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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-225T](#), a statement for the record to Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Chairman, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, asked GAO to submit a statement for the record highlighting findings from an examination of the Veterans Benefit Administration's (VBA) fiscal year 2005 budget justification. In that review, we assessed (1) VBA's determination and justification of claims processing staffing levels, and the role of productivity in such determinations, and (2) VBA's projections of future claims workload and complexity.

What GAO Recommends

In our November 2004 report, GAO recommended that VBA take steps to ensure the Congress has a realistic and transparent foundation on which to base funding decisions for disability compensation and pension programs. Specifically, GAO recommended that VBA provide additional information on (1) the impact of claims processing improvement initiatives; (2) claims processing productivity, and plans to improve productivity; and (3) the impact of changes in claims complexity. VA concurred with this recommendation.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-225T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cynthia A. Bascetta at (202) 512-7215 or bascettac@gao.gov.

VETERANS' DISABILITY BENEFITS

Improved Transparency Needed to Facilitate Oversight of VBA's Compensation and Pension Staffing Levels

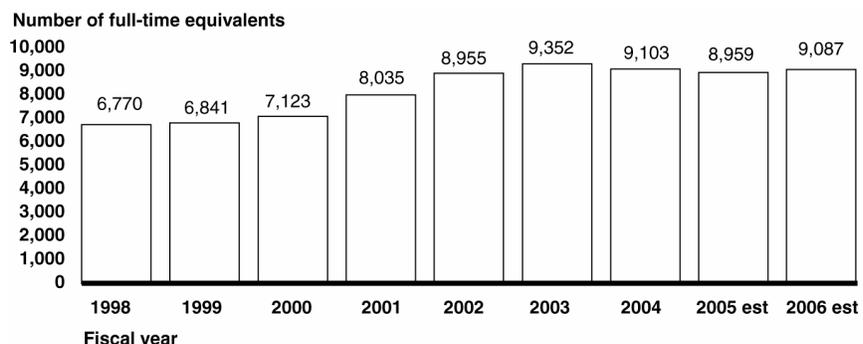
What GAO Found

We reported in November 2004 that VBA's fiscal year 2005 budget justification for disability compensation and pension staffing could have been more transparent. VBA inadequately explained how it planned to deal with a growing workload and meet its performance goals despite a lower staffing level. We recommended that to make its budget justification more transparent and useful for congressional oversight, VBA provide the Congress with the following types of information:

- Explanation of the expected impact of specific initiatives and changes in incoming claims and workload. While the fiscal year 2005 justification identified a number of factors that could affect VBA's staffing requirements, VBA did not clearly explain how each of these initiatives and projections affected its funding request for fewer employees.
- Claims processing productivity, including VBA plans to improve productivity. The fiscal year 2005 budget justification inadequately explained how VBA would achieve productivity improvements needed to improve claims processing performance with larger workloads and fewer staff.
- Explanation of how claims complexity is expected to change and the impact of these changes on productivity and requested staffing levels. VBA stated that claims complexity is increasing, but did not project increases in disabilities per claim or explain how complexity changes would affect productivity.

In responding to our report, VBA agreed to work to include this information in its future budget justifications for compensation and pension staffing and identified more specific steps that it plans to take in its fiscal year 2007 and 2008 budget cycles. We have observed that, in contrast to last year, the fiscal year 2006 justification contains performance goals that VBA believes are more achievable and it addresses how it will achieve these goals within higher resource levels, due to additional funding from the Congress.

VBA Compensation and Pension FTEs, Fiscal Years 1998-2006



Source: Department of Veterans Affairs Budget Submissions for fiscal years 2000-06.