

Veteran Benefits Guide Opposition to Legislative Docket 2259

Dear Chairman Hickman, members of the committee, my name is Ray Colas and I am here on behalf of Veteran Benefits Guide (VBG) to testify **with concerns to Legislative Docket 2259 as currently written**. VBG provides Veterans with a private, legal and federally compliant option outside of the Veteran Affairs (VA) ensuring Veterans receive the full benefits that they've earned.

VBG strongly supports the bill sponsor's commitment to protecting our veterans and actually believes that the bill does not go far enough as it is absent necessary disclosures and fee caps. However and most unfortunate, this bill prohibits the services of honorable for-profit companies serving Veterans such as ours. LD 2259 would roll back Maine's free market laws that support freedom of choice, representation and access to veteran services. Services such as those created for veterans, by veterans.

The proponents of the bill inaccurately and intentionally insinuate that organizations such as ours choose not to be accredited. **Federal law states that no individual may act as an agent or attorney in the preparation, presentation, or prosecution of any claim under laws administered by the Secretary without first being accredited.** I would like to state for the record that:

- We **DO NOT** practice law
- We **DO NOT** act as the veterans agent of record
- We **DO NOT** present before the VA

Federal law also states that VA-recognized VSOs, and their representatives, always provide their services on benefit claims free-of-charge and that only VA-accredited attorneys and claims agents may charge fees for assisting in a claim for VA benefits.

Simply put, as an **accredited VSO** or an **accredited Representative**, there is no path for the services of honorable for-profit companies such as ours to serve Veterans and this is **our primary opposition to the bill.**

We would be more than happy to partner with Senator Farrin and members of the legislature to improve protections for our veterans while also allowing a path for honorable for-profit companies such as ours to continue serving Veterans.

Unfortunately, the bill as currently written proposes to increase costs to veterans while reducing freedom of choice, representation and access to veteran services. It is for that reason we ask Senator Farrin to consider our concerns to secure our support of Legislative Docket 2259. I would like to thank Chairman Hickman for the opportunity to engage on LD 2259.