No shared philosophy within the OSD or across military departments defines the fundamental reason why the Disability Evaluation System exists—that is, there is no shared statement of its purpose. Lacking direction from the OSD on the purpose of the DES, the military departments fill the void by giving DoD policy language their own interpretation and operate their systems accordingly.

The official documents that govern the military departments’ systems express the purpose or objectives of their respective DES differently. Army Regulations govern the operations of the Army DES, Secretary of the Navy Instructions govern the operations of the Department of the Navy DES, and Air Force Instructions govern the operations of the Air Force DES.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

The Army describes the purpose of its governing regulation (AR 635-40, para. 1-1) as being designed to

- maintain an effective and fit military organization with maximum use of available manpower
- provide benefits for eligible soldiers whose military service is terminated because of a service-connected disability
- provide prompt disability processing while ensuring that the rights and interests of the United States government and the soldier (service member) are protected.

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

The Department of the Navy governing document (Secretary of the Navy Instruction 1850.4D, 1998, para. 3101) focuses on objectives, as follows:

- The maintenance of a physically fit and combat-ready Navy and Marine Corps, including Reserve components
- Equitable consideration of the interests of the government and individual service members.
DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

The Air Force governing document (AFI 36-3212, 1998, p. 10) describes the purpose of its Disability Evaluation System as follows:

To maintain a fit and vital force, disability law allows the Secretary of the Air Force to remove from active duty those members who can no longer perform the duties of their office, grade, rank, or rating and ensure fair compensation to members whose military careers are cut short due to a service-incurred or service-aggravated physical disability.

JOINT SERVICE DISABILITY WORKING GROUP

To address the findings of a DoD Inspector General audit report dated June 1992, the Office of the ASD/HA convened a Joint Service Disability Working Group to analyze the disability evaluation process using the Corporate Information Management methodology. That group articulated the following mission statement for the DOD Disability Evaluation System:

The military disability evaluation process provides and maintains a fit force, removes unfit members from active duty who can no longer perform duties commensurate with their office, grade, rank, or rating, and provides compensation to members whose military careers are cut short due to a service-incurred or service-aggravated physical disability (Joint Service Disability Working Group, November 17, 1963).

SUMMARY

The four statements of the DES purpose, objectives, or mission in this appendix—all seeking to establish the reason the system exists—offer various renditions and combinations of four themes:

1. All four statements include a “maintain a fit force” theme, as follows:
   
   • Maintain an effective and fit military organization with maximum use of available manpower.
   • Maintain a physically fit and combat-ready Navy and Marine Corps.
   • Maintain a fit and vital force.
   • Provide and maintain a fit force.

2. Three statements include a “provide compensation and benefits” theme:
   
   • Provide benefits for eligible soldiers whose military service is terminated because of a service-connected disability.
   • Ensure fair compensation to members whose military careers are cut short due to a service-incurred or service-aggravated physical disability.
   • Provide compensation to members whose military careers are cut short due to a service-incurred or service-aggravated physical disability.
3. Two statements include a “remove unfit members from active duty” theme:
   - Provide prompt disability processing; remove from active duty those who can no longer perform the duties of their office, grade, rank, or rating.
   - Remove unfit members from active duty who can no longer perform duties commensurate with their office, grade, rank, or rating.

4. Two statements include a “balance the interests of the government and the service member” theme:
   - Ensure that the rights and interests of the government and the soldier are protected.
   - Ensure equitable consideration of the interests of the government and individual service members.