**Instructions:** *Below please find a template letter-to-the-editor/op-ed for your use to demonstrate the local impact of VA’s proposed end to the 48-hour review period for our service officers, which was announced abruptly during the COVID-19 crisis. The goal of this message is to be no longer than 300 words for a letter or 500 words for an op-ed submission, amplifying the VFW’s voice to VA leaders who have refused to listen to our concerns on the policy change.*

*Please edit this message however you see fit to encourage publication by any media outlets with which you have a working relationship, focusing on the highlighted areas. We also encourage you to post this letter to any of your Department or officer social media accounts, and to encourage your Districts and Posts to do the same, tagging certain VA leaders. Examples of key social media accounts for VA include: Facebook: @VeteransAffairs @VeteransBenefits Twitter: @DeptVetAffairs @SecWilkie @VAVetBenefits.*

*Below we have provided an example of what a local narrative might look like as a guideline. Your DSOs should have similar examples from their everyday work:*

**Example:** *In Michigan, our service officer Karen Greene recently reviewed a proposed denial for a veteran who twice attempted suicide. Thankfully, she recognized that the veteran received a bad exam and fixed it before the veteran was notified. What would have happened if the veteran received the denial?* *This change will hurt veterans.*

*If you have any questions about this project or how to go about submitting an opinion piece to your local publications, please contact Ryan Gallucci at* *rgallucci@vfw.org* *or Terrence Hayes at* *thayes@vfw.org**.*

**Amid COVID-19, VA Benefits Change Will Harm {State} Veterans**

In the middle of the COVID-19 crisis, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced an abrupt end to its decades-old policy of allowing veterans’ advocates to review proposed benefit decisions for the veterans we represent. For the VFW, this dubious policy change will have dire consequences for the veterans we serve, further eroding their rights to representation when seeking benefits and sewing mistrust with the VA system.

The policy dates back to 1957 and offers advocates two business days to provide an independent quality check on VA decisions, helping veterans receive accurate benefits the first time. Every year, the VFW catches errors in up to seven percent of all the ratings we review, often fixing them before they reach the veteran. On April 24, VA wants this to stop.

In explaining the abrupt change, VA wrote that our independent review was obsolete because of the “feedback loop” to fix errors through the Appeals Modernization Act. However, this so-called “feedback loop” means that veterans first receive bad rating decisions, then must recognize any errors and fill out more bureaucratic paperwork to try to get it fixed. For decades, we have been able to fix problems up front to the benefit of both our veterans and VA.

In {State}, our service officer {Name} recently reviewed {Example – No more than 50 words}. This change will hurt veterans.

We cannot allow VA to go through with this. Now more than ever, VA has an obligation to serve the needs of veterans – not bureaucrats. VA must listen to experienced groups like the VFW. Our veterans are counting on it.