

Transition from Service

The VFW's Concern:

Leaving service is often complicated by service-related ailments, family needs, loss of identity and support networks, and the required training to enter a new career field. Sadly, the initial year following discharge also comes with increased suicide risk among veterans, heightening the need to ensure all transitioning service members are connected to post-service benefits and resources as quickly as possible.

One of the best resources to have during this period are accredited representatives who can help file Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) claims. Through BDD, service members can file expedited claims and complete medical evaluations before leaving service, enabling VA to provide disability ratings upon discharge. Receiving accelerated claims decisions means BDD participants are better able to minimize gaps in essential care like mental health counseling and medication management once they officially leave service.

Unfortunately, not all service members going through the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program (TAP) have access to BDD accredited representatives, resulting in lost opportunities to receive timely care and benefits upon discharge. The VFW believes there is immense value in incorporating these accredited representatives into the TAP curriculum itself. Specifically, we would like to see these representatives physically present in TAP classrooms during VA briefings on resources that can be applied for prior to discharge. Accredited representatives would not only be able to highlight the BDD program, but also help transitioning service members file claims. VA contract employees who largely teach the VA curriculum cannot legally assist with claims.

The VFW firmly believes the BDD program is an underutilized tool in the fight against veteran suicide. Directly connecting transitioning service members to accredited representatives in TAP classrooms has the potential to save lives.

The VFW urges Congress to:

Pass H.R. 3933/ S. 2888, *TAP Promotion Act*, to require accredited representatives from national, state, and local organizations to be included in TAP classes.