



8 April 2024

The Honorable Kurtis Gregory
Chair, House Committee on Rules – Regulatory Oversight
201 West Capitol Avenue, Room 114-A
Jefferson City MO 65101

The Honorable Mike Haffner
Vice Chair, House Committee on Rules – Regulatory Oversight
201 West Capitol Avenue, Room 114-A
Jefferson City MO 65101

Dear Chairman Gregory and Vice Chair Haffner,

I am writing to you today to express my organization's concerns regarding Missouri House Bill 1490 (HB 1490) as currently written.

Although legislative actions may have the best intentions at heart, it's possible for them to inadvertently harm the very heroes they're meant to uplift. This is currently our concern with [HB 1490](#), which seeks to reform veteran benefits process and procedures but may, in fact, place significant barriers between Missouri veterans and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability benefits that are rightfully theirs.

Missouri's veteran community, [numbering more than 340,000](#), is already navigating significant challenges in accessing VA disability benefits. Statistics compiled by the VA suggest a [troubling lag](#) behind the national average in providing this essential support to veterans living in the state. This issue demands careful handling rather than restrictive measures that could exacerbate the problem.

As a disabled veteran who has gone through the process myself, I can attest to the fact that the VA benefits claims process is a labyrinth of bureaucratic hurdles. As a result, most may not have the wherewithal to navigate it themselves, and it is important to provide veterans with a wide range of support options to help them navigate this process.

While many may turn to veteran service organizations (VSOs) or VA-accredited attorneys for guidance, these entities' capacity to assist can be limited. With the VA backlog mounting and now standing at [more than 370,000 claims](#), private consulting agents have stepped up as vital allies to help navigate the claims process.

These professionals, who leverage private business resources to get results, only receive compensation if they successfully secure an increased benefit for veterans. This is a testament to their effectiveness, but regrettably, HB 1490 seeks to outlaw this model. The bill's advocates may

argue they are trying to protect veterans from potential financial exploitation; however, a more constructive approach exists.

Rather than imposing a blanket prohibition that cuts off critical support, I would request that you work to identify and implement ways to make improvements within the existing system. Fortunately, with a few changes to this legislation – specifically the removal of lines 15-18 on Page 2 of the House Committee Substitute for HB 1490, language that interprets VA accreditation guidance written before the advent of private sector partners in a way that would impose unnecessary restrictions upon them – this bill could help Missouri veterans by providing a robust framework to safeguard veterans from any bad actors while significantly enhancing their access to professional assistance.

As your committee deliberates on HB 1490, it's crucial for these voices of concern to be heard and considered. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss further how best to support our veterans within the framework of HB 1490. Thank you for your attention to this important legislative matter.

Sincerely,



Wm. Scott Magill
Executive Director
Veterans in Defense of Liberty

CC:

State Representative Scott Cupps
State Representative David Evans
State Representative Michael O'Donnell
State Representative Keri Ingle
State Representative Raychel Proudie
State Representative Alex Riley
State Representative Lane Roberts
State Representative Kemp Strickler