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Rhode Island Works Best When We Say **UNION YES.**

March 29, 2024

Senator Walter Felag
 Chairman, Senate Committee on Special Legislation & Veterans' Affairs
 Representative Samuel Azzinaro
 Chairman, House Veterans' Affairs Committee
 Rhode Island General Assembly
 82 Smith Street
 Providence, RI 02903

RE: Senate Bill 2700 & House Bill 7609

Dear Chairmen Felag and Azzinaro,

On behalf of the 80,000 members and 275 affiliates of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO, please accept this letter as testimony of our support for Senate bill 2700 and House bill 7609, sponsored by yourselves. In our opinion, this bill would have a positive impact on the lives of Rhode Island's 54,000 veterans, many of whom are union members. Thank you for introducing these important pieces of legislation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, unaccredited claims consultants known as "Claims Sharks" took advantage of the hardships created by the emergency by exponentially increasing their efforts to prey on veterans by seeking to access their earned Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. These groups promise to increase veterans' VA disability ratings and irrationally argue that the high fees they charge equates to making them more effective in assisting veterans than the free services offered by State Agencies, County Veteran Service Officers, and VA-accredited Veterans Service Organizations. However, the contracts between many of these unaccredited consultants and veterans include fee provisions requiring the veteran to pay the Claim Shark up to 10x the increased future monthly disability & compensation payment awarded. And if the veteran receives a disability percentage increase years later, these companies often return seeking more money.

Currently, these predatory companies have no accountability, no oversight, and no penalties. Senate Bill 2700 & House Bill 7609 will provide the accountability that is sorely needed. This common-sense legislation will restore the ability to go after predatory companies that prey on veterans.

The labor movement stands with our veterans and will work to ensure they are protected by these predatory practices. Thank you for your efforts on this legislation. If we can answer any questions, please contact us at 1-401-751-7100.

Sincerely,

George Nee
 President

Patrick Crowley
 Secretary-Treasurer

George H. Nee President • Patrick M. Crowley Secretary-Treasurer
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