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that the denial may be appealed to the General Counsel.

(b) The final agency decision in such appeals will be made by the General Counsel or the Deputy General Counsel.

[40 FR 12658, Mar. 20, 1975, as amended at 55 FR 21546, May 25, 1990]

§§ 1.558–1.559 [Reserved]

**SAFEGUARDING PERSONAL INFORMATION
IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
RECORDS**

NOTE: Sections 1.575 through 1.584 concern the safeguarding of individual privacy from the misuse of information from files, records, reports, and other papers and documents in Department of Veterans Affairs custody. As to the release of information from Department of Veterans Affairs claimant records see §1.500 series. As to the release of information from Department of Veterans Affairs records other than claimant records see §1.550 series. Section 1.575 series implement the provisions of Pub. L. 93–579, December 31, 1974, adding a section 552a to title 5 U.S.C. providing that individuals be granted access to records concerning them which are maintained by Federal agencies, and for other purposes.

SOURCE: 40 FR 33944, Aug. 12, 1975, unless otherwise noted.

§ 1.575 Social security numbers in veterans' benefits matters.

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section, no one will be denied any right, benefit, or privilege provided by law because of refusal to disclose to the Department of Veterans Affairs a social security number.

(b) VA shall require mandatory disclosure of a claimant's or beneficiary's social security number (including the social security number of a dependent of a claimant or beneficiary) on necessary forms as prescribed by the Secretary as a condition precedent to receipt or continuation of receipt of compensation or pension payable under the provisions of chapters 11, 13 and 15 of title 38, United States Code, provided, however, that a claimant shall not be required to furnish VA with a social security number for any person to whom a social security number has not been assigned. VA may also require mandatory disclosure of an applicant's social security number as a condition for re-

ceiving loan guaranty benefits and a social security number or other taxpayer identification number from existing direct and vendee loan borrowers and as a condition precedent to receipt of a VA-guaranteed loan, direct loan or vendee loan, under chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code. (Pub. L. 97–365, sec. 4)

(c) A person requested by VA to disclose a social security number shall be told, as prescribed by §1.578(c), whether disclosure is voluntary or mandatory. The person shall also be told that VA is requesting the social security number under the authority of title 38 U.S.C., or in the case of existing direct or vendee loan borrowers, under the authority of 26 U.S.C. 6109(a) in conjunction with sections 145 and 148 of Pub. L. 98–369, or in the case of loan applicants, under the authority of section 4 of Pub. L. 97–365. The person shall also be told that it will be used in the administration of veterans' benefits in the identification of veterans or persons claiming or receiving VA benefits and their records, that it may be used in making reports to the Internal Revenue Service where required by law, and to determine whether a loan guaranty applicant has been identified as a delinquent taxpayer by the Internal Revenue Service, and that such taxpayers may have their loan applications rejected, and that it may be used to verify social security benefit entitlement (including amounts payable) with the Social Security Administration and, for other purposes where authorized by both title 38 U.S.C., and the Privacy Act of 1974, (Pub. L. 93–579), or, where required by another statute. (Pub. L. 97–365, sec. 4)

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 5101)

[44 FR 22068, Apr. 13, 1979, as amended at 51 FR 21750, June 16, 1986; 56 FR 25044, June 3, 1991]

§ 1.576 General policies, conditions of disclosure, accounting of certain disclosures, and definitions.

(a) The Department of Veterans Affairs will safeguard an individual against an invasion of personal privacy. Except as otherwise provided by law or regulation its officials and employees will:

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(1) Permit an individual to determine what records pertaining to him or her will be collected, maintained, used, or disseminated by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) Permit an individual to prevent records pertaining to him or her, obtained by the Department of Veterans Affairs for a particular purpose, from being used or made available for another purpose without his or her consent.

(3) Permit an individual to gain access to information pertaining to him or her in Department of Veterans Affairs records, to have a copy made of all or any portion thereof, and to correct or amend such records.

(4) Collect, maintain, use, or disseminate any record of identifiable personal information in a manner that assures that such action is for a necessary and lawful purpose, that the information is correct and accurate for its intended use, and that adequate safeguards are provided to prevent misuse of such information.

(5) Permit exemptions from records requirements provided in 5 U.S.C. 552a only where an important public policy need for such exemption has been determined pursuant to specific statutory authority.

