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SHAKE-UP AT VA'S MONTGOMERY REGIONAL OFFICE

Internal email from manager begs staff to get to work and states, "We are NOT providing quality service ..."

by Larry Scott, VA Watchdog dot Org

The first hint of trouble at the VBA's (Veterans' Benefits Administration) Montgomery, AL Regional Office (RO) came to VA Watchdog dot Org from numerous veterans who told horror stories about not getting their claims handled properly and in a timely fashion.

Then, attorneys who practice veterans' law told of similar situations.

Then, I began getting emails from a VBA employee in the Montgomery RO and posted the information on our [Under the Radar](#) page:

An employee of the Veterans' Benefits Administration (VBA) who works at a Regional Office in a Southern state reports more document mishandling. The employee has found VA forms with veterans' personal information lying in the parking lot... and has documented many instances of a veteran's personal information being sent to other veterans. Management refuses to take action. VAOIG has been notified... but has not responded to request for investigation. 4/2/09

We began to receive more and more emails from this employee and finally did a feature piece on the problems at the RO without identifying it for fear of interfering with a possible investigation. [The complete article is here](#), with excerpts below:

The mail keeps backing up so bad .. there is right this moment a stack of 3000 writeouts (2009) stacking up in Triage. They have been sitting in a unused desk for months. We have 500 pieces of returned mail and a box (6000 pieces) of returned mail-COLA. It has been collecting for months in a box under a table. Why do we keep making the same mistakes - because the supervisors / management do not pride themselves on their work / responsibilities or the VA organization. Now, if you

ask them to put a table of food together, well then, smiles and dedicated caterers emerge. Character!

There are thousands of brown folders in the FAB. These folders do not have C-file numbers, no association to C-file. The mail inside is probably not date stamped and has no control. If a claim was pending in the past, this mail was not with the file when a decision was made on the veterans claim. I have found additional service treatment records (STRs) and other evidence not associated with the veterans C-file. Example: I reviewed a file where the veteran filed a claim on Feb 07. The mail in the brown folder was not date stamped.

Now, it appears that there is no investigation into this employee's charges, so we are outing the Montgomery, AL Regional Office.

How bad is it? A look at the latest [Monday Morning Workload Report from VBA \(7-13-09\)](#) shows Montgomery with Ratings Claims pending over 180 days at 30.1%, Non-Rating Claims pending over 180 days at 20.2% and C&P Work Items pending over 180 days at 30.8%.

This doesn't make Montgomery the worst RO, just one of the worst.

But, how bad is it really?

It's so bad that the Veterans Service Center (VSC) manager had to shake up the operation and actually beg employees to do their jobs.

I don't think I've ever read such a pathetic plea from a manager to employees.

[The original document is here](#) and it is reproduced below ... and you can bet that many of the 57 VBA Regional Offices around the country have similar problems ... just look at the claims backlog now approaching one million.

From: Prude, Valerie, VBAMONT

Sent: Friday, July 10, 2009 11 13 AM

To: VBAMGY VSCEmp Subject: VSC Changes - Coaches Signed By: valerie prude

Effective Monday, July 13, 2009, the following changes will be in place with regard to our Coaches' Staff:

Public Contact - Gladys Quinn will be in charge until the Coach position is filled.

Appeals - Coach Carson Davis, Asst. Coach Julia Clark.

Pre D Teams - Norma Jenkins (PRED 1). Brian Shepherd (PRED 2)

Rating Board Teams - Sandra Payne (RATING BOARD 1), Bran Hall (RATING BOARD 2) Triage - Coach Terri Jordan. Asst. Coach Jack Polk and Mark Carter Term Employees Hit Team - Keena Cauthen and Craig Mack Post Determination - LaDawn Shepherd (McClung)

These changes have been determined to be necessary based on our continued inability to achieve results. We are meeting less than half of the performance targets we met last Fiscal Year and unfortunately have determined that those were made on unstable practices. Another unfortunate discovery over the last few months is the lack of individual empowerment and ownership we are seeing in the work that is passing through each and every employees' hands.

We are NOT providing quality service to the veterans of this state and we are no longer able to present a case that we are. We desperately need for you, the hard working employees that have a sense of responsibility to the veterans in our state, to step up and mentor your fellow employees. I have explained to the Management staff that the stress to perform in this office will NOT decrease in the near future and they must get on board to facilitate the change in the culture in this office. Change that encompasses individual preservation to an understanding that we are public servants and this is a hard job.

In conjunction with the Coaching changes, we are also going to create a Quality/Training Team to ensure that all quality reviewers are reviewing cases consistently and that we conduct training based on the training needs identified during these reviews. The team will be in place some time next week and will sit as a team in the Public Contact area. I will send a separate email with the names of the members of that team once I have spoken to the subject matter experts we will be assigning to this job.

I met with the Pre-Determination Teams this morning during one of their training sessions and plan to meet with all other teams as soon as possible to provide additional feedback about the work practices and processes that need to be corrected at the office.

**Amy L. Hill
Veterans Service Center Manager**

TOPICS: veterans, veterans' benefits, VA, Department of Veterans' Affairs, DoD, Montgomery, Alabama, VA Regional Office, Amy Hill

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