

— FWD ASSIST HQ —

FIELD GUIDE

Preparing for a Board Hearing (VA Form 10182, Hearing Docket)

Walk into your Board hearing prepared and know
what to bring and expect.



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A FWD Assist HQ Field Guide

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By J. Erickson | An FWD Assist HQ Field Guide | Publisher: FWD Assist HQ | First Edition, 2026

This guide is education, not representation. It explains how part of the VA system works so you can handle your own business with confidence. It is not legal or claims advice, and reading it does not create any representative relationship between you and the author. The author is not affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and nothing here is endorsed by the VA.

This guide prints no live VA dollar figures and no rating percentages on purpose, because they change. Before you make a decision based on any number, check the current figure at va.gov. No book can promise you a rating; the evidence in your file decides the result. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Officer is always free.

Preparing for a Board Hearing (VA Form 10182, Hearing Docket)

Walk into your Board hearing prepared and know what to bring and expect.

Companion to *The Appeals Playbook*.

This is general education, not legal or claims advice, and not guidance for your specific claim. It cannot promise you a rating or an outcome, and no one can. For help with your own claim, see a free accredited representative (see [the back of this guide](#)). Nothing here creates a representative relationship.

Current as of October 2026. Rules, forms, and figures change. Check current details at va.gov.

THE BEST WAY TO USE THIS GUIDE

The strongest position is to be your own informed advocate and to work with a free accredited representative. An accredited Veterans Service Organization, such as the DAV, VFW, American Legion, or a county or state veterans office, helps at no charge. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can help too. They can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim, and after that they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. This guide is here so you understand your own situation and can work with them as a full partner instead of handing it over blind. If you'd rather handle this yourself, and you're comfortable doing that, the guide walks you through every step. Either way, you stay in control.

If you are in crisis, help is available now. Call the Veterans Crisis Line: dial 988, then press 1. You can also text 838255 or chat online at veteranscrisisline.net. You don't have to be enrolled in VA health care to use it.

The Outcome and What You Need Before You Start

The outcome: By the end of this guide you'll walk into your Board hearing prepared, with your hearing type settled, your key points on one page, your evidence plan set, and your device or travel confirmed.

This guide prepares you for the task. It doesn't and can't promise a rating, a percentage, or an outcome. The evidence in your file decides the result.

WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE YOU START

- ☐ Your filed VA Form 10182 showing you selected the Hearing docket.
- ☐ A copy of your claims file (C-file) so you know the record.
- ☐ The few key points you want the judge to hear, tied to your evidence.
- ☐ Any new evidence you plan to hand in at the hearing or send within 90 days after it.
- ☐ A device with a camera and microphone for a virtual hearing, or travel plans for a hearing at a VA location or in Washington, D.C.
- ☐ A free accredited representative on standby to help you prepare.

When to start: As soon as you've chosen the Hearing docket, so you have time to prepare and line up any witnesses. The Board mails your hearing notice at least 30 days ahead.

Start Here: The Basics

On the Hearing docket you meet a Veterans Law Judge and tell your case in your own words, under oath. It's not a trial: nobody cross-examines you, and the judge may ask questions. You can add new evidence at the hearing or within 90 days after it. Hearings happen by virtual tele-hearing from your own device, by videoconference at a VA location, or in person at the Board in Washington, D.C. They usually last about 30 minutes, and the hearing is transcribed and added to your file. The Board's stated goal for this docket is a decision within 730 days, the longest of the three.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 20.700; 38 CFR § 20.302; 38 U.S.C. § 7107(c).

The Steps

STEP 1

Confirm you selected the Hearing docket on VA Form 10182.

Check your filed form. A Board hearing can only be requested on the 10182 itself or on a new 10182 that changes your docket.

If you didn't select a hearing and now want one, **then** file a new VA Form 10182 that the Board gets within one year of the decision or within 60 days after it got your first form, whichever is later. That's only possible if you haven't already sent evidence on your current docket.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 20.703(a); 38 CFR § 20.202(c)(2).

Done when you've confirmed the Hearing docket is selected.

STEP 2

Settle your hearing type.

You mark a preference on the form. The Board tells you the type it has set, and you can ask once for a different one. Since 2020 the law also lets you ask for a virtual tele-hearing from a place you choose; if your appeal is already waiting, you can ask by email at BVAVirtualHearing@va.gov.

If you'd rather not travel, **then** ask for a virtual tele-hearing. **If** you want to be at a VA facility, **then** ask for videoconference. **If** you want to appear at the Board in Washington, D.C., **then** ask for in person, and know the government doesn't pay travel costs for you, your representative, or witnesses. **If** you're 75 or older, seriously ill, or under severe financial hardship, **then** you or your representative can ask the Board in writing to advance your case on the docket.

Where this is written down: 38 U.S.C. § 7107(c); 38 CFR § 20.703(d); 38 CFR § 20.710; 38 CFR § 20.800(c).

Done when you know your hearing type and have asked for a change if you want one.

STEP 3

Request your C-file and review the record.

Request it with VA Form 20-10206, the Freedom of Information Act or Privacy Act Request, online or by mail. Learn what the judge already has and what your testimony needs to add.

Done when you know what evidence is already in the record.

STEP 4

Prepare what you'll say.

