

Cracking Down on Predatory Claim Companies

The VFW's Concerns:

The VFW is concerned that bad actors have been preying on veterans seeking to access their earned Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, non-accredited consulting groups that the VFW calls "Claim Sharks" viewed the chaos as an exploitation opportunity. These groups aggressively advertised online for veterans to increase their disability ratings and finally receive the benefits they deserve. Consultants who refuse to adhere to VA's well-established standards of accreditation and fee arrangements should be subject to penalties in the same manner as accredited representatives. Under VA regulations, fees are capped and usually include only a percentage of retroactive benefits. However, many of these unaccredited consultants use contracts that include a commitment by the veteran to pay the Claim Shark all or a portion of their increased benefits. If a veteran receives a disability percentage increase years later, often these companies return seeking more money. Currently, these predatory companies have no accountability, no oversight, and no penalties.

The VFW urges Congress to:

- Pass H.R. 8736, *Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding VA Benefits Act*, known as the GUARD VA Benefits Act. This legislation would reinstate penalties for charging veterans and survivors unauthorized fees relating to claims for VA benefits.