

VFW Says Don't Pay for Your Benefits

“The VFW is determined to stop predatory claim sharks and we are eager to serve alongside you in this fight”

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VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento issued a powerful statement to veterans in November: Don't Feed the Sharks.

Sarmiento's message refers specifically to what VFW has dubbed “claim sharks,” which are unscrupulous individuals or companies charging hefty fees to supposedly assist veterans with their VA claims. This is illegal and needs to be stopped, Sarmiento said.

“The bottom line is this: predatory claim shark companies are engaging in illegal activities,” the Chief said. “There is no gray area here, no matter how much money they want to throw at it. Their latest collusion is a desperate attempt to avoid accountability.”

During a VFW press conference on Nov. 14 on Capitol Hill, VFW National Veterans Legislative Deputy Director Kristina Keenan called on the Department of Justice to investigate unaccredited agencies that require veterans to pay fees for their disability claims services.

“The harm that unaccredited claims agents have caused veterans and survivors has been significant,” Keenan said. “Several [unaccredited claims agents] are even sponsoring veteran events and sporting events. They are doing everything they can to appear legitimate, while scamming people out of their benefits.”

Since the claim sharks first emerged, the VFW has increased the pressure on these companies by passing legislation to crack down on their practices at the state level and is working to help veterans bring litigation against them. At the press conference, VFW expressed its support for the GUARD VA Benefits Act of 2023 (S. 740), which would protect veterans from entities seeking to take their hard-earned benefits. If approved, the GUARD VA Benefits Act would reinstate criminal penalties for unaccredited claims representatives who charge fees to veterans for filing a disability claim.

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“This fight may get a little messy in the coming weeks,” Sarmiento warned, “But the VFW is determined to stop predatory claim sharks and we are eager to serve alongside you in this fight.”

Furthermore, VFW has trained its more than 2,300 VFW Accredited Service Officers on how to handle claim sharks. VFW will continue to seek out veterans who need help getting out of these predatory contracts.

For more than 100 years, VFW has worked tirelessly to advocate for veterans and their earned benefits. In the last year alone, more than 550,000 veterans received more than \$13 billion in benefits from VA through VFW’s global network of VA-accredited service officers. Not a penny of this \$13 billion went to VFW. It all went to the veterans, as the law requires.

A flyer with information about claims sharks [can be found here](#).

This article is featured in the January 2024 issue of [VFW magazine](#).