

Time Running Out for to Claim PTSD Benefits

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The U.S. military has agreed to pay millions of dollars to veterans who were discharged from the service for post-traumatic stress disorder with lower disability ratings than they are entitled to. But time is running out for those who are eligible.

The law says that veterans whose PTSD was serious enough to result in discharge from the military are entitled to 50-percent disability, which would give them and their families lifetime medical care, and, if the PTSD is combat-related, tax-free retirement payments, as well. But for some reason, Iraq war veteran Ryan Peck and more than 4,000 others did not receive the 50-percent rating.

"My goal was if I could retire at 37 years old and do something I love for 20 years, that'd be great," Peck said. "And i could figure out something else to do when I was 37."

Peck enlisted in the Army two days after the 9/11 attacks. In March of 2003, he went into combat in Iraq with the 101st Airborne.

Prck liked the soldier's life so much that he re-upped for six more years. But in 2005, the Army told him it didn't want him any more.

"My hands would shake constantly, to the extent that I'd have to stop doing what I was doing because I couldn't focus," Peck confided.

Peck had PTSD.

"I was devastated," Peck said. "I mean, I contemplated harming myself more than once."

The army gave ryan an honorable discharge, but not the 50-percent disability rating required by law.

Enter Lawyers Serving Warriors, volunteers like Morgan Lewis attorney James Kelley, who provide free legal assistance to people like Peck through the National Veterans Legal Services program.

"For a veteran like Ryan we have sued to get the benefits to which the law entitled him from the moment he was eliminated from the Army: namely a 50-percent disability rating," Kelley said.

The government has decided not to fight.

"The government approached us and said we want to work with you to rectify this problem," Kelley said.

But there's a catch: Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans like Peck have only until July 24 to apply for the 50-percent rating.

"There are benefits available to you at absolutely no cost to you -- legal fees are free, no litigation costs," Kelley said. "Just respond."

"I love the Army and if I knew before I signed up that I'd have problems I have now, I'd still have signed up," Peck said.

"This is justice delayed, but it's justice inevitable in any event," Kelley said.

If you think you're eligible, go to the national veterans legal services program website, nvls.org. They're waiting to hear from you.

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