

Cracking Down on Predatory Claims Companies

The VFW's Concern:

The VFW is concerned that bad actors have been preying on veterans by seeking to access their earned Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, unaccredited consulting groups that the VFW calls "Claim Sharks" viewed the chaos as an exploitation opportunity. Since the passage of the PACT Act they have ramped up their efforts even more.

These groups aggressively advertise online and make promises to increase veterans' disability ratings. Some charge thousands of dollars in fees for their services, and even request VA login credentials to track when veterans receive future ratings increases. If a veteran receives a disability percentage increase years later, often these companies return seeking more money. Furthermore, they routinely obtain medical opinions from affiliated medical providers, which raises ethical concerns.

The VFW believes that penalties need to be reinstated to the already existing law. Anyone who assists veterans with the preparation, presentation, or prosecution of VA claims should adhere to established fee caps or be subject to penalties. A bipartisan coalition of forty-four attorneys general agrees with the VFW and sent a letter to House and Senate leadership expressing support for passage of the *GUARD VA Benefits Act*.

The states and territories that signed the letter are: California, Illinois, Ohio, Tennessee, Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Provisional Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

The VFW opposes the *Plus for Veterans Act of 2023* and any legislation attempting to legalize a pathway for companies to charge lucrative fees in exchange for claims assistance. No veteran should have to pay for earned benefits.

The VFW urges Congress to:

Pass H.R. 1139 / S. 740, *GUARD VA Benefits Act*, to reinstate penalties for charging veterans and survivors unauthorized fees relating to claims for VA benefits.