



National Association
of Federal Retirees

Association nationale
des retraités fédéraux

The Hon. Seamus O'Regan
Minister of Veterans Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

November 9, 2018

Dear Minister O'Regan,

As reported in the media on November 5, 2018, and confirmed by the Veterans Ombudsman Guy Parent, 270,000 veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP and their survivors between 2003 and 2010 have been affected by calculation errors on disability pensions. Some 120,000 of those affected have since died.

The \$165-million dollar error has affected some of the most vulnerable of our members: veterans and survivors on fixed incomes who have little ability to make up for shortfalls, from the Second World War and Korea who are likely to have lower household incomes to begin with.

The federal government has taken the first step in the right direction by acknowledging the issue and pledging to repay those who have been affected. We echo the Veterans Ombudsman's recommendation that low-income veterans and survivors be prioritized and receive the money owed to them as soon as possible. This must be done prior to 2020.

Timelines and the steps to rectify this should be shared with veterans and their survivors. We would like to work with your office and your department to ensure veterans know what to expect from your plan to pay these veterans what they have been owed for more than a decade. Our staff will connect with yours and with leadership within the department for further details.

This occurrence highlights and reinforces several concerns that veterans raised with us in our 2017 townhalls.

Complexity is a pervasive and ongoing problem for the department and this must be addressed. The Ombudsman reportedⁱ the error was discovered when reviewing calculations for the Disability Award. Mr. Parent's office discovered the basic provincial tax credit was not factored into provincial income tax calculations. To an external agency such as ours, the occurrence of such a seemingly basic error signals the complex nature of Veterans Affairs programs, policies and processes – not just for veterans and their families to navigate, but possibly also for Veterans Affairs staff in administering them.

We are disturbed by the fact that this error persisted for eight years, from 2003 to 2010, and is only now being addressed. Reportsⁱⁱ that the department had some level of awareness in 2011 when they corrected the calculation and did not reimburse the lost income at that time are also concerning. We would like to learn from you what will be done within the department to prevent a situation like this from happening again.

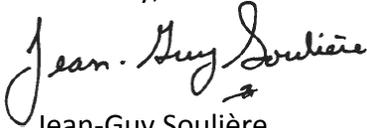
We would suggest, as discussed with you when we met on June 8, 2018, that rebuilding relationships with veterans who have come before and restoring their trust in the department need to be priorities for Veterans Affairs. Engaging stakeholders and veterans as you continue to take on this specific issue, dealing with the circumstances that contributed to it, ensuring it is remedied as quickly as possible, and clearly communicating with veterans and their families at every step along the way, will contribute to that effort.

Finally, this has also demonstrated the essential role a strong Veterans Ombudsman has to play in supporting veterans and their families. We urge this federal government to ensure the next Veterans Ombudsman is as effective and powerful a voice for veterans and their families as Mr. Parent and his team have been over the past eight years. Our members are grateful for the role he has played in advocating for what is right for veterans.

We realize that the circumstances of this problem arose before your time as Minister; we are now looking to you for continued leadership in doing the right thing for veterans to restore the trust they need to have in Veterans Affairs.

As I have noted, the National Association of Federal Retirees will contact your staff and staff within the department to ensure we are able to support Veterans Affairs' efforts to get these veterans and their families what is owed to them, without delay. We look forward to an ongoing open and positive relationship with you, your staff and the department, and to working mutually toward ever-better services and programs in support of Canada's veterans.

Sincerely,



Jean-Guy Soulière

President

National Association of Federal Retirees

ⁱ <http://ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca/eng/media/news-releases/post/54>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/veterans-affairs-pension-disability-1.4890117>