maintained
  - A deceased veteran’s dependent or designated beneficiaries, or if incompetent, the fiduciaries of such persons
  - Persons entitled to reimbursement incurred in the connection with the last sickness and burial of the veteran

- **POA may NOT be accepted from the following**
  - Any person whose interests are detrimental or adverse to those of the veteran
  - A claim in which two or more persons are claimants to the same monetary benefit
    - Examples are apportionment claims by an estranged spouse and claims which are simultaneously contested

- **POA rules**
  - A dependent claimant must sign a new POA after death of veteran
  - POA that would result in dual representation may not be accepted
  - If a BVA appeal, with D.C. hearing, is requested the POA must be changed to *straight* American Legion
POA Revocation

- **Power of Attorney MAY be revoked for reason such as:**
  - Tampering with, altering evidence, willfully providing false information
  - Refusal to cooperate and maintain an effective working relationship
  - **Threats or acts of violence**
  - Harassment by phone or in person
  - If further representation may give rise to conflict of interest of privacy violation
  - **The claim has no basis in law (not adjudicative action)**
  - The benefits being received are contrary to law or regulation
  - Representation of a co-worker or friend may present inadvertent disclosure of confidential personal information and give rise to unreasonable expectations

- **POA revocation special considerations:**
  - POA may not be withdrawn based on personal prejudice or discomfort
  - POA should not be accepted for pending appeal unless authorized by DSO and VA&R
Duties of the Accredited VSO

- Prepare, present, and prosecute claims IAW the laws administered by DVA
- Communicate to claimants the extent and limitation of representation
- Assess the facts and review prior claims history
- Reconcile the facts with the law
- Communicate eligibility criteria, necessary evidence, and the process of adjudication
- Discuss tactics and strategies with claimants
- Achieve the best possible effective date
- Develop a complete record of evidence and documents
- Manage deadlines applicable to informal claims, appellate windows, waiver requests, etc.
- Develop relationships with DVA adjudicators/administrators to assist our clients
- Ensure VA complies with all duties to notify, assist, consider evidence, infer issues, etc.
- Safeguard as confidential any veteran (PII) information pertaining to claims and appeals

NOTE: An accredited representative may not sign a VAF 21-526 or Eligibility Verification Report (EVR)
“Proceedings before the VA are ex parte in nature. It is the obligation of VA to assist a claimant in developing the facts pertinent to the claim and to render a decision which grants every benefit that can be supported in law while protecting the interests of the Government.”
“The Secretary shall make reasonable efforts to assist a claimant in obtaining evidence necessary to substantiate the claimant’s claim for a benefit under a law administered by the Secretary.”

Question: What is reasonable? Who has the final responsibility to secure government held evidence? Privately held evidence?

• The final burden of proof in establishing a claim for DVA benefits rests with the claimant.
Is a Service Officer obligated to do more than the VA in helping a claimant obtain VA benefits? *How? Why?*
Standards of Conduct

- American Legion Code of Procedures (May 20, 2004)
Accreditation Revoked

Accreditation can be revoked by DVA under certain circumstances including:

- Unlawful, unprofessional, or unethical practice which shall include but not be limited to the following—
  - Deceiving, misleading or threatening a claimant or prospective claimant
  - Neglecting to prosecute a claim for 6 months or more
  - Failing to furnish a reasonable response within 90 days of request for evidence
  - Willfully withholding an application for benefits

Accreditation shall be canceled when the General Counsel finds an agent’s, attorney’s, or representative’s performance before DVA demonstrates a lack of the degree of competence necessary to adequately prepare, present, and prosecute claims for veterans’ benefits. (See 38 C.F.R. 14.633)
DSO Actions

- Policy matters requiring VA&R Commission action should be sent to
  - Director, National VA&R Commission
    The American Legion
    1608 K Street, NW
    Washington, DC 20006
- May submit additional comments on the merits of BVA appeal to The American Legion BVA unit
- May not provide representation in a Social Security Administration appeal before SSA review boards
- Should notify appellant of timelines involved with filing timely NOD, VAF 9 and CAVC appeal

NOTE: Review current Code of Procedures for details on matters requiring special consideration and VA&R Commission review/approval
Fugitive Felons

- Federal law prohibits payment of almost all VA benefits to veterans and dependents while in fugitive felon status. A fugitive felon is defined as:
  - A person who “is fleeing to avoid prosecution, custody or confinement for a felony, including those that have violated probation
  - The term “felony” includes state defined high misdemeanors that would be classified as felonies under federal law

- The American Legion proposes that the following be included in letters to fugitive felons:
  - Effective date of proposed termination
  - The fact that beneficiary is considered a FF
  - The reason VA believes beneficiary to be a FF
  - A request for information showing the beneficiary is not a FF
  - How and where beneficiary can contact VA
  - An explanation of how VA benefits may be reinstated
  - An explanation as to the one year time limit to reopen claim after dismissal
Check on Learning

- What are three of the duties of the DSO/VSO?

- What are three of the clients duties?

- What is the time limit for filing a Form 9 after the SOC/SSOC is received?

- What are three reasons that accreditation may be revoked?

- Name three reasons a POA may be revoked?

- Does the DSO/VSO have a legal obligation to inform the VA if a beneficiary is receiving benefits which are in excess of the legally based entitlement?

- Who may a POA be accepted from? Who may a POA not be accepted from?

- Fill in the blank “We provide fair __________, assistance, and counseling to ensure our claimants receive full ______ ________.”