

## **DO YOU NEED A LAWYER TO HANDLE YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY CASE?**

**By Sharon A. Christie, Esq.**

If you've become unable to work because of a medical condition and need to apply for Social Security disability benefits, the question you might ask is, 'Should I file the claim myself, or should I hire a disability lawyer to represent me?' It's a question you should consider carefully, because it may be one of the most important decisions of your life.

Getting a disability claim through the gauntlet of the Social Security Administration (SSA) is a long and difficult process. On average, it takes over two years and at least one appeal to get your benefits approved, during which time you are not only dealing with serious health issues, but a potential financial crisis as well. Many people give up while waiting for their claim to be approved. A lawyer experienced in handling Social Security disability claims can relieve the stress and anxiety that come with trying to deal with this system.

If you're unable to work and are facing financial uncertainty, you might think that you can't afford to hire an attorney to help you with your claim. The good news is that lawyers who file disability claims work on a contingency basis, which means that you pay them nothing unless and until you win your claim from Social Security. Attorneys normally collect 25% of the back benefits awarded in your claim. This means that they only charge you a portion of the retroactive payments that you'll receive once your claim is approved.

Studies show that your benefits are more likely to be approved if you're represented by an attorney. This is because an experienced disability attorney knows the ins and outs of the process. They will collect all of the documentation necessary to support your case and make sure that your paperwork is filled out accurately and completely before being submitted to the SSA, sparing you unnecessary delays. Their expertise means that they know which medical information will help your claim and will obtain additional documentation from your healthcare providers, if needed. An experienced disability attorney can shepherd your claim through the review process, making sure that your case doesn't get lost in the crush of the huge number of claims in the SSA pipeline. They will save you the time, energy and stress of dealing with the confusing bureaucracy of the Social Security Administration.

If your claim goes to a hearing with an administrative law judge, your attorney will prepare you for your testimony, accompany you to court, cross examine expert witnesses and argue your case before the judge. The attorney will assemble all of the evidence you'll need to support your claim and ease your path through the hearing process.

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