

DISABILITY EVALUATION SYSTEM (DES) FACT SHEET

(June 2023)

PURPOSE OF THE DES

The purpose of the DES is to maintain a fit and vital force. To achieve that end, disability law allows the Secretary of the Air Force (SAF), to separate those military members who can no longer perform the duties of their office, grade, rank, or rating and to ensure fair compensation to those whose military careers are cut short due to a service-incurred or service-aggravated medical condition.

This fact sheet is to establish expectations, prepare you for each stage of the DES process and to inform you of what is expected of you during this process.

Your medical provider has identified one or more condition(s) making you potentially unfit for continued military service. As such, your case has been referred into the DES. This fact sheet provides a complete overview of the DES process to include your option to either choose to undergo the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) or the Legacy Disability Evaluation System (LDES) path. DES process details can be found on the myFSS website at: <https://myfss.us.af.mil/USAFCommunity/s/login/> and if you are being disability retired, visit the following AFPC website for retirement information at: <https://www.afpc.af.mil/Retirement>. **Also, your Physical Evaluation Board Liaison Officer (PEBLO) will keep your commander/first sergeant informed on the status of your case as it progresses through the DES process. You must be available throughout the complete DES process.**

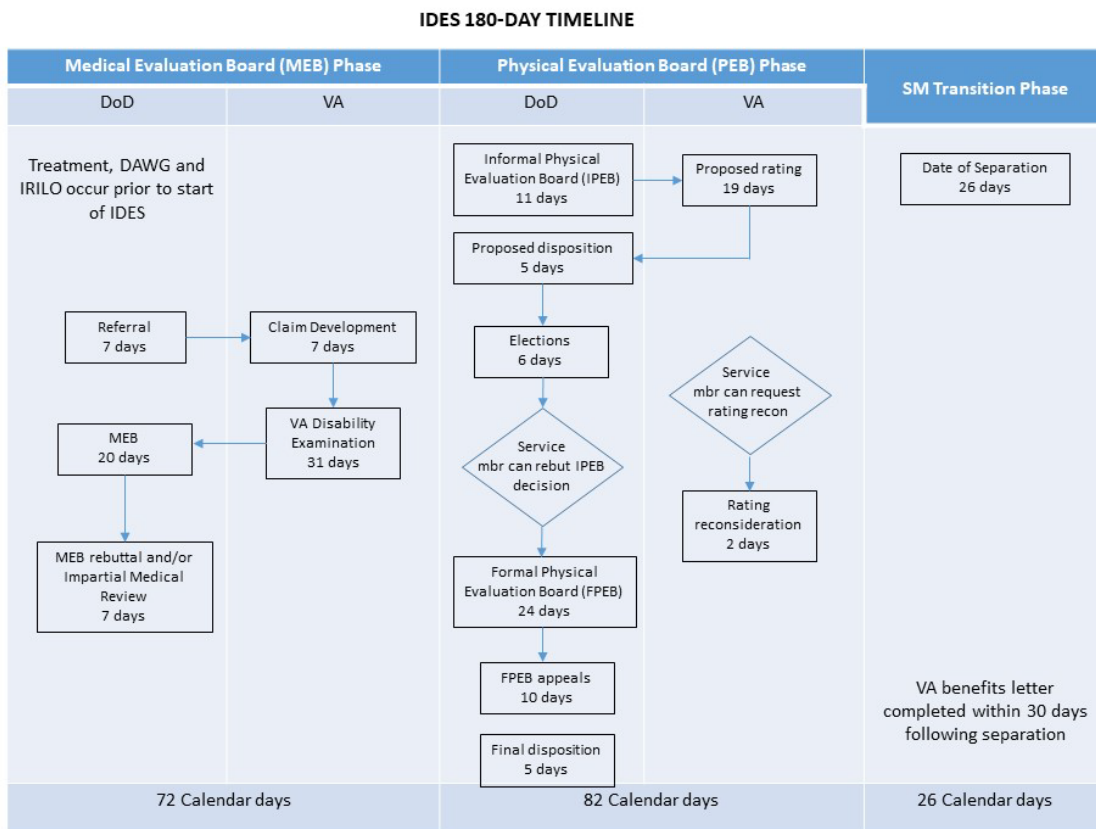
THE IDES PROCESS

The IDES is a joint Department of Defense (DoD)/Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) program which was created to improve the transparency of the DES and ensure timeliness of the transfer between your military service and receipt of VA benefits and compensation. In other words, if entitled you can expect to receive your post-service VA benefits much faster, typically within 30-60 days of separation.

There are four main phases under the IDES: Treatment, Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) Phase, Physical Evaluation Board (PEB) Phase, and Transition Phase. (See **Figure 1**) Prior to your MEB, you will complete a VA claim form identifying ALL medical conditions incurred during your military service, whether they impact your ability to do your job or not. Additionally, you will complete a VA Separation Health Assessment (SHA) Part A, Self-Assessment form. The signed SHA form should be returned within the 3-day timeline established by your assigned PEBLO. Any questions you have concerning the SHA form will be answered by either your assigned VA Military Service Coordinator (MSC) or your evaluating physician at the time of your VA examination. The SHA form is available via the VA website link at: https://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/dbq_publicdbqs.asp.