(b) The Department of Veterans Affairs will not disclose any record contained in a system of records by any means of communication to any person or any other agency except by written request of or prior written consent of the individual to whom the record pertains unless such disclosure is:

(1) To those officers and employees of the agency which maintains the record and who have a need for the record in the performance of their duties;

(2) Required under 5 U.S.C. 552;

(3) For a routine use of the record compatible with the purpose for which it was collected;

(4) To the Bureau of the Census for purposes of planning or carrying out a census or survey or related activity pursuant to title 13 U.S.C.;

(5) To a recipient who has provided the Department of Veterans Affairs with advance adequate written assurance that the record will be used solely as a statistical research or reporting record, and the record is to be trans-

ferred in a form that is not individually identifiable;

(6) To the National Archives of the United States as a record which has sufficient historical or other value to warrant its continued preservation by the U.S. Government, or for evaluation by the Administrator of General Services or designee to determine whether the record has such value;

(7) To another agency or to an instrumentality of any governmental jurisdiction within or under the control of the United States for a civil or criminal law enforcement activity if the activity is authorized by law, and if the head of the agency or instrumentality has made a written request to the Department of Veterans Affairs specifying the particular portion desired and the law enforcement activity for which the record is sought;

(8) To a person pursuant to a showing of compelling circumstances affecting the health or safety of an individual if upon such disclosure notification is transmitted to the last known address of such individual;

(9) To either House of Congress, or, to the extent of matter within its jurisdiction, any committee or subcommittee thereof, any joint committee of Congress or subcommittee of any such joint committee;

(10) To the Comptroller General, or any authorized representatives, in the course of the performance of the duties of the General Accounting Office; or

(11) Pursuant to the order of a court of competent jurisdiction.

(c) With respect to each system of records (i.e., a group of records from which information is retrieved by the name of the individual or by some identifying number, symbol, or other identifying particular assigned to the individual) under Department of Veterans Affairs control, the Department of Veterans Affairs will (except for disclosures made under paragraph (b)(1) or (2) of this section) keep an accurate accounting as follows:

(1) For each disclosure of a record to any person or to another agency made under paragraph (b) of this section, maintain information consisting of the date, nature, and purpose of each disclosure, and the name and address of

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the person or agency to whom the disclosure is made;

(2) Retain the accounting made under paragraph (c)(1) of this section for at least 5 years or the life of the record, whichever is longer, after the disclosure for which the accounting is made;

(3) Except for disclosures made under paragraph (b)(7) of this section, make the accounting under paragraph (c)(1) of this section available to the individual named in the record at his or her request; and

(4) Inform any person or other agency about any correction or notation of dispute made by the agency in accordance with § 1.579 of any record that has been disclosed to the person or agency if an accounting of the disclosure was made.

(d) For the purposes of §§ 1.575 through 1.584, the parent of any minor, or the legal guardian of any individual who has been declared incompetent due to physical or mental incapacity or age by a court of competent jurisdiction, may act on behalf of the individual.

(e) Section 552a(i), title 5 U.S.C., provides that:

(1) Any officer or employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs, who by virtue of his or her employment or official position, has possession of, or access to, Department of Veterans Affairs records which contain individually identifiable information the disclosure of which is prohibited by 5 U.S.C. 552a or by § 1.575 series established thereunder, and who knowing that disclosure of the specific material is so prohibited, willfully discloses the material in any manner to any person or agency not entitled to receive it, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and fined not more than \$5,000.

(2) Any officer or employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs who willfully maintains a system of records without meeting the notice requirements of 5 U.S.C. 552a(e)(4) (see § 1.578(d)) shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and fined not more than \$5,000.

(3) Any person who knowingly and willfully requests or obtains any record concerning an individual from the Department of Veterans Affairs under false pretenses shall be guilty of a mis-

demeanor and fined not more than \$5,000.

(f) For purposes of § 1.575 series the following definitions apply:

(1) The term *agency* includes any executive department, military department, Government corporation, Government controlled corporation, or other establishment in the executive branch of the government (including the Executive Office of the President), or any independent regulatory agency.

(2) The term *individual* means a citizen of the United States or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence.

