# POSITION DESCRIPTION

# Chairman of the Board of Veterans Appeals, Department of veterans affairs

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| **OVERVIEW** |
| Senate Committee | Veterans’ Affairs |
| Agency Mission | To fulfill President Lincoln’s promise “to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan” by serving and honoring the men and women who are America’s veterans. |
| Position Overview | The chairman provides leadership and direction for the Board of Veterans Appeals, a distinct component of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that handles appeals of all questions under section 511(a) of Title 38 that are subject to a decision by the secretary (38 U.S.C. § 7104 (a)). He or she serves as the principal advisor to the secretary on veterans appeals issues and represents the department on matters related to veterans appeals programs in support of the priorities, goals and objectives of the secretary. The chairman is appointed by the president, with the advice and consent of the Senate, for a term of six years. The chairman is subject to the same ethical and legal limitations and restrictions concerning involvement in political activities as apply to judges of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (38 U.S.C. § 7101(b)(1)). |
| Compensation | Level IV $155,500 (5 U.S.C. § 5315)[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Reports to | The board is under the administrative control and supervision of a chairman directly responsible to the secretary (38 U.S.C. § 7101(a)). |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** |
| Management Scope | The board chairman is responsible for a staff of approximately 950 full-time equivalents (note: the board has undergone tremendous growth in recent years). The Department of Veterans Affairs’ budget for fiscal 2018 is over $185 billion. |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Provides leadership and direction for the Board of Veterans Appeals, a distinct component of the VA responsible for appeals
* Serves as the principal advisor to the secretary on veterans appeals issues and represents the department on matters related to veterans appeals programs in support of the secretary’s priorities, goals and objectives
* Administers the board's appellate program to ensure that all appellants seeking relief are provided with due process of law and that the determinations made are impartial, as well as legally and medically sound
* Develops policies and procedures governing appellate procedures, personnel hearings and other appellate issues in accordance with the law, including the decisions of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims
* Is authorized to approve an assumption of appellant jurisdiction, under the authority delegated by the secretary, and appears before committees of Congress and before organizations of national scope concerning department operations and policies relating to the appellant functions of the board[[2]](#endnote-2)
* Prepares a report, after each fiscal year ends, on the activities of the board during that fiscal year, the projected activities of the board for the fiscal year in which the report is prepared, and the next fiscal year (38 U.S.C. § 7101)
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| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** |
| Requirements | * Active member of the bar in good standing
* Prior experience leading a large legal organization (preferred), including experience working directly with unionized employees (Note: The board’s non-management attorneys and support staff are unionized, which requires bargaining on changes in conditions of employment)
* Prior active-duty service (preferred)
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| Competencies | * Strong communication and interpersonal skills (preferred)
* Demonstrated leadership skills
* Ability to work under high pressure, while maintaining diplomacy and high ethical standards (critical)
* Ability to handle sensitive matters with tact and discretion
* Keen legislative skills (helpful), including the ability to navigate politics and Washington D.C.
* Excellent negotiation skills (vital), including the ability to work in a matrixed agency that often faces competing priorities
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| **CURRENT AND PAST APPOINTEES** |
| Cheryl L. Mason (2017 – Present): Interim Principal Deputy Vice Chairman, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Deputy Vice Chairman, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Chief Veterans Law Judge, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Veterans Law Judge, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Counsel, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Attorney, Federal Labor Relations Authority; Contract Attorney Investigator, Civil Rights Division, Department of Justice[[3]](#endnote-3) |
| Laura H. Eskenazi (acting as “Executive in Charge,” 2013 to 2016): Vice Chairman, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Principal Deputy Vice Chairman, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Chief Counsel for Operations, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Special Counsel to the Senior Deputy Vice Chairman, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Counsel, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA |
| Steven L. Keller (acting, 2011 to 2013): Vice Chairman, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Principal Deputy Vice Chairman, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA; Senior Deputy Vice Chairman, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA[[4]](#endnote-4) |
| James Philip Terry (2005 to 2011): Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Regional, Global and Functional Affairs, Bureau of Legislative Affairs, Department of State; Deputy Assistant Secretary, Regional, Global and Functional Affairs, Bureau of Legislative Affairs, Department of State; Judge, Board of Land Appeals, Department of the Interior[[5]](#endnote-5) |

1. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (Public Law 115-31, May 5, 2017), contains a provision that continues the freeze on the payable pay rates for certain senior political officials at 2013 levels during calendar year 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. OPM [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Whitehouse.gov [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. iv https://www.va.gov/opa/bios/docs/keller.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. v <https://www.va.gov/opa/bios/docs/terry.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)