Your MSC, a local VA representative or Veteran Service Organization (VSO), will help you with the VA claims process. The VA will perform medical exams, which will be used by the Air Force in determining your fitness for duty and by the VA in determining your disability ratings. The PEB will decide which condition(s) (if any) makes you unfit for continued service and will coordinate with the VA, who will assign your disability ratings. The PEB will then apply the VA ratings to your unfitting conditions. However, you may choose to expedite the MEB process by electing to undergo the LDES process. This process excludes the VA process until after you have been discharged. It will then be your responsibility to submit your claim form to the VA. If you are entered into the LDES process, you may enroll in the VA’s Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) program, which is a “fast track” program for you to receive your VA benefits. For more information about the VA BDD Program, please visit the following website at: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/general/BDDFactSheet.pdf>.

Figure 1. 180-day IDES Timeline. (Unless otherwise stated, all “days” are calendar days.)



REFERRAL TO DES: Disability evaluation begins only when examination, treatment, hospitalization, or your commander requests evaluation due to poor duty performance or deployment concerns stemming from your potential medical or mental health condition results in referral by your attending physician for an MEB. You will be referred to the MEB office where you will meet your PEBLO who will enter you into, and guide you through, the DES process.

Remember the mere presence of a physical defect or condition does not qualify you for disability retirement or separation.

The physical defect or condition(s) must render you unfit for continued military service. For IDES, completion of the Joint DoD/VA Referral form VA 21-0819, allows you to be seen at the VA and to meet with the MSC. **All VA and MEB appointments are mandatory.** Once you are separated or retired, it is your responsibility to complete and file a VA claim for any additional medical conditions.

If you choose the LDES process, you must complete the LDES Election Statement memo, which will be provided by your PEBLO. Also, as part of completion of the election memo, you must contact the Office of Disability Counsel (ODC) to be briefed concerning the differences between IDES and LDES processes within 7 days (from date of your IDES briefing given to you by the PEBLO). Once you have completed the appropriate areas of the memo, the memo must be signed by you and your PEBLO. Within 14 calendar days, a final determination will be made by the MTF/CC or designee (0-6 or GS-15 equivalent). It will be your responsibility to file and complete a VA claim form to receive your VA benefits once you have been discharged. **NOTE: If you elected to undergo the IDES process and subsequently refuse to attend mandatory VA compensation and pension (C&P) examinations, you may be involuntarily directed into the LDES process by the MEB office upon approval by the MTF/CC.**

Also, if you elected the LDES process you may initiate action to be entered into the VA BDD Program. The BDD Program allows Service members to submit a claim for disability compensation between 180 to 90 days prior to separation, retirement, or release from active duty or demobilization. The VA requires a minimum of 90 days to complete the medical exam process (which may involve multiple specialty clinics) prior to your separation from service. You may visit the VA website to start your VA claims process once you receive your approved disability separation or retirement orders at: <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/>.

LINE OF DUTY (LOD) DETERMINATION: A LOD determination is a finding made after an investigation into the circumstances of a member's illness, injury, disease, or death. The finding determines: (1) whether the illness, injury or disease existed prior to service (EPTS) and if an EPTS condition was aggravated by military service; (2) whether the illness, injury, disease, or death occurred while the member was absent without authority and (3) whether the illness, injury, disease, or death was due to the member's misconduct. A LOD determination protects the interests of both you and the United States Government. A LOD determination is required for all conditions referred in the MEB process. Further information about LODs is contained in DAFI 36-2910, *Line of Duty (LOD) Determination, Medical Continuation (MEDCON), and Incapacitation (INCAP) Pay*.

PRE-SEPARATION AND TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP) BRIEFING: It is important for you to attend your Pre-Separation and TAP Briefings as they will provide you important information regarding post-retirement insurance, allotments, potential veteran benefits, applicable transition benefits, services provided by military/veteran/national service organization, electronic resources for ill/injured services members, and more.

MEB PHASE

The MEB consists of at least two physicians. For mental health condition(s), a psychiatrist or psychologist with a doctorate must be present on the Board. The results of the MEB are recorded on DAF Form 618, *Medical Board Report*, and briefed to you by your PEBLO. Your signature on this form does not mean that you agree with the MEB recommendation, only that you were informed of the results. If you refuse to sign, your case will still be forwarded to Air Force Personnel Center Disability Operations Branch (AFPC/DPFDD) for continued DES processing.

The IDES MEB phase includes the following stages: Referral by your physician, Claim Development with the MSC, VA C&P/Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) examinations, and execution of the MEB recommendation (to include impartial review/MEB rebuttal). For LDES MEBs, you will not undergo the claim development or VA C&P examination stages.

