
Department of Maine

**STATEMENT OF
STEVEN J. SANPEDRO FIRST SERGEANT, RETIRED
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS & LEGAL AFFAIRS**

**ON
AN ACT TO PROHIBIT RECEIVING COMPENSATION FOR ASSISTING A PERSON TO OBTAIN
VETERANS' BENEFITS EXCEPT AS PERMITTED UNDER FEDERAL LAW
MARCH 12, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chairman Hickman, Chairwoman Supica and distinguish Members of the Veterans & Legal Affairs Committee.

It is an honor and a privilege to address you today regarding LD-2259 An Act to Prohibit Receiving Compensation for Assisting a Person to Obtain Veterans' Benefits Except as Permitted Under Federal Law. My name is Steven SanPedro, I am currently the National Councilman and a National Legislative Committee Member for the Veterans of Foreign Wars representing Maine. I served as the Maine State Commander of the VFW in 2016-2017. In addition, I have served on the Maine Veterans Home Board of Trustee from 2015 to present and currently serve as Vice Chair of the Board.

The intent of this bill is not preventing law firms from representing Veterans with their claims and appeals but simply put restriction on how much they can charge them for their services.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars at the State and National level are working very hard to stop these bad actors know as "Claim Sharks", from taking advantage of Veterans and their Families who have earned these benefits. 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.

These Claim Sharks will tell you that they cannot get VA accredited and that is an outright lie. They don't want to get accredited because then they will be subjected to the same fines and possible incarceration that our accredited VA service officers are upheld to. Why would outside agencies have a different standard then our accredited VA service officers? This makes no sense at all.

Since the passage of the PACT Act these predatory law firms have charged astronomical amounts of money to our Veterans and their Families. At the National level there is a House and a Senate bill that will reinstate the fines and jail time that was suspended to help catch up on VA claims. HR-1139 and S-740 GUARD VA Benefits Act has overwhelming support.

The VA and the VA Secretary Denis McDonough have continued to speak out in favor of this. Also, confirming that anyone can go through the accreditation process.

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*. I am proud to say that Maine's AG Aaron Frey was one of them.

These Claim Sharks are so worried about these laws passing they have spent over 1.5 million dollars fight the VFW at the National and State levels. These actions are spearheaded by Former VA Deputy Secretary Peter O'Rourke. They have proposed their own law call the PLUS ACT (We refer to it as the Please Let Us Steal Act).

Once again no one is trying to put these law firms out of business we just want them to do the morally right thing by charging a reasonable rate to help Veterans and their Families get what they have earned and deserve.

The Department of Maine Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary strongly request that you support this and make it a law to protect our Veterans and their Families.

Respectfully Submitted

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