

## **VFW Tops \$8.3 Billion in VA Benefits Recoveries for Veterans**

*More than 500,000 veterans and transitioning military represented by the VFW in FY 2018*

**WASHINGTON** – The Department of Veterans Affairs has reported that more than a half-million veterans represented by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. this past fiscal year received in excess of \$8.3 billion in VA disability compensation and pension benefits, which far exceeds last year’s record recovery of \$7.7 billion.

“The VFW advocates for veterans in many ways, from lobbying Congress to create good quality of life legislation for America’s veterans, service members and their families and survivors, to helping veterans and transitioning service members receive the VA benefits they earned after they return home wounded, ill or injured,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. “For nearly a century — and a full decade before the VA’s predecessor organization was created — the VFW has helped veterans understand and file for their government benefits, a service that is needed now just as much as it was then.”

The VFW accredits an international network of more than 2,000 highly-trained and professional veterans’ advocates whose mission is to help service members, veterans, and their eligible family members receive their earned VA benefits, explained Lawrence. VFW’s accredited advocates can be found in every VA Regional Offices and dozens of VA health care facilities. Many state and county service officers also carry a VFW accreditation to ensure that VFW claimants can receive timely assistance closer to home. In fiscal year 2018, VFW’s accredited service officers filed more than 109,000 new claims for VFW claimants, resulting in \$1.4 billion in new benefits paid to veterans.

In addition to assisting veterans at VA Regional Offices and in the community, the VFW places a special focus on helping transitioning service members file for their benefits on 24 military installations through the VFW Pre-Discharge Claims Program. Last year, the VFW’s Pre-Discharge Claims Representatives filed nearly 15,000 claims for separating service members, resulting in more than \$155 million in disability compensation.

“Once a veteran chooses to be represented by the VFW, we commit to provide you with a ‘Lifetime of Advocacy’ in navigating and understanding your earned VA benefits,” said VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci. “When life circumstances change, if new conditions emerge, or if VA asks to reevaluate a condition, your VFW-accredited representative will be there to help. If you disagree with your rating decision, we’ll help you appeal,” he said. “Even after you pass away, the VFW will be there to help your family understand their benefits and how the VA can honor your memory. This is our commitment to our clients, and just one of the ways we prove that ‘No One Does More for Veterans than the VFW.’”

In order to provide this “Lifetime of Advocacy,” the VFW provides up to 80 hours of classroom training every year to its VFW-accredited representatives stationed at the VA’s 56 Regional Offices and on 24 of the military’s largest installations. In 2019, the VFW will expand its reach to all VFW-accredited representatives through a new online learning platform, just in time for the 100th anniversary of the VFW’s benefits assistance program.

By law, VFW’s accredited claims assistance is provided free of charge and under no obligation to any honorably discharged veteran, regardless of VFW membership status.

To find a VA-accredited service officer at VFW copy and paste this link, <https://www.vfw.org/assistance/va-claims-separation-benefits>. If you are a service member within 180 days of discharge from the military, you can contact a VFW Pre-Discharge Representative in your area copy and paste this link <https://www.vfw.org/assistance/va-claims-separation-benefits/pre-discharge-locations-and-contacts>.