During the MEB phase you may either utilize legal counsel provided or obtain civilian counsel of your choosing at your own expense. If you choose to consult with legal representation from the ODC they may be reached by email at: afloaja.disabilitycounsel@us.af.mil. After sending an email, please wait at least 24 hours before calling them at DSN 665-0739/Commercial (210) 565-0739. The ODC attorneys and paralegals are independent from the DES process and serve as an advocate for you. The ODC will advise based on the documentation you provide for review.

Please view the new client video on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/bu43o7PQMk0> or Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/officeofdisabilitycounsel> for more information on how the ODC can best represent you during your DES processing. For Air Reserve Component (ARC) members, an additional video is located at: https://youtu.be/RWd5YyN_RCA.

NOTE: If you have a previously approved separation or retirement date, you will remain on duty until the conclusion of the DES process. However, if you are an enlisted member who has reached the end of either your active obligated service (DOS), Expiration of Term Service (ETS), or have an approved separation or retirement date, you may request to be placed on medical hold until the completion of your DES process. If you wish to waive your right to the DES process and not accept a medical hold, you must make a request in writing to decline medical hold, and such request must attest that you have received counseling on the DES process. For information on how to waive DES processing (decline medical hold), contact your PEBLO.

CLAIM DEVELOPMENT (IDES only): Prior to your MEB, the PEBLO will provide your complete Service Treatment Records, including civilian records, Separation Health Assessment (SHA), Part A, and VA Claim Form 21-0819, to the VA MSC identifying ALL medical conditions incurred during your military service, whether the conditions impacted your ability to do your job or not. Your MSC, a local VA representative, can help you with the VA disability claim process. You should fully review and fill out the SHA form accurately and completely as this becomes a key document in the Claims Development process.

The VA will perform medical exam(s) which will be used by the Air Force in determining your fitness for duty and by the VA in determining your disability ratings.

The PEB will decide which condition(s) (if any) makes you unfit for continued military service and will coordinate with the VA, who will assign your disability ratings. The PEB will then apply the VA ratings to your unfitting conditions. But, if you wish to expedite your MEB, you may elect to undergo the LDES process. This process excludes the VA process until after you have been discharged. It will then be your responsibility to submit your claim form to the VA.

DISABILITY EXAMINATION (IDES only): You must complete all VA C&P exams for your referred and claimed medical conditions.

SERVICE MEMBERS OPTIONS TO THE MEB: Once briefed on your MEB results, including the completed VA C&P exams (IDES only), you may submit any of the options listed below:

1. No Election. You concur with the MEB decision and wish to submit your case to AFPC/DPFDD for Informal Physical Evaluation Board (IPEB) review.
2. Request an Impartial Medical Review (IMR). An IMR is a review of your case by a physician or other health care professional not previously involved in your MEB. In rare circumstances the impartial reviewer may not validate the MEB findings. If so, the MEB Board President must consider whether changes to the MEB package are warranted and whether to reconvene the MEB once changes have been documented. You may submit a written Letter of Concern (memorandum format) to the IMR physician outlining any specific issues you may have about your MEB package. (**NOTE:** Any concerns you have about the AF Form 1185, *Commander's Impact Statement for MEB* must be addressed to your commander.)
3. Submit a Rebuttal Letter. A Rebuttal Letter is a document (memorandum format) you submit to the MEB Convening Medical Authority (CMA) addressing why you disagree with the narrative summary or the MEB recommendations. You may include any extenuating circumstances you feel should be considered. The CMA is a senior medical officer appointed by the MTF Commander and may not be one of the physicians who served on your MEB, wrote your narrative summary, or the impartial reviewer (if you elected an IMR). The PEBLO will forward your Rebuttal Letter and the CMA response to the MEB president for review. Your MEB case will not be forwarded to AFPC/DPFDD until the rebuttal process is finalized and the MEB results still indicate you are potentially unfit for continued military service.

If you elected to complete any of the above, (IMR, MEB Rebuttal Letter, and/or Letter of Exception) these documents will be included in your MEB package and sent to AFPC/DPFDD. The IDES timeline is very rigid so you must ensure you are timely with each of these documents since only 7 (seven) calendar days are allotted within the MEB timeline to complete the IMR/Rebuttal process. However, you may request an extension, which must be presented in writing to the PEBLO before surpassing the suspense date. If your suspense date lands on a weekend or holiday, your response/documents will not be due until the next business day.

You are encouraged to contact legal representation at the ODC for review of these documents before submission to your PEBLO.

PEB PHASE

The PEB phase includes the following sub-stages: IPEB, Proposed Ratings, Proposed Disposition, Elections, Formal PEB (FPEB), Secretary of the Air Force Personnel Council (SAFPC), and (IDES only) Rating Reconsideration.

NOTE:

During this phase you may consult with the ODC legal attorney at DSN 665-0739/Commercial (210) 565-0739 or by email at: afloaja.disabilitycounsel@us.af.mil.

IPEB: The IPEB consists of at least two (2) Board members, including at least one physician and one military personnel officer at field grade level or higher (or civilian equivalent). The IPEB will make a fit/unfit determination. A fit (return to duty) determination will be sent to the PEBLO.

