

Designated for electronic publication only

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR VETERANS CLAIMS

No. 19-5101

DONNA K. COBURN, APPELLANT,

V.

ROBERT L. WILKIE,
SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, APPELLEE.

Before ALLEN, *Judge*.

MEMORANDUM DECISION

*Note: Pursuant to U.S. Vet. App. R. 30(a),
this action may not be cited as precedent.*

ALLEN, *Judge*: Self-represented appellant Donna K. Coburn served the Nation honorably in the United States Army. In this appeal, which is timely and over which the Court has jurisdiction,¹ she contests a June 4, 2019, decision of the Board of Veterans' Appeals that denied service connection for an acquired psychiatric disorder, including PTSD and depression, including as due to military sexual trauma.² Because appellant's underdeveloped arguments fail to demonstrate error in the Board's decision, we will affirm.

I. ANALYSIS

Because appellant is proceeding pro se, she is entitled to both a sympathetic reading of her informal brief and a liberal construction of her arguments.³ But on appeal she still carries the burden of demonstrating error in the Board's determination that she was not entitled to the benefits at issue.⁴ We have considered appellant's informal brief as well as the numerous letters she

¹ See 38 U.S.C. §§ 7252(a), 7266(a).

² Record (R.) at 7-27.

³ See *De Perez v. Derwinski*, 2 Vet.App. 85, 86 (1992).

⁴ *Shinseki v. Sanders*, 556 U.S. 396, 409 (2009).

submitted during the course of this appeal. While her submissions are often confusing and disjointed, she appears to make two arguments about why the Board erred. Though she does not frame the issues in this way, we understand both issues she raises to concern the Board's obligation, for all its findings on a material issue of fact and law, to support its decision with an adequate statement of reasons or bases that enables a claimant to understand the precise bases for the Board's decision and facilitates review in this Court.⁵ We will address each of her arguments in turn.

First, appellant makes several references to gender bias. At times the references are quite general. For example, she states that "[g]ender [b]ias is universal."⁶ And she asks us to "[r]ule on [b]ias [i]ssue."⁷ Continuing on this theme, appellant seems to fault the Board for not addressing what she refers to as the "[g]ender [b]ias [i]ssue."⁸ This argument does not show error in the Board's decision. To begin with, we have no idea what the gender bias issue purportedly is. Nothing in the record (which we have carefully reviewed in its entirety) gives us a clue about that question. And certainly nothing suggests that the Board failed to address any argument appellant made. As we noted above, we sympathetically read a pro se appellant's arguments.⁹ But here no amount of sympathetic reading can fill in the gaps in appellant's argument about gender bias. She has failed to carry her burden of showing error.

Second, appellant suggests that the Board "highly edited" the information concerning her claim.¹⁰ But just as she fails to explain her gender-bias claim, she also fails to explain what she means by "highly edited." She doesn't identify what the Board supposedly "edited" or why what might have been altered or omitted was important to the issue at hand. We have closely reviewed the Board's discussion of the evidence and the record as a whole. We can't fill in the gaps in appellant's argument. She has not carried her burden to show error on this assertion either.

In sum, while we appreciate appellant's service, we can't see error in the Board's decision. So, we will affirm.

⁵ 38 U.S.C. § 7104(d)(1); *Gilbert v. Derwinski*, 1 Vet.App. 49, 57 (1990).

⁶ Appellant's Brief (Br.) at 1, Question 2.

⁷ *Id.* at 3, Question 7.

⁸ *Id.* at 3, Question 6.

⁹ *De Perez*, 2 Vet.App. at 86.

¹⁰ *See* Appellant's Br. at 1, Question 2.

II. CONCLUSION

After consideration of the parties' briefs, the governing law, and the record, the Court AFFIRMS the June 4, 2019, Board decision on appeal.

DATED: April 27, 2020

Copies to:

Donna K. Coburn

VA General Counsel (027)