



PRESS RELEASE

Vietnam Veterans of America

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**Contact:
Mokie Porter
301-996-0901**

VAOIG Faults VA Delivery of Services to Children of Vietnam Vets

(Washington, D.C.)--“The recent findings of the VA Office of Inspector General echo what we have long known. Most Vietnam veterans are unaware of the benefits available for children with certain birth defects due to their exposure to Agent Orange,” said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America. “For years, we have been advocating for veterans whose children have spina bifida and are unable to access the services to which they are entitled. We continue to hear countless stories of roadblocks, unjust denials, and unclear access to available healthcare and other benefits in all corners of our country.”

In response to VVA’s advocacy on behalf of the children of Vietnam veterans who are not receiving their benefits--compensation, healthcare, home services, and more--Sen. Mike Braun (R-IN) pressed for a VAOIG review of the VA’s spina bifida program. “Our concerns are reflected in the title of the VAOIG report: *VA Needs Better Internal Communication and Data Sharing to Strengthen the Administration of Spina Bifida Benefits*,” said Rowan.

“Communication issues we had noted repeatedly were confirmed by the VAOIG. The Veterans Benefits Administration and the Veterans Health Administration are not communicating effectively or sharing data. Delays we had noted in newly identified beneficiaries being enrolled in healthcare were identified. Further, VAOIG found individuals with spina bifida and their caretakers are not receiving critical information about benefits, as VA is not consistently reaching out and communicating with them,” said Rowan.

“For the most part, these adult children, the unfortunate victims of our war, are under the care of their aging veteran parent,” said Rowan. “Currently, the burden of accessing services falls on the families and children. The program is administered in Denver, with no local VA personnel having any responsibility to the veterans or their children. This needs to change. While we concur with VAOIG’s four recommendations, more is needed to remediate the dysfunction. Families must have the option of being assigned a permanent caseworker at their local VA to assist them in navigating the spina bifida program and locating resources close to home. We will continue to fight until we are assured that our children will be taken care of when we are gone.”