For Unfit Finding

1. If the IPEB finds you unfit for continued military service, they will list the conditions which make you unfit. For LDES, the PEB will use the current Veterans Affairs Schedule for Rating Disabilities (VASRD) guidance to apply the appropriate ratings. For IDES, the VA Disability Rating Activity Site (DRAS) will prepare a preliminary rating decision for all your referred and claimed conditions and will make it available to the IPEB. The IPEB will apply the VA ratings to your unfitting condition(s) and make one of the following recommendations:

- a. Discharge with Severance Pay (DWSP): If the Board determines your condition makes you unfit for service and your disability rating in accordance with guidelines established in the VASRD is less than 30%, and you have less than 20 years active service, the Board will recommend DWSP. You will be entitled to receive a lump-sum severance pay based on your years of service multiplied by twice the amount of monthly basic pay. The percentage of disability has no effect on the amount of severance pay you will receive. **NOTE: ARC members who are recommended for DWSP who have between 15 to 20 years of satisfactory service will be offered the opportunity to select retirement at age 60 in lieu of receiving severance pay. Your PEBLO will have you sign a memo if you elect this option.**
- b. Permanent Retirement (PR). If the Board determines you are unfit for continued service and the disability rating for your condition(s) is 30% or more, or you have 20 or more years of active service and your condition is stable, they will recommend medical retirement. You will receive all entitlements afforded to any member retired from the Armed Forces, including entitlement to a military retired identification (ID) card, medical care, Base Exchange (BX) and commissary privileges, Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) election, etc.

- c. Temporary Disability Retired List (TDRL). If you are diagnosed with a medical condition, which meets the threshold for medical retirement but is considered unstable at the time the IPEB finds you unfit for continued military service, the Board may recommend placement on the TDRL. In this situation, you are in a temporary retired status, and eligible to receive AF retirement benefits. However, while on the TDRL, you are subject to periodic evaluations at least once every 12 months. After your TDRL re-evaluation, if the IPEB determines your TDRL condition has stabilized based on the results of your evaluation, they could recommend the following: Permanent Retirement (PR), Discharge with Separation Pay (DWSP), or Fit for Duty (you will have the option of reenlistment or to separate without benefits).
- d. Discharge Under Other Than 10 U.S.C., Chapter 61. Applies to service members who have been found unfit whose disabilities existed prior to service and were not permanently aggravated by service or were incurred while the member was in excess leave status or were not the proximate result of performing military duties for ARC members called to active duty for 30 calendar days or less on or before September 23, 1996.
- e. Discharge under 10 U.S.C. § 1207. Applies to members found unfit and the disability is due to intentional misconduct, willful neglect, or was incurred during a period of unauthorized absence.

2. Options Following IPEB Recommended Decision. Once briefed on the results of the IPEB by your PEBLO, you will be allotted six (6) calendar days to sign an AF Form 1180, *Action on Physical Evaluation Board Findings and Recommended Disposition* with the following options below. You have the right to confer with legal counsel to assist you in your decision. The ODC can provide legal representation for you concerning your IPEB finding. Your PEBLO will present you with the ODC's Legal Representation Form for you to make an election requesting legal counsel or not. After you have signed both the AF Form 1180 and the Legal Representation Form (or if you refuse to sign one or both forms), your case file will be forwarded to the AFPC/DPFDD for review. Your case will then be finalized or forwarded to the FPEB dependent on which IPEB option you have chosen below:

- a. You agree with the findings and recommended disposition of the IPEB and waive the right to a FPEB hearing.
- b. You agree with the findings and recommended disposition of the IPEB and waive the right to a FPEB hearing but request a one-time VA reconsideration of your disability ratings for your unfitting conditions (IDES only). This reconsideration will only occur once a final unfit determination is made. In other words, you must either concur with the unfit findings or exhaust the appeal process before the reconsideration request can be processed. The VA will only reconsider those conditions deemed unfitting by the PEB (Category I on the AF Form 356). All other disability ratings may be readdressed following your separation/retirement from active service. You must submit documents in support of your request, or a reconsideration will not be given. The ODC or other legal representative (if requested by you) will assist you in preparing your reconsideration package, which will accompany the AF Form 1180.

You must provide your reconsideration request/documentation within the same 6 calendar day election period of being briefed of the PEB recommended findings.

- c. Your request will be forwarded to the VA DRAS for review. The IPEB will then review the rating board's decision and provide a final recommendation.
- d. You may disagree with the recommended findings of the IPEB and request a formal hearing of your case. If you request a FPEB hearing, you will be afforded the option to request a one-time VA reconsideration of disability ratings (IDES only) after final determination of the FPEB findings and recommended disposition. (For Return to Duty cases only, justification must accompany your request for a formal hearing and your request may be disapproved.)

NOTE: If an election is not received within the established 6-day requirement, your case will continue to be processed and finalized as a concurrence of the PEB (Informal or Formal) findings. If you were found unfit, your orders for separation or retirement will be generated.

