

**Mark C.W. Montigny, State Senator**  
Statehouse, Room 312-C  
Boston, MA. 02133

March 10, 2018

Dear Senator Montigny,

My wife and I recently relocated from the sunny and military friendly city of San Antonio, Texas. Since we were both born and raised in New Bedford and have many of our friends and family located in or near this area, we decided to purchase a home in New Bedford where we could be closer to them. Our relocation from that sunny city to the cold wintry weather of Mass., has been smooth except for one very important situation which has to do with your Department of Transportation, Medical Division.

Let me explain my problem to you. To begin with, I am a US Air Force veteran who has proudly and honorably served my country for 20 years, 9 months and 18 days. While an Air Force member, I was ordered to serve in several different countries overseas, like the Philippines, Japan, Germany and twice in South Vietnam. My last assignment to Vietnam was in 1967 and 1968. As you undoubtedly recall, the "Tet" offensive took place in early 1968. During those years, and perhaps other years as well, our government decided to spray a chemical called "Agent Orange" to destroy/lessen the thick foliage that exists in South Vietnam. Because of this I, and many others serving in South Vietnam, were affected by this chemical and eventually become disabled. In my case, the Veterans Administration (VA) has classified me as being 100% combat-related disabled. As a result, I currently am receiving full care and medical treatment from the VA for which I am extremely grateful.

In the city of San Antonio, Texas, disabled Veterans (DV) license plates are offered to any veteran who has a combat-related disability of 60% or higher as designated by the VA as is the case in the state of Massachusetts. To obtain this license plate, all I had to do was provide them with an official letter from the VA certifying that I had a combat-related disability rated at 100%. The VA sends such an official letter to me every year. In a matter of minutes, after presenting the VA official letter to them, I was issued the DV license plates. No hassle. No delay. No problems.

When I relocated to New Bedford, I went to the local RMV to register my vehicle. I inquired about obtaining a DV license plate. I was handed a form and told that I would have to submit it to the DOT Medical Department located in Boston, MA. This was the beginning of my long journey to obtain a DV license plate. I completed the information on the form, attached the most recent copy of my VA Disability confirmation letter and mailed it to the Mass. DOT on October 25, 2017. Shortly thereafter, I received a return letter from the Mass DOT advising me that I was required to have my doctor complete the appropriate section of the form and that I also had to obtain a letter from the VA specifically stipulating the medical conditions I had that substantiated my 100% combat-related disability. Please understand that for me to receive a disability rating from the VA, I was examined by four different doctors. This also meant that I would have to arrange for an appointment with my VA doctor. When I called, using the telephone number provided to me by the medical division, the first time I was connected with the VA in Utah and the second attempt connected me with the VA in Pennsylvania. When I informed them of the purpose of my call, both expressed astonishment that the official VA letter that I had sent to the Mass. DOT medical division was not acceptable. I asked if it would be possible to send me a letter identifying the

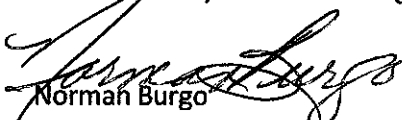
exact nature of my disabilities. The person that I spoke to from the Utah VA agreed to provide me with such a letter but also told me that it was not a common practice.

Again, I completed the Application for Disabled Parking Placard/Plate. My doctor was kind enough to complete the Healthcare Provider section. I also attached the Utah VA letter I received to include the letter with a breakdown of my disabilities and resent the completed package to the Mass. DOT Medical Department on 12/15/2017. I made several follow up calls to the DOT Medical division only to receive a recording stating the progress that was being made in processing these applications. On 1/22/2018 they were processing applications for permanent disability plate for those submitted during the week of September 27, 2017. On 1/31/2017, they were processing applications for the week of October 2017. On 2/17/2018, they were processing applications through the end of October. On 3/5/2018, they were processing applications as of 12/28/2017. Since my second sending was done on 12/15/2017, I decided to call and speak with an agent. In our conversation, she informed me that my application for the DV plates have been approved on 2/21/2018 and a letter was sent to me. She also told me that the plates would be at the New Bedford RMV and that I had to pick them up within 30 days. I informed the person that, to date, I have never received such a letter. The woman asked me to wait while she checked on the letter supposedly mailed to me. When she returned on the line, she said, "The letter is on the way." Had I not made this follow-up call, and since I did not receive the letter, it is conceivable that the plates would have been returned and I would have to start the process all over again. All in all, I had to wait about four months before receiving the approval for the Disabled Veterans (DV) plates. Quite a difference from the minutes I had to wait in San Antonio, TX.

During this waiting period whenever there were chores that I had to take care of such as grocery shopping, and/or meeting my medical appointments, and since I was unable to use the disabled parking spaces, there were times when I would have to walk a long distance, with the help of my wife and my cane, in order to get into the facility I was visiting. This was not only extremely difficult for me but also very painful. I would often defer from even going into these places to avoid this discomfort. I suspect there are other disabled veterans with more severe handicaps, i.e., loss of limbs, that are being caused to wait for several months before getting an approval for a DV plate. Not to mention those that have probably just given up in disgust. Sir, is this the way veterans living in Massachusetts can expect to be treated?

If a veteran has a 60% or higher combat-related disability and can produce an official letter from the VA stipulating such, that document should be acceptable in Massachusetts as is the case in San Antonio, TX. It should not be predicated on the type of disability the veteran has since it happened as a result of being in a combat environment. At the very least, the Medical Department of the Mass DOT should process DV license requests received from a disabled veteran separately and expeditiously. I respectfully request that you designate someone to investigate this matter with the intent of trying to determine if there is a way that disabled veterans can have their requests for a DV plate acted upon immediately or with the minimum of delay. I sincerely hope that you will address this matter seriously to avoid other disabled veterans applying for DV plates in the future from having to experience such a long wait as I had to.

Thank you very much for taking the time and having the patience to read this letter.



Norman Burgo

Command Chief Master Sergeant, USAF, Retired

584 Hawes Street

New Bedford, MA 02745