Write the few points that tie your evidence to what the decision said wasn't shown. Use your own words and real examples. Practice saying them plainly and briefly.

Done when your key points fit on one page.

STEP 5

Plan any new evidence.

Decide what new evidence to add and when: hand it in at the hearing or send it within 90 days after.

Do not mail new evidence to the Board before the hearing. On this docket the judge considers evidence you submit at the hearing or in the 90 days after it, and VA asks you not to send it early.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 20.302(a).

Done when you know what new evidence you'll add and when.

STEP 6

Prepare your witnesses.

A spouse, buddy, or family member can testify about what they've seen. Witnesses testify under oath, so help them keep it brief and factual. Someone who can't attend can give a written statement on VA Form 21-10210, the Lay/Witness Statement, sent with your other evidence.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 20.708.

Done when any witnesses know what they'll speak to.

STEP 7

Confirm your device or your travel, and protect your date.

For a virtual hearing, use the test link VA emails you, at least two days ahead, on the device you'll use. For videoconference or in person, confirm the date, place, and travel.

Do not just skip the hearing if something comes up. To change the date, write to the Board at least two weeks ahead and show good cause, like illness. If you miss the hearing without an approved change, the Board treats your hearing request as withdrawn. You then have 15 days from the hearing date to file a written motion explaining why you missed it and why you couldn't ask in time.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 20.704(c) and (d).

Done when your setup is tested or your travel is confirmed.

STEP 8

On the day, speak plainly and answer the judge's questions.

The judge swears you in. Stick to your key points, answer what the judge asks, and hand in any evidence you brought. Let your representative help if you have one. If the transcript later has a mistake, you can ask the Board in writing to correct it within 30 days after it's mailed to you.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 20.708; 38 CFR § 20.714.

Done when the hearing is held.

STEP 9

Send any post-hearing evidence within 90 days.

Mail it to Board of Veterans' Appeals, PO Box 27063, Washington, D.C. 20038, or fax it to 844-678-8979, and keep proof. If you have nothing more to add, you can waive the rest of the 90 days in writing so the case moves to the judge sooner. Ask your representative first.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 20.302(a)(3); 38 CFR § 20.300(b).

Done when your post-hearing evidence is in within 90 days, or you've closed the window on purpose.

STEP 10

Know your options after the decision.

The judge decides on the whole record, your testimony included.

If the Board denies and you have new and relevant evidence, **then** you can file a Supplemental Claim; filing it within one year keeps your effective date. **If** you think the Board made a legal error, **then** you can appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims within 120 days of the date on the Board's decision. You can't do both at once on the same issue. A free accredited representative can help you choose.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 3.2500(b), (c)(3) and (h)(1); 38 U.S.C. § 7266(a).

Done when you have the decision and know the next step and its deadline.

Recap Checklist

- ☐ Confirmed the Hearing docket is selected on VA Form 10182.
- ☐ Settled the hearing type: virtual, videoconference, or in person.
- ☐ Requested the C-file on VA Form 20-10206 and reviewed the record.
- ☐ Put my key points on one page, tied to what the decision said wasn't shown.
- ☐ Planned new evidence for the hearing or the 90 days after, and sent none early.
- ☐ Prepared witnesses (VA Form 21-10210 for anyone who can't attend).
- ☐ Tested my device or confirmed travel, and know how to reschedule.
- ☐ Spoke plainly on the day and answered the judge's questions.
- ☐ Sent any post-hearing evidence within 90 days, or waived the window on purpose.
- ☐ Noted my options after the decision, including the 120-day court deadline.

Reminder: rules and rates change. Check any current figure at va.gov. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Organization is free. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim. After that, they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. This guide prepared you for the task. The evidence in your file decides the result.

Get Free, Accredited Help

For anything about your own claim, talk to an accredited representative. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Organization is free. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim. After that, they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. Free help is available through Veterans Service Organizations such as the DAV, VFW, and American Legion, and through county and state veterans offices.

To find one near you, visit va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative. Representation begins only when you sign VA Form 21-22 (for a Veterans Service Organization) or 21-22a (for an individual agent or attorney). With one rare exception for a single unpaid case, only accredited people can represent you before the VA, and only an accredited agent or attorney can charge you a fee. Nothing in this guide creates that relationship.

A warning about claim sharks. Anyone who offers to file your initial claim for a fee, or who guarantees you a rating or a percentage, is selling something you shouldn't buy. Accredited Veterans Service Organizations help at no charge, and accredited claims agents and attorneys may charge only after VA issues its initial decision, within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. Report predatory companies to the VA Office of Inspector General at 1-800-488-8244.

Keep Going: The Full Guide

This field guide is the short, do-this-now companion to the book *The Appeals Playbook*. See every FWD Assist HQ title that is out now at fwdassisthq.com/books.

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About the Author

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J. Erickson is a service-disabled Air Force veteran. He served as a military firefighter and as a veteran service officer, where he spent years walking veterans through the same claims process he writes about now. He holds an MBA and writes plain-language guides for veterans who want to understand the system without a translator.

He writes the For the Rest of Us series at fwdassisthq.com. This guide is published by FWD Assist HQ as a veteran education resource. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by the Department of Veterans Affairs.