



August 26, 2024

Office of Mayor London N. Breed
San Francisco City Hall
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Sent via Email: MayorLondonBreed@sfgov.org

Dear Honorable Mayor Breed,

The San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission (VAC) would like to share our strong support for a bill currently being considered by California legislators. The bill is CA SB 1124, and its goal is to protect veterans from deceptive practices and unscrupulous business methods. If enacted, this bill will provide much needed protection for the approximate 24,000 veterans living in San Francisco.

Outlined below is an overview of the bill's goals and objectives. We hope that by bringing this to your attention, you will join our Commission in supporting passage of this important piece of legislation.

Overview of CA SB 1124

The primary objective of CA SB 1124 is to address and mitigate predatory practices targeting veterans, often referred to as "claim sharks." These entities exploit veterans by charging them for assistance with their benefits claims without proper accreditation. The bill introduces several provisions to curb these practices:

1. **Accreditation Requirement:** It prohibits anyone from receiving payment for assisting with veterans' benefit claims unless they are accredited by the VA as an attorney or claims agent.
2. **Unauthorized Access:** It criminalizes unauthorized access to VA computer systems using a veteran's login information.
3. **Fee Limits:** The bill limits the fees that can be charged for assisting with veterans' benefit claims to ensure they do not exceed what VA-accredited representatives can legally charge.

Importance of the Legislation

Our commission has observed the deceptive and dubious methods employed by these claim sharks. For example, they often target veterans seeking Social Security disability benefits, only to take their money and leave them with broken promises and financial burdens. These predators exploit the vulnerabilities of veterans, coercing them into parting with benefits they rightfully deserve.

This legislation is essential for several reasons:

- **Protection from Financial Exploitation:** By imposing stricter regulations, the bill ensures that veterans are protected from financial exploitation, enabling them to receive the assistance they deserve without undue financial burden.
- **Promotion of Ethical Practices:** It promotes ethical practices in assisting veterans with their claims, ensuring that only accredited and legitimate representatives can provide such services.
- **Support for Local Services:** The San Francisco County Veterans Service Office serves as a shining example of how the process should operate. This bill supports the exemplary work done by such offices, reinforcing their role in assisting veterans effectively and ethically.

Call to Action

For all the reasons listed above, the Commission respectfully requests your support of CA SB 1124, recognizing it as legislation that aligns with the city's commitment to protect those who have served our country and ensure they receive the respect they deserve.

In conclusion, we would like to also acknowledge and thank you for your continued support of the San Francisco County Veterans Service Office (CVSO). The claims representatives of the CVSO, who are licensed by the state and federal government, provide outstanding assistance at no-cost to veterans – contrasting sharply with the for-profit entities that seek to exploit them.

Through continued support of the SF CVSO and by endorsing legislation such as SB 1124, we can stand together against those who seek to take advantage of the most vulnerable of our veterans community.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your continued support of our veterans.

Sincerely,

The Veterans Affairs Commission
City and County of San Francisco