(3) The term *maintain* includes maintain, collect, use, or disseminate.

(4) The term *record* means any item, collection, or grouping of information about an individual that is maintained by an agency, including, but not limited to, his or her education, financial transactions, medical history, and criminal or employment history and that contains his or her name, or the identifying number, symbol, or other identifying particular assigned to the individual, such as a finger or voice print or a photograph.

(5) The term *system of records* means a group of any records under the control of any agency from which information is retrieved by the name of the individual or by some identifying number, symbol, or other identifying particular assigned to the individual.

(6) The term *statistical record* means a record in a system of records maintained for statistical research or reporting purposes only and not used in whole or in part in making any determination about an identifiable individual except as provided by section 8 of title 13 U.S.C.

(7) The term *routine use* means, with respect to the disclosure of a record, the use of such record for a purpose which is compatible with the purpose for which it was collected.

(g) When the Department of Veterans Affairs provides by a contract for the operation by or on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs of a system of records to accomplish a Department of Veterans Affairs function, the Department of Veterans Affairs will, consistent with its authority, cause

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the requirements of 5 U.S.C. 552a (as required by subsection (m)) and those of the § 1.575 series to be applied to such system. For the purposes of 5 U.S.C. 552a(i) and § 1.576(e) any such contractor and any employee of such contractor, if such contract is agreed to on or after September 27, 1975, will be considered to be an employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(h) The Department of Veterans Affairs will, for the purposes of 5 U.S.C. 552a, consider that it maintains any agency record which it deposits with the Administrator of General Services for storage, processing, and servicing in accordance with section 3103 of title 44 U.S.C. Any such record will be considered subject to the provisions of § 1.575 series implementing 5 U.S.C. 552a and any other applicable Department of Veterans Affairs regulations. The Administrator of General Services is not authorized to disclose such a record except to the Department of Veterans Affairs, or under regulations established by the Department of Veterans Affairs which are not inconsistent with 5 U.S.C. 552a.

(i) The Department of Veterans Affairs will, for the purposes of 5 U.S.C. 552a, consider that a record is maintained by the National Archives of the United States if it pertains to an identifiable individual and was transferred to the National Archives prior to September 27, 1975, as a record which has sufficient historical or other value to warrant its continued preservation by the United States Government. Such records are not subject to the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 552a except that a statement generally describing such records (modeled after the requirements relating to records subject to subsections (e)(4)(A) through (G) of 5 U.S.C. 552a) will be published in the FEDERAL REGISTER.

(j) The Department of Veterans Affairs will also, for the purposes of 5 U.S.C. 552a, consider that a record is maintained by the National Archives of the United States if it pertains to an identifiable individual and is transferred to the National Archives on or after September 27, 1975, as a record which has sufficient historical or other value to warrant its continued preservation by the United States Govern-

ment. Such records are exempt from the requirements of 5 U.S.C. 552a except subsections (e)(4) (A) through (G) and (e)(9) thereof.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 501)

[40 FR 33944, Aug. 12, 1975, as amended at 40 FR 58644, Dec. 18, 1975; 47 FR 16323, Apr. 16, 1982]

§ 1.577 Access to records.

(a) Except as otherwise provided by law or regulation any individual upon request may gain access to his or her record or to any information pertaining to him or her which is contained in any system of records maintained by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The individual will be permitted, and upon his or her request, a person of his or her own choosing permitted to accompany him or her, to review the record and have a copy made of all or any portion thereof in a form comprehensible to him or her. The Department of Veterans Affairs will require, however, a written statement from the individual authorizing discussion of that individual's record in the accompanying person's presence.

(b) Any individual will be notified, upon request, if any Department of Veterans Affairs system of records named contains a record pertaining to him or her. Such request must be in writing, over the signature of the requester. The request must contain a reasonable description of the Department of Veterans Affairs system or systems of records involved, as described at least annually by notice published in the FEDERAL REGISTER describing the existence and character of the Department of Veterans Affairs system or systems of records pursuant to § 1.578(d). The request should be made to the office concerned (having jurisdiction over the system or systems of records involved) or, if not known, to the Director or Department of Veterans Affairs Officer in the nearest Department of Veterans Affairs regional office, or to the Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20420. Personal contact should normally be made during the regular duty hours of the office concerned, which are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday