

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Signs Legislation to Protect Veterans and Their Families When Seeking Assistance with Veterans' Benefits

08/25/2023

**NEPTUNE CITY** – To help protect veterans from exploitation, Governor Phil Murphy today signed legislation (S-3292/A-3286) to establish standard requirements that must be followed if an individual is seeking compensation for providing assistance or advice to veterans and their families regarding veterans' benefits. The requirements apply to situations in which an individual assists with the preparation or representation of any claim for benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA).

The legislation establishes the circumstances under which compensation may be sought in these situations; requires terms of service and compensation to be in writing; prohibits individuals from guaranteeing any specific result when offering their services; and requires individuals to disclose any affiliations they may have with the VA, DMAVA, or other federally chartered service organizations prior to entering into an agreement with the veteran or their family. Under the bill, any violation of these terms will be considered an unlawful act under the New Jersey Consumer Fraud Act, which may result in monetary or other penalties.

"Our veterans put their lives on the line in service to our country and have more than earned the benefits for which they and their loved ones are eligible," said **Governor Murphy**. "We must protect veterans and their families from unscrupulous individuals who would take advantage of them by overcharging for assistance with those benefits. This legislation will help ensure these bad actors either follow all applicable federal standards or face the consequences."

"Our Garden State Veterans, who exemplified honor and integrity during their service in uniform, rightfully deserve honest support from those who assist them in securing their hard-earned benefits. The New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs has federally trained and certified Veterans Service Officers employed throughout the state for the express purpose of providing free-of-charge help to Veterans navigating claims and appeals for state and federal benefits," said **Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, NJDMAVA Commissioner and The Adjutant General of New Jersey**. "In addition to our state offices, there are Federal VA offices and a number of volunteer organizations that also seek to help Veterans better understand and pursue their benefits and entitlements, providing a wealth of experiences and lessons learned free-of-charge. I encourage all New Jerseyans who have worn the uniform to connect with our VSOs by visiting <http://www.nj.gov/military> ([https://urldefense.com/v3/\\_https://t.e2ma.net/click/fdhwxj/fd1rrbm/3b8eh5\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!LfjUyssoml\\_lg34UWjCbJzI](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/fdhwxj/fd1rrbm/3b8eh5_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!LfjUyssoml_lg34UWjCbJzI)) a list of offices, or call us, toll free at 1-888-8N J-V E T S."

"New Jersey veterans deserve to be treated with respect for the sacrifices they've made, not financially exploited in their time of need," said **Cari Fais, Acting Director of the Division of Consumer Affairs**. "This legislation makes it easier for the Division to hold accountable those who cheat veterans under the guise of helping them access benefits they earned while defending our country and our freedoms."

The bill is sponsored by Senator Vin Gopal and Assemblyman Joe Danielsen, as well as Senator Shirley Turner and Assemblymembers Sean Kean and Michele Matsikoudis.

"Veterans who served and protected our country from our enemies abroad now find themselves in need of protection here at home from bad actors, scammers and dishonest brokers who would target them for ill-gotten financial gain," said **Senator Vin Gopal**. "This law adds a layer of transparency concerning those who seek to advise veterans about benefits and claims, bars these unaccredited consultants from receiving any compensation for services that aren't now recognized under federal law and keeps our veterans safe from unscrupulous operators who would prey upon them."

"It is important our veterans know there are plenty of public offices and non-profits able to assist them in obtaining their VA benefits, at no cost to them. If someone is asking you to pay for their assistance, they are likely trying to take advantage of you," said **Senator Shirley K. Turner**. "This legislation will ensure veterans are not being taken advantage of, by prohibiting individuals from receiving compensation for helping a veteran to navigate obtaining benefits."

“We cannot allow veterans and their families to be preyed upon by corporations looking to make money off of services that are provided free of charge by numerous government and non-government organizations,” **said Assemblyman Joe Daniels**. “This law will better protect New Jersey’s veterans and ensure they are not taken advantage of.”

“It is my honor as a public servant to stand up for those who sacrificed and fought for our freedoms. Helping veterans access their earned benefits is a privilege, not an opportunity to pad one’s pockets. This law protects New Jersey veterans and their families from the bad actors out there who want to take advantage of their service,” **said Assemblyman Sean Kean**.

“Navigating the web of bureaucracy that stands between veterans and their benefits is not only difficult, but it also makes veterans more likely to seek help from people who promise to cut through the red tape on their behalf. New Jersey owes it to our veterans and military families to protect them from unscrupulous business practices that target their vulnerabilities and exploit their service to this nation and state. I would like to thank Governor Murphy for signing A3286/S3292 into law, and my legislative partners for their leadership on this important initiative,” **said Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis**.

“The VFW thanks the New Jersey Legislature for their bipartisan support of S3292 which led to today’s action by the Governor on this law making it a violation of the consumer fraud act for persons to receive compensation for advising or assisting, or referring any individual to another person to advise or assist, with any veterans benefits matter, except as is permitted under federal law,” **stated Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of New Jersey**.

## Governor Phil Murphy

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