

(Statement of Mr. Guy Williams follows:)

STATEMENT OF GUY S. WILLIAMS, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR CONTACT AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE AND PROCEDURES, COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY, UNITED STATES SENATE, JANUARY 16, 1968

I appreciate the opportunity to appear and discuss S. 1195, a bill before this Subcommittee which would establish the Office of Administrative Ombudsman to investigate administrative practices and procedures of the Social Security Administration, Veterans Administration, Internal Revenue Service and the Bureau of Prisons. I submit for the record the Administrator's report which states our position on the bill and points to the existing aids to claimants before the Veterans Administration. These aids include the VA Contact service and representation by service organization representatives. We have a detailed statement which, with the Chairman's permission, I would like to submit for the record and which I will briefly summarize now.

I understand you are particularly interested in the assistance now available to veterans and their dependents from VA and non-VA sources in the presentation and prosecution of their claims for Veterans Administration benefits.

The Veterans Administration has Contact Representatives stationed in each of its 230 locations. It is the job of the Contact Representative to know by heart the requirements for each benefit, how to apply, the administrative procedures involved and how best to assist the claimant in bringing out the facts that will present his claim in its most favorable light. He must be knowledgeable on many diverse benefit programs . . . compensation, pension, education, insurance, hospitalization, out-patient medical and dental care, wheelchair homes, paraplegic lifts, housing loans, guardianship, burial benefits, automobiles and many others as well as benefits available through other Federal or state agencies. He determines what additional benefits the claimant may be eligible for beyond those specifically requested and assists in the preparation of the proper claim.

The Contact Representative also determines the actions necessary and files claims for veterans who are too ill to act in their own behalf, many of these claimants are patients in hospitals who have no one else immediately available to act for them.

Of the 2.5 million personal interviews conducted by Contact Representatives during FY 1967, thousands were conducted with persons who were not satisfied with the outcome of their claims for benefits. Most of these were resolved to the complete satisfaction of the claimant by sitting down and going through the VA file with him and explaining the requirements of the law and regulation and, where indicated, assisting him in obtaining the evidence that might result in favorable action.

Unique and effective services are also provided claimants for VA benefits by the national service organizations, the American Red Cross and recognized state service organizations. Accredited Representatives of these organizations number nearly 3,200.

Any claimant may file a Power of Attorney with one of these organizations and be assured that a skilled technician representing that organization in the VA regional office and Insurance Centers will assist him fully in the presentation of his claim, and will review each action taken often as the claim is in process, to assure that the claim is fully developed and fairly and properly disposed of. If the claimant or the organization representative expresses disagreement with the decision and finally appeals it, a representative of the service organization appears in the claimant's before the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

Field representatives of these service organizations visit all VA offices and VA hospitals regularly and submit written reports of their findings to their national headquarters which in turn submits them to our Central Office for any indicated investigation and reply.

This completes my formal presentation and I will be pleased to answer any questions of the Subcommittee on the proposal.

Senator LONG. Mr. Kass?

Mr. KASS. Thank you.

Mr. Williams, as I understand the contact system of the VA, when a veteran or anybody, for that matter, walks into a local VA office, he is assigned a contact man. In effect, the first person he sees may be the contact man?