THIS ISSUE
Securing Your Mental Health VA Claim Without In-Service Records
Will Filing For VA Disability Affect Your Job?
What's Cooking: *Soft Pretzel Knots*

THE JAN DILS FOUNDATION
VETERANS BENEFITS & BEYOND
MAY 2026



SECURING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH VA CLAIM WITHOUT IN-SERVICE RECORDS

If you are a veteran having mental health issues, you might look to the Veterans Administration for help. But what if your service records don't show anything that would indicate you need treatment? How can you establish that your mental health problems are service related if you were never treated during your time in the military? A VA mental health claim can be approved without any in-service records as long as you have other statements to back up your claim. The VA has a "duty to assist" servicemembers in need, so by gathering the right information, you can get the help you need.

Many veterans wonder how they can establish that their mental health problems are service related if they were never treated during their time in the military.

Establishing a Nexus

The VA wants proof that your condition is related to your time in service. The first thing you need is a "nexus letter" from your current physician establishing that you have a mental health condition, and their professional opinion that it is related to your military service. The VA has forms that doctors should use to write this nexus letter, and what it should contain.

Depending on your service history, you may also need lay evidence, sometimes called "buddy letters." If you experienced a combat situation in areas such as Iraq, Afghanistan, or Vietnam, the VA applies relaxed standards. In these combat-related cases, you do not have to verify your stressors with outside statements. However, if you were not located in a combat area, personal statements from fellow servicemembers who recall the events of your time in service can help verify your stressors. Additionally, statements from friends or family since then who have seen changes in your behavior or other events and can link it to your time in the military can be very beneficial.

Continues on back page >>



Letter From Jan

As the year continues to move along, our team remains dedicated to helping you navigate the VA disability process with confidence.

In this issue, we tackle two common Veterans' concerns. First, we explain how to secure a mental health claim without in-service treatment records using "buddy letters" and military history clues. We also address whether filing for VA disability will affect your current employment, and how your disability ratings and job status work together.

Beyond legal updates, we are excited to celebrate our community and our team. Read about our renewed partnership with Downtown PKB, and join us in congratulating VA Hearing Clerk Jolene on her 11-year anniversary! Finally, enjoy a savory weekend baking project with VA Case Development Team Leader Joe Fortuno's recipe for Pesto Cheese Garlic Butter Soft Pretzel Knots.

Thank you for the continued privilege of serving you. We are honored to stand by your side.

Warmly,

Jan Dils

Community Corner

Community Corner: Partnering with Downtown PKB

At Jan Dils, Attorneys at Law, we believe in investing in the communities we call home. That is why we are so proud to announce the renewal of our partnership with **Downtown PKB**!

We absolutely love everything this incredible organization does to keep downtown Parkersburg vibrant, welcoming, and full of life. From hosting engaging community events to driving local initiatives, their hard work makes our city a better place to live and work for everyone.

A Message from Our Partners at Downtown PKB:

"Thank you to Jan Dils, Attorneys at Law for renewing your partnership with Downtown PKB! Your continued support helps us create events, programs, and initiatives that keep downtown Parkersburg vibrant and welcoming. We appreciate your commitment to our community and look forward to another great year working together!"

We are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to support their mission and look forward to another fantastic year of community growth together!

THANK YOU

For Investing in Downtown PKB!

WE LOOK FORWARD TO ANOTHER YEAR OF COLLABORATION, PROGRESS & IMPACT.

PKB DOWNTOWN

JAN DILS
ATTORNEYS AT LAW, LC

Employee Spotlight

Meet Jolene Reeder

Celebrating 11 Years of Service

Jolene is celebrating 11 incredible years with the firm! As a VA Hearing Clerk, she ensures our attorneys have everything they need for hearings, directly helping Veterans secure the benefits they've earned. For Jolene, knowing her daily work supports those who served is the best part of the job.



Community and Home Life

Jolene's dedication extends into the community. She loves representing the firm at events like Relay for Life and local parades, and she currently serves as the President of the Belpre Lions Club (2025–2026). She lives in Belpre, OH, and enjoys spending her summer days by the river in Marietta. To unwind, you'll find her reading, baking, or enjoying an iced coffee.

Family and Future Goals

Jolene is married and celebrating 17 years of marriage with her husband, Steve. She is a proud mom to Mason and Charlotte, and a cat mom to Arya. Her bucket list is full of adventure: she dreams of visiting Sicily, traveling to all 50 states, and watching sea turtles hatch.

Thank you, Jolene, for your heart for our Veterans and your 11 years of outstanding service to our clients and community!



WILL FILING FOR VA DISABILITY AFFECT YOUR JOB?

A common concern among Veterans is whether applying for benefits will jeopardize their current or future employment. The good news is that filing for VA disability will generally not affect your ability to work. This is because VA disability benefits are based on your service-related impairments, not your existing income.

