



NVLSP
NATIONAL VETERANS LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM

Watts v. Meink

Air Force Pre-IDES

Frequently Asked Questions

August 2026

Disclaimer

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Watts Air Force Pre-IDES

Frequently Asked Questions

What is this case about?

The [lawsuit](#) in *Watts v. Meink* was brought by the National Veterans Legal Services Program ([NVLSP](#)) and Ashurst Perkins Coie on behalf of Ms. Kathleen Watts, Mr. Robert Newman, and a class of similarly situated Air Force servicemembers and veterans who were unlawfully denied access to the medical retirement process. Under the challenged policy, the Air Force diverted eligible servicemembers into a preliminary screening process known as “Pre-IDES” and denied them entry into the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (“IDES”). As a result, they were denied important protections, including evaluation by Medical and Physical Evaluation Boards, free military counsel, hearings and appeal rights, and consideration for military disability retirement and benefits. Plaintiffs [argued](#) that the Air Force’s pre-screening process violated the Due Process Clause and the Administrative Procedure Act, by failing to comply with mandatory requirements in 10 U.S.C. § 1071 and U.S. Department of Defense Instruction (“DoDI”) 1332.18.

What did the court decide?

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia granted summary judgment for the plaintiffs, holding that the Pre-IDES was arbitrary, capricious, contrary to law, and an extra-statutory process the Air Force lacked authority to create. The court also concluded that Ms. Watts and Mr. Newman had protected due-process rights because they qualified for referral into IDES. The court has not yet determined the relief that the Air Force must provide.

Who is considered part of the class?

All current and former members of the United States Air Force, including the Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard, who, from July 1, 2019, to the present:

- met the criteria for referral into the IDES under Section 5.2 of DoDI 1332.18;
- were not ineligible for referral under Section 5.4 of DoDI 1332.18; and
- were referred into the Air Force’s Pre-IDES, and did not receive access to IDES;

What do I need to do to participate/join the class?

Nothing. If you satisfy the class definition, you are automatically included in the class and do not need to formally join the lawsuit.

What happens next?

The parties will submit additional briefing on the appropriate relief for current members denied access to IDES and former members who may be entitled to a new disability evaluation. The court has not yet determined the remedy or whether class members must take any action. NVLSP cannot provide individualized advice at this time. Please monitor www.nvlsp.org for updates.

About the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP)

The National Veterans Legal Services Program ([NVLSP](#)) is an independent, nonprofit veterans service organization that has served active duty military personnel and veterans since 1981. NVLSP strives to ensure that our nation honors its commitment to its 18 million veterans and active duty personnel by ensuring they have the benefits they have earned through their service to our country. NVLSP has represented veterans in lawsuits that compelled enforcement of the law where the VA or other military services denied benefits to veterans in violation of the law. NVLSP’s success in these

lawsuits has resulted in more than \$7.2 billion dollars being awarded in disability, death and medical benefits to hundreds of thousands of veterans and their survivors. NVLSP offers training for attorneys and other advocates; connects veterans and active duty personnel with pro bono legal help when seeking disability benefits; publishes the nation's definitive guide on veteran benefits; and represents and litigates for veterans and their families before the VA, military discharge review agencies and federal courts. For more information, go to nvlsp.org.