FPEB: If you do not agree with the IPEB findings, you will be scheduled to present your case to the FPEB. The hearing will typically be scheduled within 10 days of your non-concurrence (hearing for ARC members will typically be scheduled within 14 days of non-concurrence). The FPEB consists of three board members, one of whom is a physician, and is held at JBSA-Randolph AFB, TX.

FPEB Counsel: If you have not already contacted the ODC at the beginning of the MEB process, you are encouraged to contact them at DSN 665-0739, or commercial (210) 565-0739, or via email at: afloaja.disabilitycounsel@us.af.mil. The lawyers are independent from the FPEB and are there to serve as an advocate for you. Your appointed attorney will advise you based on the documentation in your case file, your proposed testimony, any new or additional documentation you desire to submit or witness you want to call for consideration. You may either utilize the legal counsel provided or obtain counsel of your choosing at your expense. If, after speaking to the lawyers, you choose to change your election and accept the IPEB findings, you may request to waive the FPEB.

FPEB Hearing Procedures: If you decide to appear before the FPEB, this formal hearing will be held via Zoom, teleconference, or absentia. The hearing will consist of the Board members, you, your legal counsel, and any witnesses, as applicable. The hearing will be recorded on an audio file which is maintained for a 3-year period. Once your hearing is complete, the Board members will deliberate on the evidence presented prior to writing a recommendation on your case. The FPEB may either uphold the IPEB findings or make a different recommendation. You will be briefed on the findings and provided 6 calendar days (once counseled) to make an election to the findings.

Options Following the FPEB:

- a. You agree with the findings and recommended disposition of the FPEB and waive the right to submit a rebuttal to the SAFPC. Your case file will be sent to the Disability Operations Branch for finalization.

- b. You concur with the findings and recommended disposition of the FPEB and waive the right to submit a rebuttal to the SAFPC, but (for IDES cases only) request a one-time VA reconsideration of disability ratings for unfitting condition(s).

You must submit documents in support of a reconsideration request explaining what you wish the VA to reconsider. The VA will only reconsider evaluations for ratings if new medical evidence is presented, or you are able to provide sufficient evidence of error to warrant reconsideration. Your legal counsel will assist you in preparation of your reconsideration request.

- c. You request a one-time reconsideration of the disability rating for unfitting condition(s) (IDES cases only). You may also, in certain circumstances, non-concur with the findings and recommended disposition of the FPEB and submit a rebuttal to the SAFPC. If you request a one-time reconsideration, it will be held until after receipt of the SAFPC decision. When required, you must submit documentation in support of your rating request or reconsideration will not be addressed. Your legal counsel will assist you in preparing your paperwork. Your request will be forwarded to VA for review. The SAFPC will then review the rating Board's decision and provide a final recommendation.

D. APPEAL TO SAFPC. Under certain circumstances, you may appeal your case to the SAFPC. Your case may be forwarded for review to the SAFPC by your legal counsel. The SAFPC is the final board of appeal for members being processed through the DES. You may choose to submit a rebuttal to be sent with your case file to SAFPC. If you choose to submit a rebuttal, SAF Appeal must be received within 6 calendar days of being notified of the FPEB findings. SAFPC will review your case file, the contention provided by the Service members legal counsel, additionally the member will be afforded the option to request a virtual hearing or a Records Review only hearing; not both. After completion of the hearing a final disposition will be made. SAFPC may concur with the findings of the previous boards or make an alternate determination. AFPC/DPFD will be notified, and you will be informed of the disposition, along with your separation/retirement date.

Justification Criteria for Appeal to SAFPC:

1. The Airman includes and clearly identifies new and compelling evidence not previously available to the FPEB and is material and relevant to the applicant's contention(s). All new evidence must be credible and if related to a medical issue, it must be supported by a licensed/credentialed medical authority.
2. The Airman includes evidence to substantiate allegations of fraud, misrepresentation, or abuse of discretion during the DES process. The evidence must be significant enough to support the conclusion that if it had not occurred, a different outcome may have resulted in the case.
3. The Airman alleges a mistake of law or policy. The appeal should clearly state what the mistake of law and/or policy is, and how it impacted the outcome of the case. Examples may include failure to provide the Airman an opportunity for a formal hearing or an FPEB outcome that was outside the scope of its authority.

NOTE: Further appeals of the PEB decisions can be pursued through application to the Air Force Board for Correction of Military Records (AFBCMR). See Paragraph 7 below under transition stage.

Dual-Action MEB and Grade Determinations. If you received any administrative discharge action due to misconduct/misbehavior, your administrative discharge package will be coupled with your MEB.

Once you have completed both processes, the Dual-Action MEB package will be sent to the SAFPC or General Court-Martial Convening Authority (GCMCA) to determine if you will receive any military benefits.

If you were demoted, your MEB and demotion authority will be sent to SAFPC for a grade determination of whether you will be discharged at the higher or lower grade. Reference AFI 36-3212, *Physical Evaluation for Retention, Retirement and Separation* (Chapters 1 and 5).