However, your ability to work may impact your VA disability rating, which in turn affects how much you receive in total VA benefits.

Understanding Ratings and Disability

VA ratings are designed to reflect how much your service-related disability affects your daily life. In general, these ratings and your compensation are meant to compensate for the impact a service-related injury caused in your life.

Believe it or not, most Veterans can work a full-time job even with a 100% disability rating. If you are not otherwise disabled and can successfully return to full-time work, it may not affect your initial VA rating. However, there are a few important exceptions to keep in mind:

- **TDIU Restrictions:** If you have been given a Total Disability Based on Individual Unemployability (TDIU) rating, you cannot have substantial gainful employment.
- **Reevaluations:** If you have a 100% rating and are working full-time, the VA may reevaluate your rating and potentially lower your compensation.
- **Condition Improvements:** If your medical condition improves over time, you must report your condition to the VA, as this may also lower your compensation.

Other financial factors that can reduce your VA compensation include:

- Receiving a pension or other retirement pay.
- Receiving Social Security benefits.
- Engaging in self-employment that raises your income above a certain level.

Overall, your VA disability payments will not be affected unless your income increases beyond the VA threshold.

Your Rights Under the Americans with Disabilities Act

It is also important to remember that Veterans still have job protection under other federal regulations, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and related laws. If you are able to work despite your service-related condition, you must receive necessary accommodations under federal law.

Navigating the intersection of employment and disability benefits can be tricky. If you're still unsure about the status of your job and VA benefits, we're here to help. At Jan Dils Attorneys at Law, we work with Veterans and their families to ensure you have the job and the benefits you deserve.

Call us today at **877.JanDils** or contact us online at **JanDils.com**.

What's Cooking

SOFT PRETZEL KNOTS

From the Kitchen of **Joe Fortuno**, VA Case Development Team Leader



INGREDIENTS

The Pretzel Dough & Filling

1 ¾ cups warm water
1 tbsp honey
2 ¼ tsp active dry yeast
½ cup (1 stick) salted butter, melted
4 ½ cups all-purpose flour
⅓ cup basil pesto
2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
1 egg, beaten (for the egg wash)
¼ cup sesame seeds

The Galic Butter Topping

6 tbsp butter
1 to 2 cloves garlic, chopped
¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
2 tbsp chopped fresh herbs (thyme and basil, or oregano/parsley)

DIRECTIONS: 1. Activate the Yeast: In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the warm water, honey, and yeast. Let it sit for about 5 minutes until the mixture looks bubbly on top. **2. Mix the Dough:** Add the melted butter and flour to the yeast mixture. Mix on medium speed for 3 to 4 minutes until the dough is smooth and begins to pull away from the sides of the bowl. Pro tip: If the dough feels too wet or too dry, simply add flour or water 1 tablespoon at a time. Cover the bowl and let it rest in a warm spot for 1 to 2 hours until the dough doubles in size. **3. Prep for Baking:** Preheat your oven to 425°F and line two baking sheets with parchment paper. **4. Roll and Fill:** On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough out into a rectangle about ¼-inch thick (roughly 16×14 inches). Spread an even layer of pesto over the dough, then sprinkle generously with the cheddar and mozzarella cheeses. Fold the dough in half, pressing down gently to help it adhere. **5. Shape the Knots:** Cut the folded dough into 16 even strips. Twist each strip into a loose knot. Do not worry about making them look perfect; the rustic look is part of their charm! **6. Bake:** Brush the top of each knot with the beaten egg, then sprinkle with sesame seeds and a dash of coarse salt. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes, or until the pretzels turn a beautiful golden brown. **7. Make the Garlic Butter:** While the pretzels are baking, melt the 6 tablespoons of butter and chopped garlic in a small saucepan until the garlic just becomes fragrant. Remove from the heat and stir in the Parmesan and fresh herbs. **8. Garnish & Serve:** As soon as the knots come out of the oven, spoon the warm garlic butter generously over the top. Enjoy them warm or at room temperature!

THE JAN DILS FOUNDATION

MAY 2026

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PERSONAL INJURY | VETERANS DISABILITY | SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY

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Military Evidence

Even if you were not treated for mental health issues in service, your records during and after that time can suggest something happened that can support your nexus letter and lay evidence. Military Sexual Trauma "markers" such as health records for STD testing or treatment, sudden requests for transfer, and other changes can indicate an unreported event. Pre- and post-service medical records can create a timeline for regular treatment. Unit records, police reports, and news reports can verify when a PTSD stressor occurred.



Get Legal Advice to Pursue Your Case

The VA is required to help you gather this evidence to support your claim. If you need legal help getting VA assistance, call Jan Dils Attorneys at Law at **877.JanDils** or contact us online at **JanDils.com**. We will fight for your legal rights and mental health.