



## **Commission on Veterans Affairs**

**Michael Wilson, Chair**

### **Testimony on SB928 – Veterans Benefits Matters – Claims Servicers – Prohibitions and Requirements**

**February 27, 2025**

**Senate Finance Committee**

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs, I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 928 that would protect Veterans from claims predators. Unscrupulous businesses, commonly referred to as "claims predators", continue to be an issue across the country affecting numerous military veterans who seek disability benefits, especially since the increase in claims resulting from the PACT Act of 2022, in connection to injuries they suffered while serving in our military.

Oftentimes, these businesses take advantage of veterans by feeding them false information or claim they can either expedite the approval of disability benefits with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or assistance with winning appeals to claims that have been denied. High pressure tactics are used such as making veterans sign a contract agreeing to pay an individual/company in exchange for help with their initial VA claim. There are cases where veterans have been either charged an exorbitant amount of money up front with a promise of getting their filing approved or a stiff percentage of their future benefits, sometimes ranging between 20-30%, if their filing is approved. A significant number of these businesses are not VA accredited representatives, and thus take advantage of veterans.

As Chair of the Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs, I had a recent encounter with a Gaithersburg, MD resident who is a barber and veteran. He shared with me that he is working with an out of state attorney who had him sign a contract that would provide the attorney up to 20% of his future disability benefits for filing on his behalf. Unfortunately, this resident is concerned with both losing this amount of his future disability benefits as well as the legal challenges of getting out of the contract with this attorney. The veteran explained that he was not aware that the State provides such services through the Veteran Service Officers at no cost. We believe this bill would in fact address this matter head on and protect our veterans who reside in Montgomery County and across the state from these unethical business practices.

This bill incorporates federal law into Maryland law by providing that no one may charge fees for claims assistance who is not accredited by the VA. The bill creates fines for violations and any collected fines are tendered to the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund. We thank you for your support of this critical bill and respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 928.