



PURPLE HEART HOMES

IMPROVING VETERANS' LIVES ONE HOME AT A TIME

January 10, 2025

The Honorable C.T. Wilson
Chairman, House Economic Matters Committee
231 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Brian M. Crosby
Vice-Chairman House Economic Matters Committee
231 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Wilson and Vice-Chairman Crosby:

On behalf of Purple Heart Homes (PHH), a North Carolina-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to serving Veterans across the nation, we are writing to express our support to **Maryland House Bill 267 with amendments**.

Purple Heart Homes was founded in 2008 by Veterans John Gallina and the late Dale Beatty, both of whom served together in Iraq and returned with life-altering injuries. Inspired by the unwavering support of their community, they established PHH to honor fellow Veterans. Today, PHH provides housing solutions to service-connected, disabled, and aging Veterans of all eras across the United States, reflecting our core commitment to supporting Veterans and their rights.

Attempting to protect Veterans is an honorable endeavor that we all share; unfortunately, the current form of HB 267 misses the mark and would not only deny a Veteran the right to choose how they pursue their own claim, but they also fail to address the full spectrum of the issues at hand. The current bill also fails to address critical issues including: providing additional oversight and protections for the Veteran while preserving their Constitutional rights to petition their government in a manner they see fit, and ensuring Veterans have access to diverse options and effective solutions for decades to come.

Rather than purposely restricting a Veteran's right to choose how they pursue their claim as the current version of HB 267 does, a better approach is to implement necessary amendments and reforms that must take place to ensure the integrity of the systems and to protect Veterans from potentially bad actors. Some of these amendments include, but are not limited to:

- o Prohibiting anyone for receiving compensation for referring anyone to another person to assist with a veterans' benefits matter
- o Prohibiting anyone for receiving compensation for services rendered to a Veteran within one year presumptive period of active-duty release unless the Veteran specifically acknowledges in writing at the initiation of the services agreement that the Veteran is within the 1-year presumptive period, and has also been referred to a VSO of their choice
- o Mandating that anyone receiving compensation for assisting with Veterans' benefits must specify the terms under which the amount to be paid will be determined in a written agreement signed by both parties
- o Mandating any fees are purely contingent upon a successful outcome and are not to exceed 5x the monthly increase

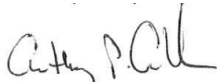
- o Prohibiting any initial or non-refundable fees
- o Getting written confirmation from the Veteran they have been informed of their free options
- o Prohibiting private companies from having doctors on the payroll performing secondary medical exams
- o Prohibiting the use of international call centers or data centers for processing Veteran's personal information
- o Prohibiting aggressive and direct solicitation
- o Prohibiting advertising or guaranteeing a successful outcome
- o Prohibiting businesses from gaining access to personal medical, financial, or governmental benefits log-in, username, or password information

These amendments will offer the true protections that will ensure the Veteran is not taken advantage of, while still preserving their rights to seek expert claims support.

PHH also supports Veterans' rights to choose reliable and expert assistance, whether through private entities or traditional Veterans Service Organizations. Veterans deserve the freedom to access the support they need without undue restriction or compromise, and these amendments serve as an important step in that direction.

The demand for current services in this space is far too vast for the government and VSOs to handle on their own. This highlights the need for an enhanced system that provides an expanded pathway for accreditation and enhanced oversight. With these amendments, HB 267 can accomplish this, and we encourage you to support this amended legislation to empower Veterans a choice in how they receive their benefits.

Thank you for your dedication to Maryland's Veterans.



Paul Cockerham
Chief Development Officer
Purple Heart Homes