Aug 10, 2023

Contact Kylie Mason

Phone (850) 245-0150

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Attorney General Moody Urges Congress to Pass GUARD VA Benefits Act



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody is pushing Congress to pass legislation to protect veterans. In a bipartisan coalition of 44 attorneys general, Attorney General Moody is calling on congressional leaders to support the passage of legislative proposals included in Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding Veterans Affairs Benefits Act.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “Our veterans sacrifice so much for our freedom, and they should be able to access the benefits they earned without being preyed upon by bad actors. We need Congress to help protect these brave Americans by passing the GUARD VA Benefits Act and reinstating criminal penalties for unlicensed individuals who may try to prey on our nation’s veterans.”

In a letter sent to congressional leaders, the coalition of attorneys general explained that the passing of the bipartisan legislation would hold unlicensed and unregulated actors accountable for targeting and preying upon veterans who apply for benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Federal law requires proper accreditation by the VA Office of General Counsel for anyone who assists veterans in preparing, presenting, or prosecuting claims. However, in 2006, the OGC

became virtually powerless to enforce the federal statute against anyone who did not follow the law due to the removal of criminal penalties.

Attorney General Moody and the coalition argues in the letter that, without accountability, unlicensed actors can advertise coaching and consultation services that are purportedly superior to the free services offered by approved actors such as veteran service officers, claim agents and attorneys. In reality, the veterans do all of the work, and the unlicensed actors may only answer questions or advise.

According to the coalition, many of the unapproved actors never contact the veteran once the claim is finished. Approved veteran service officers and claim agents, on the other hand, do all of the required work and remain available to the veteran. Additionally, since unlicensed actors do not have access to the VA claim system, some require the veteran to share system logins, passwords or even bank account information so fees can be immediately withdrawn before the veteran even learns claim money has been deposited.

To read the full letter, click here.

Joining Attorney General Moody in signing the letter are the attorneys general of: America Samoa, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

# # #