

**Original Document Guidance  
For Records Decommissioning Process Purposes  
Compensation Service  
September 29, 2014**

**Purpose:** To provide original document guidance for document conversion services contractors.

**References:** M21-MR III.1.C.10.a, M21-MR III.3.C.7.a, M23-1 Chapter 2, VA Directive 6609

**Background:** The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has contracted out the scanning of Veteran claims documentation into the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). Once the records are scanned into VBMS, they will be physically separated into three categories; service treatment records (STRs), original documents, and all other claims documentation. This decision document concerns original documents only.

**Question: What exactly is an original document?**

- **Historically:** M23-1 noted that original documents consisted of documents used to establish service, age, marriage, birth, and death.
- **Current M21-1MR definition:** "...Records that are considered sentimental, irreplaceable, or replaceable with great expense."
- **VA Directive 6609** notes: "...originals of documents used for evidentiary purposes which, if lost or destroyed, would be difficult or impossible to replace."

**Definition Guidelines:** Original documents can be placed into two categories.

**1.) Records used to establish service, age, marriage, birth, and death.** These documents will often be printed on specially paper and have a raised seal or a stamped seal. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- A.) Birth/Death/Marriage Certificate
- B.) Legal Adoption/Divorce Decrees
- C.) DD form 214 or other discharge papers,<sup>1</sup> (union paper)
- D.) Original Social Security Cards
- E.) Passports

**\*All documents in this category should be sent back to the Veteran.**

<sup>1</sup> World War II discharge papers to include WD AGO Form 317, WD AGO Form 372, WD AGO Form 53-55, NAVPERS 553, NAVJMC 78PD, and NAVCG 553

**\*All documents in this category should be sent back to the Veteran.**

**2.) Other records of a sentimental nature not used to establish the above categories.** VA regulations make allowance for the return of sentimental documents to the Veteran. Due the subjective nature of sentimentality, a specific definition is impossible. Therefore a description of documents that appear to be sentimental or hard to replace is required. Sentimental documents can be of an odd shape or printed on specialty paper and may appear of a historical nature. They may have official seals or stamps on them. DCS vendors will need to use their best judgment in records identification.

Examples of sentimental and hard to replace documents:

- 1.) Medal citations
- 2.) Photographs and newspaper articles
- 3.) Diplomas
- 4.) Official college transcripts
- 5.) Wartime correspondence (e.g., letters from home)

**\*When in doubt whether or not a document is of a sentimental nature, send the document back to the Veteran.**

#### **Quality Control:**

- 1.) It is recommended that an emphasis of quality be placed on category 1. If quality control finds a category 1 document that has not been removed from claims documentation prior to decommissioning, this is a critical error.
- 2.) Category 2 errors are not considered to be of a critical nature and their occurrences are recorded for tracking purposes only (for future training).

Concur ☒ Non-Concur ☐

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