



VETERANS GUARDIAN VA CLAIM CONSULTING

The Honorable Larry Luick, Chair
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Veterans Affairs
North Dakota Legislative Council
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, North Dakota 58505

Dear Chairman Luick and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is John Blomstrom, and I am here on behalf of Veterans Guardian, where I have the privilege of helping Veterans secure the benefits they have earned. I am also a United States Marine Corps Veteran who has personally navigated the VA claims process, experiencing firsthand the delays, frustration, and roadblocks that too many of our nation's heroes face when seeking the support they deserve. Beyond my work and my service, I also come before you as someone with deep midwestern farming and ranching roots. My family still operates a working ranch here in the Dakotas.

I understand the values of personal responsibility, freedom of choice, and ensuring that our Veterans are not left behind. That's why I am here today to urge you to support HB 1169, the SAVE Act—Safeguarding American Veteran Empowerment. Veteran Choice is at the Heart of this Debate at its core, this bill is about Veteran choice—protecting the right of those who served to seek out the best assistance for their individual needs.

In a Free Market State like North Dakota, Veterans deserve the freedom to choose who helps them navigate the VA system, whether that's a Veterans Service Organization (VSO), a private consultant, or an attorney.

Unfortunately, the VA disability process is a bureaucratic and difficult system to navigate, and presents challenges to most Veterans, often resulting in deserving Veterans not receiving the benefits to which they are entitled. In fact, there are more than 18 million Veterans in America, but only 5 million have a disability rating. While actors such as VSOs and law firms also serve Veterans, more options, not less, are needed to effectively meet the demand of American Veterans. I am proud of the work my company has done to support the benefits ecosystem and assist Veterans with this process.

Veterans Guardian employs a staff of more than 75% Veterans, spouses of Veterans, spouses of active-duty service members or immediate family members of veterans. We have been recognized by the Department of Labor by receiving the HIRE Vets platinum or gold award four years in a row. We have received the BBB Torch Award for Marketplace Ethics in 2020, 2021,

and 2022. We were most recently recognized for hiring Veterans and spouses and named a Military Friendly Company of the year. And, we are the national presenting sponsor for Irreverent Warriors and support more than 60 national and local charities, including support to local chapters of many of the organizations that have also been invited to engage in this important discussion today.

The Reality of VA Claims in North Dakota is that the state is home to 48,788 Veterans. There are only 75 accredited VSOs in the entire state—that's one VSO for every 634 Veterans. Simply put, the system does not have the capacity to support every Veteran who needs help. That is why organizations like Veterans Guardian exist. In North Dakota alone, we have helped 75 Veterans secure over \$700K in annual VA disability benefits—funds that improve quality of life and provide the financial security these Veterans have earned through their service.

Veterans Guardian is in enthusiastic support of ND HB 1169, which would preserve the rights of a Veteran to choose how they pursue their own US Department of Veterans' Affairs disability claim and address the full spectrum of the issues at hand. This bill provides additional oversight and protections for the Veteran while preserving their Constitutional rights to petition their government in a manner they see fit, and ensuring Veterans have access to diverse options and effective solutions for decades to come.

ND HB 1169 provides common-sense, straight forward protections for Veterans such as:

- Mandating any fees are purely contingent upon a successful outcome and are not to exceed 5x the monthly increase;
- Prohibiting any initial or non-refundable fees;
- Getting written confirmation from the Veteran they have been informed of their free options;
- Prohibiting the use of international call centers or data centers for processing Veteran's personal information;
- Prohibiting aggressive and direct solicitation;
- Prohibiting advertising or guaranteeing a successful outcome.

These protections will ensure North Dakotan Veterans are not being taken advantage of by bad practices. Similar bills have passed at least one chamber this year in at least a dozen states.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide written testimony. I strongly urge you to support ND HB 1169.



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