



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Veterans Benefits Administration
Regional Office
3333 North Central Avenue
Phoenix, Arizona 85012

JANUARY 22, 2015

LAUREN GILGER
KNXV-TV INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER
515 N. 44th St,
PHOENIX, AZ 85008

RE: FOIA Request: **December 2, 2014**

Dear Ms. Gilger:

This is in response to your FOIA request received on December 2, 2014.

The current blocked call rate (calls that don't get through to a VA representative) for the Phoenix VA Call Center;

The Phoenix National Call Center is part of a national call center network that uses a national call queue.

The current blocked call rate for all VA Call Center's nationwide;

FYTD 2015 – 59 percent
FY 2014 - 54.8 percent

Daily call volumes in FY 2015 have increased an average of 8,000 calls a day from FY 2014. June 2014 through October 2014, call volumes increased 42 percent.

To support call volumes and provide choice to our callers, VA implemented the Virtual Hold system. This system allows callers to record their name and phone number and the system automatically calls them back. Callers do not need to stay on the line as the system holds their place in the queue. Since its inception in September 2011, the system has successfully returned over 13 million calls with a 94 percent successful reconnect rate. The National Call Centers provide 13 hours of service operation (8:00am-9:00amET) daily across the time zones. If a caller reaches us after normal business hours the Virtual Hold system allows the caller to schedule an automated return call. The call will be completed on average of one business day.

Approximately 47% of the incoming calls are requesting the status of a benefits claim. VA has developed multiple access points for Veterans to reach us. These options provide additional avenues to obtain benefits information. Our on-line eBenefits site is

available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A premium eBenefits account allows Veterans to view their personal benefit information, such as status of a claim; view or change direct deposit information; and print copies of benefit letters. VA currently has 4.3 million eBenefit users and that user base continues to grow as new users are utilizing the on line channel to access their benefit information. Veterans can also reach us via an email through the eBenefits site. Veterans can access benefit payment information through an Interactive Voice Response System. Veterans can receive their current monthly compensation or pension check amount by pressing 1 on the menu prompt and entering their Social Security Number or Claim Number. Development is currently in progress to enhance the Interactive Voice Response System to provide status of claim information. In addition, a pilot program is underway to answer Veterans' inquiries via a live chat with an agent. The expansion of the chat functionality will provide increased access for our Veterans.

The blocked call rates, broken down by month, in the last calendar year (December 1, 2013 until December 1, 2014) at the Phoenix VA Call Center;

The Phoenix National Call Center is part of a national call center network that uses a national call queue.

The blocked call rates, broken down by month, in the last calendar year (December 1, 2013, until December 1, 2014) at all VA Call Centers nationwide;

Month	Percentage
December 2013	44%
January 2014	63%
February 2014	64%
March 2014	53%
April 2014	47%
May 2014	51%
June 2014	46%
July 2014	62%
August 2014	64%
September 2014	63%
October 2014	64%
November 2014	59%
December 2014	54%

Overall National Call Center staffing will be increased within the next few months. At the end of December 2014, 38 agents completed their training and went live on the phones. In February 2015, 46 agents will complete their training and go live on the phones.

The VA Call Center policy regarding “special care” call times, for calls that may take longer; What would qualify as a call that requires “special care?”

A Special Care Call is defined as a phone call that has exceeded a 30-minute talk time because this extra time was required to continue to address all of the caller's questions and concerns and to provide a high level of service to the caller. There are also other call types that are excluded from an agent's client contact management average. An external third party, JD Power and Associates, surveys our Veterans on their call center experience and reports a Client Satisfaction Index score. The Phoenix Call Center achieved a JD Power Client Satisfaction Index score of 761 for November 2014. The satisfaction score of 761 exceeds the JD Power government benchmark of 731 by 30 points. The index is on a 1,000 point scale.

The Phoenix Call Center JD Power Service Attribute Scores are strong for the month of November.

Courtesy of the Representative: 8.96 (on a 10-point scale)
Representative's Concern for your Needs: 8.01 (on a 10-point scale)
Knowledge of the Representative: 7.97 (on a 10-point scale)

The number of Call Center employees that would make the Phoenix VA Call Center fully staffed;

The Phoenix National Call Center would be fully staffed at 100 employees.

The number of current employees at the Phoenix VA Call Center;

As of November 30, 2014, there are 97 employees at the Phoenix National Call Center.

Monthly staffing levels (detailing the number of employees working each month) for the Phoenix VA Call Center for the last three years (December 1, 2011 until December 1, 2014).

As part of our employee succession planning and talent development process, many Call Center Agents are promoted to other areas within VA. This process allows us to continue to develop our employees and share and retain talent across the organization. In alignment with the Call Center industry, there are periods of time throughout the year when attrition occurs. New agents are recruited and begin an 8-week new hire training program. VA follows a recruitment and onboarding process to ensure that qualified candidates are selected for the position. Due to their expertise and job experience, agents are also promoted to a higher level within the Phoenix Call Center. This provides growth and development opportunities for the agents. The Phoenix Call Center is currently authorized to hire to 100 FTE.

Please see spreadsheet for staffing levels.

This concludes our response.

Your request was processed by the undersigned. You may appeal the determination made in this response to:

General Counsel (024)
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

If you should choose to make an appeal, your appeal must be postmarked no later than sixty (60) calendar days after the date of the adverse determination. It must clearly identify the determination being appealed and must include any assigned request number.

The appeal should include:

1. The name of the FOIA Officer
2. The address of the component
3. The date of the component's determination, if any
4. The precise subject matter of the appeal

If you choose to appeal only a portion of the determination, you must specify which part of the determination you are appealing.

The appeal should include a copy of the request and VA's response, if any. The appeal should be marked "Freedom of Information Act Appeal".

Thank you for your interest in the Department of Veterans Affairs. Customer service is very important to us. If you have questions regarding this letter, please contact me on (602) 627-3370.

Sincerely,

M. Jeanisse

M. Jeanisse
FOIA Officer