

Testimony in favor of H-5043

Chairman Solomon,

Chairman Solomon and members of the House Corporations Committee. My name is John Gallo and I am the Chairman of the Legislation Committee of the United Veterans Council of RI. I am also a retired veteran with over forty-two years of military service. The UVCRI is made up of nine mayor veterans organizations that have a State Department in Rhode Island.

We are in Favor of passage of H-5043

This is legislation that is designed to protect veterans from unethical practices and improper fee collection when filing for disability benefits with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This act aims to ensure that those who advise or assist veterans adhere to ethical standards and legal guidelines, preventing exploitation and deceptive practices. Additionally, it imposes penalties for violations under the deceptive trade practices provisions.

Key provisions of this act include:

1. **Protection from Unethical Conduct:** Advisors and assistants must follow ethical and legal standards.
2. **Regulation of Fees:** Unauthorized fee collection from veterans is prohibited.
3. **Penalties for Deceptive Practices:** Violators face penalties under deceptive trade practices laws.

These measures are intended to safeguard veterans' rights and ensure they receive fair treatment when filing for disability benefits.

To comply with the act and ensure ethical and proper conduct when advising or assisting veterans with their disability claims, here are some best practices:

1. **Adhere to Ethical Standards:** Always follow ethical guidelines and legal standards when providing advice or assistance to veterans.
2. **Transparent Fee Structure:** Clearly communicate any fees and ensure they are authorized by federal law. Avoid any unauthorized fee collection.
3. **Proper Documentation:** Maintain accurate and thorough records of all interactions and transactions with veterans.
4. **Training and Education:** Regularly train staff on ethical practices, legal requirements, and the specifics of the act to ensure compliance.
5. **Regular Audits:** Conduct regular audits to ensure compliance with the act and identify any potential issues early.
6. **Clear Communication:** Provide clear and honest communication to veterans about their rights, the claims process, and any fees involved.
7. **Report Violations:** Establish a system for reporting any unethical practices or violations of the act.

These practices help ensure that veterans receive fair and ethical treatment when filing for disability benefits and protect advisors from potential legal issues.

Violating the provisions of this act can result in significant penalties. Here are some potential consequences:

1. **Fines:** Individuals or entities found guilty of unethical practices or improper fee collection may face substantial fines.
2. **Legal Action:** Violators can be subject to legal action, including lawsuits and court proceedings.
3. **Criminal Charges:** In severe cases, criminal charges may be filed against those who engage in deceptive trade practices or exploitation of veterans.
4. **Loss of Accreditation:** Advisors or organizations assisting veterans may lose their accreditation or authorization to provide services if they violate the act's provisions.

These penalties are designed to ensure that veterans receive fair and ethical treatment when filing for disability benefits and to deter any potential misconduct.

Respectfully Submitted,

John P Gallo Sr., Chairman
Legislation Committee
United Veterans Council of RI