

TDVS Benefits Bulletin 25-2

This month's bulletin is 1,258 words and will take just over 5 minutes of your time.

1 BIG THING: The Honorable Doug Collins Sworn in as VA Secretary

Doug Collins was sworn in as the 12th secretary of Veterans Affairs on February 5, 2025. Read his **message** to Veterans and VA employees. Read his **biography**.

TDVS Updates

☐ TDVS' Knowledge Library

- ☐ Added **2025 Veterans Benefits Guide – VSO Tools – Publications**
- ☐ Added **VA Benefit Eligibility Matrix**
- ☐ Added **Benefits Bulletin 25-1 – VSO Tools – Benefits Bulletin – 2025**
- ☐ Added **TDVS Accreditation Course Smartbook January 2025 – VSO Tools – Publications**
- ☐ Added **TN County and State Veteran Service Officer Contact Roster February 2025 – VSO Tools - Organizations**
- ☐ Added February 2025 Lunch and Learn: Complex Claims Assistance – Discharge Upgrade – *TDVS Training Resources – Monthly Training 2025*
 - Complex Claims Assistance – Discharge Upgrades **Presentation Slides**
 - **TDVS Fact Sheet** Complex Claims Assistance Discharge Upgrades V3
 - Complex Claims Assistance – Discharge Upgrades **Recording**

☐ Training Updates

What's next:

- **March Lunch & Learn** – Wednesday, 12, 2025, 11:30 – 12:30 CST – TBD
- **April Mandatory Quarterly Accreditation Training** – Regional / In-person
 - Region 1: April 8, 2025; 9:00am – 4pm; Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce, 197 Auditorium St. Jackson TN 38301
 - Region 2: April 1, 2025; 9:00am – 4pm; Memorial Building, 308 W 7th St., Columbia, TN 38401
 - Region 3: April 10, 2025; 9:00am – 4pm; Veterans Memorial Building, 90 East Spring Street, Cookeville, TN 38501
 - Region 4: TBD; 9:00am – 4pm; TBD

2025 Training Schedule

We value your input! To ensure future training offerings are relevant, impactful, and meet your

*advocacy needs, we want to hear from you. Please take a moment to **share your ideas** for training topics or subjects you'd like to see included in upcoming training sessions.*

VetraSpec VA Form Updates - VA Forms 21-0995 and 21-0781

VA Form 21-0995 and VA Form 21-0781 have been updated in VetraSpec. These updates were first identified in **Benefits Bulletin 24-7**, which outlined the substantive edits.

I need more:

- **Benefits Bulletin 24-7**
- **VBA VSO Quarterly Slide Deck**
- **VA Form 20-0995 – With Information and Instructions**
- **VA Form 21-0781 – With Information and Instructions**

Learning Opportunity

The Tennessee Department of Revenue offers free monthly tax webinars to the public. These live virtual events offer tax practitioners, attorneys, accountants, and others an opportunity to learn more in depth about a tax topic and ask questions.

Tax Exemptions for Military Service Members

□ **When:** February 25, 2025

Time: 9:00 AM | (UTC-06:00) Central Time (US & Canada)

Description: join for this free webinar to discuss TN tax exemptions available for military service members.

**Register for the
Event**

VA and Veteran Benefit Updates

VA Postpones Secure Sign in Changes

VA will provide Veterans more time to start using a Login.gov or ID.me account to sign in to their My HealtheVet portal.

Catch up quick: In 2025, Veterans will have 2 secure sign-in account options (Login.gov and ID.me) for all VA websites and apps. VA had planned to remove the My HealtheVet option after January 31, 2025, and the DS Logon option after September 30, 2025.

What's new: VA is extending the final deadline by which veterans and beneficiaries can log in to VA.gov, VA mobile applications and other VA online services using their My HealtheVet username and password from Jan. 31, 2025, to March 4, 2025. The deadline to switch from DS Logon to ID.me or Login.gov remains Sept. 30, 2025.

