



**INGHAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF VETERAN AFFAIRS**  
HUMAN SERVICES BUILDING  
5303 S. Cedar St., Lansing, MI 48911  
Phone: (517) 887 4331

From the Director:

I would like to thank you for providing us the opportunity to assist you in filing for benefits with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. Our service officers are highly trained and skilled in all aspects of the claims process. They are accredited with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs through several organizations including the National Association of County Veterans Counselors, Veterans of Foreign Wars, The American Legion, and Disabled American Veterans.

They will assist you with:

- Obtaining Appropriate Supporting Documentation
- Completing the Appropriate VA Claim Forms
- Filing Your Claim Ensuring the Earliest Effective Date
- Monitoring Your Claim
- Forwarding Additional Documentation if Necessary
- Reviewing Your Rating Decision
- Applying for Ancillary Benefits Based on Your Rating Decision
- File on Appeal if You Disagree With Your Rating Decision

Our counselors are employed by Ingham County and work for you...not the VA. We will discuss in detail with you the merits of your claim and your supporting documentation. If necessary we will discuss any shortfalls that may be seen in your claim. Our goal is to assist you with a successful claim. Many times we will ask you if you can get additional supporting medical documentation or other evidence that will strengthen your claim. Keep in mind that we have already submitted the appropriate documentation to ensure the earliest effective date for your claim.

You have all heard the VA horror stories of shredded documents, the lengthy claims process and others. You may even have been approached by someone that states that "they" can get a claim through faster than anyone on the planet. Truth be told the fastest way to get a claim through is to file a complete claim with all supporting documentation included. The only situations that the VA will expedite a claim are where the claimant is homeless or they have a terminal illness (proof should be submitted with claim).

We ask that you keep in **contact** with us on all correspondence that you may receive from the VA. This may include notices of an appointment related to your claim (commonly called a c&p exam), or letters from the Regional Office. There may or may not be a need to respond to these letters. The VA has a language of their own and many times a client will misinterpret what the VA is trying to communicate to them. Your counselor may spend a significant amount of time in between appointments researching legislation on your claim or securing additional supporting

documentation. If you at any time have a question on your claim please contact your counselor directly by phone or by email. Many times your questions and concerns will not require an appointment.

I have seen many instances where an individual, trying to assist a veteran with a claim has actually done the veteran/survivor a disservice. One instance that is brought to my attention on a fairly regular basis is the filing of an incomplete claim. The VA has what is called a Fully Developed Claims process. When a claimant files for benefits under this process they are asking the VA to make a determination based on the supporting documentation that is submitted with the claim and other evidence already in possession of the VA such as medical records at VA treatment facilities and service medical records. If anything is submitted on a Fully Developed Claim after the VA receives this claim - the claim is automatically taken out of the Fully Developed Claims process. Also the filing of another claim while there is a Fully Developed Claim pending will result in it being kicked out of the Fully Developed Claim process. The end result is longer processing time.

Clients have brought concerns into our office where some well-meaning person:

- filed the wrong form for them such as filing for an increase in a disability that was denied by the VA;
- filed a claim for them that VA previously denied and submitted the same supporting documentation;
- filed a claim for service connected compensation for a surviving spouse.

These are just a few of the instances where veterans and their survivors ended up being provided inappropriate information and the end result was none of these claims had a chance of success. Don't let this happen to you. Fortunately our benefits counselors were able to address the discrepancies in these situations and the claims were updated appropriately. It is imperative that you developed a good working relationship with your benefits counselor and them with you.

I am attaching the Veterans Service Officers Code of Ethics for your review. I want to thank you for your service and would like to thank you for allowing us to assist you with your claim for benefits. Our counselors and I realize the responsibility that we have in providing you with the best service you deserve.

Sincerely,

*Randy A. Marwede*

Randy A. Marwede  
Director

Ingham County is an Equal Opportunity Employer  
VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS  
CODE OF ETHICS

1. Confidential information, whether supplied by the veteran, the Department of Veterans Affairs, or other parties shall remain confidential and will not be released or discussed except to those personally connected to the case with a need to know in order to assist the veteran or the veteran's dependents.
2. The Service Officer will prepare and perfect all claims to the best of his/her ability with the intent of affording the claimant the benefits to which they are entitled. The Service Officer must insure that all information is true and factual to the best of his/her knowledge.
3. The Service Officer shall maintain high professional standards in dealing with other service officers, (federal, state, and local) and other persons and agencies as necessary in service to his/her client.
4. The Service Officer will provide services without prejudice to all persons making a claim to the Department of Veterans Affairs.
5. The Service Officer will, to the best of his/her ability, maintain a working knowledge of all rules and regulations concerning veterans' benefits and will strive to keep such knowledge updated in light of constantly changing laws and regulations.
6. Veterans Service Officers should not, under any circumstances, accept remuneration in cash or other form for services rendered.
7. Veterans Service Officers should not, under any circumstances, serve as guardians, committees, or fiduciaries for any other individuals receiving benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs or any other agency.