LIMITED ASSIGNMENT STATUS (LAS)

If you are motivated to remain on active duty even though found unfit by the PEB, you may apply to be retained on active duty under the LAS program. This program allows the Air Force to keep needed experience and skills. To apply for LAS, you must first be found unfit by a PEB (IPEB or FPEB) and if you meet the eligibility criteria, you must submit a formal request for this status. Recommendation from your commander is required when applying for LAS.

1. Under the LAS program, members may be **eligible** for retention if they meet all the following requirements:
 - a. Have 15 or more but less than 20 years active service or deemed combat wounded. For ARC, service is computed under 10 U.S.C. § 12732.
 - b. Possess qualification in a needed skill or shortage Air Force Specialty Code.
 - c. The unfit medical condition must be essentially stable.
 - d. Able to function in a normal military environment without adverse effect on their own health or the health of others, and without need for excessive medical care.
 - e. Obtain commander recommendation for retention and approval of LAS via memorandum.
2. Service members are **not eligible** if:
 - a. Pending non-disability retirement or separation.
 - b. The unfitting condition is unstable (placed on TDRL)
 - c. Have over 20 years of active-duty service.
3. If approved for LAS, you must undergo an annual physical examination review (RILO) and once you near 20 years of service (YOS), you will be required to undergo another MEB based on the results of the examination and the continued need for your grade and specialty.

Only members that have less than 19 YOS when approved for/placed on LAS, will undergo another MEB to determine the final disposition.

Any member that is over 19 YOS when approved for LAS will have their retirement order generated to reflect a retirement date effective to either equal to or shortly over 20 YOS to get as close as possible. Reference AFI 36-3212.

SKILLBRIDGE PROGRAM

The Skillbridge Program provides eligible Service members civilian job training, employment skills training, apprenticeship, and other employment preparation opportunities to facilitate job access in the civilian sector upon transition from military service. The program is designed to facilitate the readiness of eligible Service members transitioning from active duty into civilian sector occupations and careers with a reasonable expectation and high probability of post-Service employment and a sustainable standard of living to that received while in Service. These programs should assist Service members in acquiring new profitable and sought-after employment skills that enable them to gain successful employment in the civilian sector.

The length of the training program depends on the amount of time a company needs to train transitioning members on required skills that lead to successful entry and potential career advancement in private or public competitive career fields with the goal of offering civilian employment after completion of the program. The recommended program length for commander consideration is 120 days or less.

During Skillbridge participation, members are placed in a PTDY status and receive military compensation and benefits. Release for Skillbridge is always mission-dependent and the unit Commander must authorize participation prior to entering into any agreement with interested industry employment partners.

There are many industry partners with opportunities in a variety of fields, such as energy, information technology, manufacturing, retail, transportation, civil service and more. These industry partners have developed SkillBridge programs for separating service members because they value your expertise, dedication and service. Visit the DoD Skillbridge website at <https://skillbridge.osd.mil/> and DAF Skillbridge website at: <https://afvec.us.af.mil/afvec/skillbridge/welcome> to research opportunities.

Those members that are undergoing a medical separation are eligible to participate as an exception to policy, based on establishing a temporary “expected” separation date 180 days from notification of full Medical Evaluation Board via Form Letter 4 (FL-4). Interested participants should research local or online training opportunities in advance so that the member can start training within the established 180 days. Members must submit their online application for commander approval or disapproval in the Air Force Virtual Education Center. The temporary DOS is only utilized to allow application submission. The DES Board will establish the actual DOS IAW their policy and guidelines. No additional extensions are allowed for Skillbridge participation.

(NOTE: If you wish to apply for the Skillbridge Program, begin this process immediately after you have been briefed of/referred into the DES MEB process or application may be denied/disapproved.)

Please contact your local Education & Training Office for additional application details.

AIR FORCE WOUNDED WARRIOR (AFW2) PROGRAM

The Air Force Wounded Warrior (AFW2) Program is a Congressionally mandated and federally funded program that provides personalized care, services, and advocacy to total force seriously injured (SI) or very seriously injured (VSI), or ill Airmen and Guardians. The program focuses on specific individual and family needs through personalized support and advocacy. The Program includes Recovery Care Coordinator (RCC), Family Liaison Officer (FLO), Caregiver Support, Special Compensation for Assistance with Activities of Daily Living (SCAADL), Emergency Family Member Travel (EFMT), Adaptive Sports & Resiliency Programs, Recovering Airman Mentorship (RAMP), and Empowerment in Transition (EIT).

Eligibility and Enrollment: The AFW2 Program is available to Total Force Active, Guard and Reserve members who have been identified as SI/VSI on a Casualty Morning Report or by a Medical Authority, Airmen with highly complex medical conditions as provided by a Medical Authority, and medical diagnosis of Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), and under consideration for MEB.

If you believe you may be eligible for AFW2 services, you can also self-refer by going to www.woundedwarrior.af.mil and click the link "Refer an Airman" or contact your local Air Force Recovery Care Coordinator (RCC) assigned at your location. AFW2's Toll-free number is 1-800-581-9437.

TRANSITION PHASE

Transition spans from the time you are informed of your final disability disposition decision to your date of final out-processing or Return to Duty.