I need more:

- **Learn How to Create an Account**
- **Prepare for VA's Secure Sign-In Changes**
- **VA Press Release**

Rudisill v. McDonough Decision Update

Benefits Bulletin 24-5 highlighted the Supreme Court's decision in *Rudisill v. McDonough* that found that Veterans can use benefits accrued under both the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post-9/11 GI Bill up to the 48-month aggregate benefits cap. VA recently held a VSO forum to share information on how it will implement this decision.

Catch up quick: The decision changed how qualifying periods of military service impact benefits earned, so individuals may now be eligible for expanded VA education and training benefits. If a Veteran served at least two periods of service-one that qualifies for the Montgomery GI Bill and a second that qualifies for the Post-9/11 GI Bill-you may be able to receive additional GI Bill Benefits.

I need more:

- Supreme Court's Rudisill Opinion
 - VA Press Release
 - VA Rudisill Webpage
 - VA's Communication to VSOs
-

Practice Like a Pro

What did I learn from quarterly training?

January's quarterly accreditation training was an NVLSP Webinar – Identifying Duty to Assist Errors: Reasons Why a VA Medical Examination May Be Inadequate.

Why it matters: VA has a compensation and pension examination problem. You hear about it from the Veterans you serve. Frequently, your disagreements and the positive dispositions obtained at the Board of Veterans' Appeals are a result of VA's error in providing an adequate medical examination or opinion. VA's Medical Disability Examination Office highlighted several challenges during their **presentation** at Annual Conference.

Here are a few key takeaways and advocacy strategies from January's training to add to your toolbox -

- **Provide VA with sufficient evidence to trigger the duty to obtain a medical exam or opinion – McClendon Factors**
 - Current Diagnosis Not Required – Provide lay evidence to demonstrate symptoms.
- Spot inadequacies in a VA exam as soon as possible and **bring them to VA's attention immediately.**
 - Use a VA Form 21-4138 to point out why the exam was inadequate. VA might recognize the exam, or opinion is inadequate and have it reworked. If VA makes a decision, use the **Claim Accuracy Review** process or a **Higher-Level Review** (Duty to Assist Error) to disagree with VA's decision.
- When filing a secondary service connection claim, you should **explicitly raise the issues of both causation and aggravation** by submitting the following statement to VA.
 - *The Veteran alleges that (his/her) (name of secondary condition) has been caused or aggravated by (his/her) service-connected (name of primary condition).*
 - *Any VA exam that does not address both theories will be considered inadequate.*

I need more:

- TDVS 2024 Annual Training Conference (Day 2) - **Medical Disability Examination Office Presentation**
- TDVS 2024 Annual Training Conference (Day 2) - **C&P Exams Practical Application Session Presentation**

- TDVS 2024 Annual Training Conference (Day 3) - Toxic Exposure Risk Activity (TERA) Claims Training

👉 **Don't forget:** The Pact Act included a provision that triggers a VA examination / opinion for certain Veterans with evidence of participation in a TERA, even when claiming certain non-presumptive conditions.

□ Advocacy Spotlight

□ Please join us in welcoming Tennessee's newest accredited representatives:

Marissa Gilliam-King, Jefferson County
Edward Norris, Putnam County
Julie Coulter, Blount County
Avery Honeycutt, Scott County
Shaun Smith, Carter County
Bonnie Watts, Jackson Field Office
Justin Weir, McMinn County
Cole Matthews, Washington County
Rebecca Smith, Chester County
Estella Ford, Shelby County
Sandra Smith, Shelby County
Patrick Kizer, Memphis Field Office
Michael Holmes, Shelby County
Stacey Greer, Cheatham County
Tykeria Grissom, Shelby County
James Reynolds, Sullivan County

Congratulations on your recent completion of TDVS's Accreditation Course and TDVS accreditation!





*Are you a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one? You're not alone - the **Veterans Crisis Line** is here for you. You don't have to be enrolled in VA benefits or health care to call.*

*Do you have an advocacy success story or something you'd like to see included in an upcoming bulletin? If so, **share**.*

*Past TDVS Benefits Bulletins Can Be Found on the **VSO Tools** Portion of TDVS's Knowledge Library*



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