



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON

July 20, 2005

The Honorable Lane Evans  
Ranking Democratic Member  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
U. S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Evans:

I am writing in response to your June 21, 2005, letter concerning a Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) directive imposing a concurring second-signature requirement for certain benefit decisions.

As noted in your letter, the directive issued by the Under Secretary for Benefits on June 14, 2005, required a concurring second signature on grants of service connection for PTSD, 100 percent disability evaluations, and total disability ratings based upon individual unemployability (IU). This directive addressed the Inspector General's recommendation that VBA institute increased quality reviews of PTSD and IU cases at the local level. Shortly after issuance, we became aware of growing concern that the scope of this directive was too broad in that it included 100 percent evaluations for all disabilities and, as you pointed out, too narrow because it did not include a review of denials of service connection for PTSD. The Under Secretary therefore withdrew his directive on June 20 in order to consider what changes are necessary.

We intend to issue a new directive in the near future that requires a concurring second signature on the following cases: (1) grants of service connection for PTSD; (2) denials of service connection for PTSD; (3) grants of 100 percent evaluations for PTSD; and (4) grants of total disability ratings based upon IU. We agree that the extra scrutiny of denials provided through this second-signature review will help to ensure that we have taken all appropriate actions and provided all assistance possible before denying a veteran's claim for PTSD.

We appreciate your concern and your support of our efforts to ensure all veterans receive the benefits they have earned through their service to our nation. A similar response has been sent to the other members of the Committee who co-signed the letter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. James Nicholson", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

R. James Nicholson