RETURN TO DUTY PROCESSING: Your case file will be forwarded to the Medical Retention Standards office (AFPC/DPMNR) for possible determination of an Assignment Limitation Code (ALC-C). (**NOTE:** ARC members who are recommended for Return to Duty may be ALC-C coded, removed from orders and/or retired/separated by the appropriate ARC agency; AFRC/SG, ARPC/DPTOT, NGB/SG or A1PS.)

PROCESSING FOR SEPARATION/RETIREMENT:

1. Date of Separation/Retirement. The time from the date your case is finalized (published order) to the date of retirement/separation should allow sufficient time for out-processing, any permissive TDY granted by your commander, and use of any unsold leave. You may request an earlier separation/retirement date through your PEBLO at the time of your concurrence with the IPEB or FPEB. If you request a separation/retirement date of less than 30 days, your request must be routed through your Military Personnel Section (MPS) for endorsement. The MPS is responsible for ensuring all out-processing and briefings can be completed by your requested earlier date.

Once a date has been established, only AFPC/DPFD may approve changes to the retirement or separation date in cases where you can show an unusual personal hardship. Both your PEBLO and your MPS will receive a copy of the separation message.

2. Grade Determination.

a. For Retirement. Unless entitled to a higher retired grade under some other provision of law, you will be medically retired in the highest of the following grades:

I. The grade in which you were serving on the date placed on the TDRL or on the date permanently retired for disability.

II. The reserve grade you held at the time of retirement if it is higher than the grade in which serving on active duty. The Reserve grade must be a valid USAFR or ANG grade that is still in effect at the time of retirement.

III. A higher grade in which you served satisfactorily on active duty as determined by the SAF.

NOTE: If selected (officer) for promotion or your line number (enlisted) is prior to the date of the SAF memorandum approving your retirement, you may be retired in the regular or Reserve grade to which you had been selected and would have been promoted had it not been for the physical disability for which you are being retired.

b. For Separation: The discharge grade will be the higher of the following:

I. The grade in which you are serving at the time of discharge.

II. A grade in which you served satisfactorily on active duty, as determined by the SAF.

III. If selected (officer) for promotion or your line number (enlisted) is prior to the date of the SAF memorandum approving your discharge, you may be discharged in the regular or Reserve grade to which you had been selected and would have been promoted had it not been for the physical disability for which you are being separated.

3. Pay Computation. After your retirement effective date, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS)-Cleveland Center is responsible for your final retired pay computations. DFAS will send you an explanation of how they computed your retired pay, and you will have 45 days to contest their computation. You may contact them for more information using their toll-free number at 1-800-321-1080. For further information concerning your pay, please visit the DFAS website at: <https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/disability/>.

a. RETIRED PAY COMPUTATION. If you are retired for disability, your retired pay is computed based on your years of creditable service or percent of disability, whichever is most advantageous to you. Creditable service for Regular Air Force members is active-duty service time; for ARC members it is total retirement points divided by 360.

If using creditable service, the calculation is to multiply 2.5% times your years of service (YOS), then times the retired pay base. Using the disability rating, multiply the percent of total disability reflected on AF Form 356 times the retired pay base. For more information on your retired pay please visit the DFAS website at: <https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/disability/>.

- b. **DISABILITY SEVERANCE PAY COMPUTATION.** If you are discharged with entitlement to disability severance pay, you will receive a lump sum severance payment equal to 2 months of base pay for each year of service, up to 19 years, but not less than 3 years for non-combat related conditions and not less than 6 years for combat related conditions. There is no maximum dollar amount for disability severance pay. To compute severance pay, a part of a year of active service that is 6 months, or more is counted as a whole year, and a part of a year that is less than 6 months is disregarded. For example, if you have 2 years, 7 months active service, you are credited with 3 years of service when computing severance pay. For ARC members, YOS is computed as retirement points divided by 360. For more information please visit the DFAS website at: <https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/disability/> and select Disability Entitlements tab.

4. **CONCURRENT RETIREMENT AND DISABILITY PAY (CRDP), CONCURRENT RECEIPT.** CRDP allows military retirees to receive both military retired pay and VA compensation. To be eligible for CRDP, you must have a VA disability rating of 50 percent or greater. If you were placed on a disability retirement but would be eligible for military retired pay in the absence of the disability, you may be entitled to receive CRDP. You do not need to apply for CRDP, you will be enrolled automatically if qualified. Please visit the DFAS website at: <https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/disability/> to see if you may be entitled to receive CRDP.

5. **VA VERSUS AIR FORCE DISABILITY.** As a matter of information, you should be aware of the differences between the Air Force and VA disability programs. The Air Force and the VA are separate government agencies operating under different laws and policies. The findings of the two agencies frequently differ because the VA may compensate for any service-connected physical or mental condition listed in the VASRD, whereas the Air Force only compensates for those conditions which render you unfit for further military service. For this reason, it is not unusual for the military and VA total disability ratings to differ.

