**THE CLAIM BRIEF**

Helping Veterans Understand VA Decisions

FREE PRINTABLE RESOURCE

# DIY, VSO, or Attorney?

Compare filing yourself with accredited representation.

## 4-PAGE COMPARISON CHECKLIST

- ☐ Understand the roles, including accredited claims agents.
- ☐ Ask about experience, communication, and fees.
- ☐ Check accreditation before appointing someone.

> Use privately, offline. This resource provides general education and writing space. It does not evaluate your claim, select a review option, or replace accredited help.

01 / HELP, RESPONSIBILITY, AND COST

# Understand the options

## File yourself

VA provides direct filing methods. Consider your time, comfort with the paperwork, record organization, and ability to follow correspondence. This guide does not assess whether self-filing fits your case.

## Accredited VSO representative

VSO services on your VA benefit claim are free. Accredited VSO representatives can help with evidence, claims, decision reviews, and communication with VA. Ask about availability and experience at your stage.

## Accredited attorney or claims agent

These representatives can help with evidence and legal arguments. Many work after an initial VA decision. Some provide initial-claim help for free; fee eligibility and terms depend on the applicable rules and agreement.

> A denial does not automatically require an attorney. A VSO can also assist with reviews and appeals. A fee, title, or accreditation does not guarantee an outcome.

**What kind of help am I looking for?**

Examples: understanding correspondence, organizing documents, or discussing a decision.

02 / ASK THE INDIVIDUAL, NOT ONLY THE ORGANIZATION

# Questions before you appoint

- ☐ Is the individual currently accredited by VA?
- ☐ Are they accepting matters at my stage of the process?
- ☐ What relevant experience do they have with this kind of issue?
- ☐ What work will they handle, and what will I still need to do?
- ☐ Who will communicate with me, and how are documents exchanged?
- ☐ How will I receive copies and updates?
- ☐ If fees apply, what is covered and how is the amount calculated?
- ☐ Are expenses separate, and when could they be due?
- ☐ What does the agreement say if representation ends?
- ☐ Have I read and kept copies of the appointment and any fee agreement?

**Questions I still want answered before deciding**

Do not assume all agreements use the same percentage or cover the same work. VA's fee-agreement materials explain issues to discuss; this checklist does not determine whether a particular fee is lawful or owed.

03 / PRIVATE NOTES AND OFFICIAL SOURCES

# Compare and verify

| Question | Option A | Option B |
|---|---|---|
| Accreditation checked / date | | |
| Relevant experience / availability | | |
| Scope / communication | | |
| Fees / separate expenses, if any | | |

## Official sources and next reading

**VA: Accredited representative FAQs**
va.gov/resources/va-accredited-representative-faqs/

**VA: Find and appoint accredited help**
va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative/

**VA: Accreditation search**
va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp

**VA: Tips on fee agreements**
va.gov/OGC/docs/Accred/TipsonFeeAgreementsforVeteransClaims.pdf

> Prepared October 30, 2026. General education only. The Claim Brief is independent, is not affiliated with VA, and does not provide claim representation or individual legal advice. Contact the representative before attempting to appoint them.