



March 25, 2025

The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.
Chairman, House Corporations Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear Chairman Solomon and Members of the House Corporations Committee,

As the former Acting Secretary and Chief of Staff of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the current President of the National Association for Veterans Rights (NAVR), and a Veteran myself, I write to you today in opposition to Rhode Island House Bill 5043 (HB 5043).

Attempting to protect Veterans is an honorable endeavor that we all share; unfortunately, HB 5043 misses the mark and would not only deny a Veteran the right to choose how they pursue their claim but also fails to address the full spectrum of the issues at hand. The bill as sold also fails to address critical issues, including providing 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.

NAVR is a national trade association that promotes ethical and transparent business practices among companies engaging with the service-disabled Veteran community while helping advance support for Veteran-owned businesses. Our member companies have helped thousands of Veterans in Rhode Island navigate the complicated VA disability system and have generated millions of dollars in additional benefits for Veterans in Rhode Island.

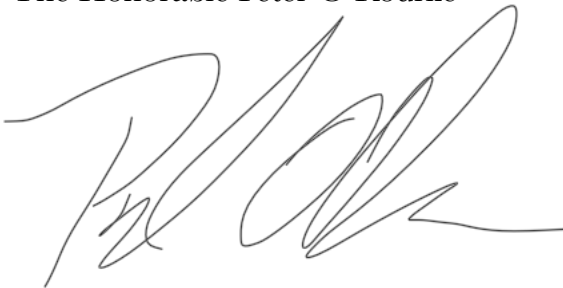
Rather than trapping Veterans in a backlogged appeals system only benefiting a handful of attorneys, Rhode Island Veterans should have the right to hire expert help to get their claim done correctly the first time. Trust me, the system is broken, and the current Veteran Service Organization (VSO)/attorney model results in Veterans getting trapped in the appeals space, waiting years for their benefits, and results in the attorneys taking up to 33.3% of their entire back pay.

I fear you may have been misled about what HB 5043 would do. It has zero protections for Veterans and would shut down the entire private expert claims space. It is also counter to the direction this debate is heading in Washington, DC. Almost identical legislation to HB 5043 has been introduced in Congress for six years now, and it has failed to even receive a markup. Because of this, the opponents of the free market, and those who want to keep Veterans trapped in a broken system, are trying to circumvent Congress and spread lies and falsehoods in the states to gain support for destructive bills.

I encourage you to legislate around the practices we want to see eliminated in this space. You can pass legislation that ensures fees are only applicable on a contingent basis; you can cap fees; you can mandate transparency measures so Veterans know of their free options; you can prohibit access to VA E-Benefits and bank accounts; you can ensure the use of HIPAA compliant servers; and more.

I would be more than happy to speak with you about these issues at your convenience. You can contact me at Peter.ORourke@NAVR.org.

Sincerely,
The Honorable Peter O'Rourke

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter O'Rourke', written in a cursive style.

President, National Association for Veterans Rights