6. **VA BENEFITS.** Whether you are retired or separated for a disability, you may be eligible for VA benefits, such as life insurance, medical care, prescription medication, hospitalization, educational benefits, survivor's benefits, etc. Additional information concerning VA benefits is available in a VA informational pamphlet titled "Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents" which can be obtained through your local VA office or can be viewed/downloaded at their website at <https://www.va.gov/> . VA determination of service connection for disabilities may be established from the day following the date of discharge from the Air Force. However, entitlement to payment is not authorized until the first of the month following the month in which service connection is established. VA compensation is paid, like military pay, in arrears.

7. AIR FORCE BOARD FOR CORRECTION OF MILITARY RECORD (AFBCMR). Once your case has been finalized and after you have been discharged from service and have received a DD Form 214, *Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty*, if you feel an error or injustice has occurred during the processing or finalization of your case, you may apply to the AFBCMR. The AFBCMR is the highest level of administrative appeal in the Air Force and will carefully consider your petition and make recommendations as it deems appropriate to the SAF. Please be aware that submission of an application should not be considered an automatic approval. For more information visit the website at: <http://www.afpc.af.mil/board-for-correction-of-military-records>.

8. TDRL RECOGNITION CEREMONY. Individuals placed on the TDRL are not eligible to receive the typical recognition members receive for a voluntary service retirement or permanent disability retirement. However, the following steps should be followed to recognize the members for their service.

If desired, the commander should ensure a ceremony is conducted for the service member before departing for TDRL. The recommended sequence of events is as follows:

- a. Opening narration
- b. Arrival fanfare
- c. Musical honors
- d. Colors
- e. National Anthem
- f. Invocation
- g. Remarks by presiding official
- h. Presentation of medal (if applicable)
- i. Reading of TDRL order
- j. Presentation of Certificate of Recognition
- k. Presentation of US Flag (if paid for by member or supervisor--cannot be unit funded)
- l. Presentation of Letters (if applicable)
- m. Presentation of TDRL member's gifts to spouse/family
- n. Remarks by Honoree
- o. Closing Narration
- p. Air Force Song
- q. Departure of Official Party

Members on the TDRL who are later permanently retired may request the **DD Form 363AF**, *Certificate of Retirement*, by contacting The AFPC Disability Transitions Branch by email at afpc.dpfdc.tdrl@us.af.mil. AFPC prepares the certificate, the **DD Form 2542**, *Certificate of Appreciation for Service in the Armed Forces of the United States* and, if appropriate, the **AF Form 1344**, *Certificate of Appreciation for Spouse of Retiring Member* for spouses of Airmen who are placed on the TDRL whose status changed to a permanent retirement, whether for years of service or disability.

Once you have separated from the service, within 30-60 days, you will receive your permanent VA rating, VA Benefits Letter and begin receiving your VA compensation. We hope this information assists you in understanding the DES process. Should you have any questions, please contact your local PEBLO.

HELPFUL WEB SITES:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnqKQS1ojcl&spfreload=10> (DES process video)

<https://www.va.gov/> (Veterans Administration)

https://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/dbq_publicdbqs.asp (SHA, Part A form)

<https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx> (Defense Finance Accounting System My Pay)

<https://militarypay.defense.gov/benefits/survivor-benefit-program/> (AF Survivor Benefit Program)

www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/index.html (National Personnel Records Center)

<https://warriorcare.dodlive.mil/Benefits/compensation-and-benefits/>

(DoD Compensation and Benefits Handbook)

<https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/> On the left side are the links for Plan for Retirement, Disability Entitlements – which includes links to Disability Retirement; Combat Related Special Compensation; and Concurrent Retirement Disability Pay –AKA Concurrent Receipt.

<https://www.afpc.af.mil/Career-Management/Military-Personnel-Records/>

(Air Force Board for Correction of Military Records)

For Blended Retirement System (BRS) information to include the BRS calculator:

<https://militarypay.defense.gov/Calculators/BRS/>

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDODAF/bulletins/1a01e73?reqfrom=share>

There are many resources available to airmen, their families, and friends pertaining to the subject of suicide prevention.

Veterans/Military Crisis Line: The purpose of the Veterans/Military Crisis Line is to connect service-members, their families, and their friends to a qualified DOD responder in a time of crisis. The VCL/MCL can be reached by phone at 1-800-273-8255, by text at 838255, or via online chat.

Make the Connection: A public awareness campaign by the VA that provides personal testimonials and resources to help Veterans discover ways to improve their lives.

<http://maketheconnection.net/conditions/suicide#>

Military One Source. Free service provided by the DoD to service members and their families to help with a broad range of concerns including money management, spouse employment and education, parenting and childcare, relocation, deployment, reunion, and the concerns of families with special-needs members. They can also include more complex issues like relationships, stress, and grief. Services are available 24 hours a day by telephone and online. (Available 24/7) 1-800-342-9647 or at

<http://www.militaryonesource.com/skins/MOS/home.aspx>

The Defense Suicide Prevention Office website at <https://www.DSPO.mil/>

The Air Force Suicide Prevention Program website at: <https://www.resilience.af.mil/Suicide-Prevention-Program/>.