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**FOR RELEASE:** Monday, December 2, 2024

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(South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs)

### **Veterans Urged to Protect Themselves Against Claim Scammers**

**Pierre, SD** – The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA), in partnership with county and tribal veterans service officers (CTVSOs) and veterans service organizations (VSOs), is urging veterans to be aware of fraudulent activities targeting those seeking benefits. To help veterans safeguard themselves, the SDDVA has outlined guidelines and resources.

Veterans have earned their benefits and must protect themselves from individuals and companies that take advantage of their trust. We encourage all veterans to utilize the free resources available through our Department and other trusted organizations.

#### **Key Guidelines for Veterans:**

- **No Payment for Initial Claims:** Veterans should never pay anyone for assistance in filing an initial claim for benefits;
- **Consult Trusted Resources:** Before filing a claim or sharing personal information, veterans are advised to work with SDDVA, CTVSOs, VSOs, or trusted attorneys;
- **Avoid Unauthorized Fee Agreements:** Veterans should not sign contracts to pay unauthorized individuals or companies a portion of their benefit payments;
- **Review Documentation:** Always carefully review all forms and documents before signing. Do not engage with those who refuse to complete a VA representation form (VA Form 21-22A);
- **Protect Personal Information:** Safeguard personal identity information and never share VA.gov or eBenefits login credentials; and
- **Be Wary of Promises:** Avoid companies that advertise guaranteed benefits awards or special relationships with medical professionals.

#### **What to Do If You Encounter Issues:**

- **For Payment Discrepancies:** Contact the VA at 1-800-827-1000 immediately;
- **Report Fraud:** If you suspect fraudulent activity, file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC);
- **Challenge Unreasonable Fees:** If you believe an attorney or claims agent has charged an excessive fee, file a motion to challenge it;
- **Report Misconduct:** Veterans should report any unethical behavior by accredited representatives; and

- **Fraud and Identity Theft:** Notify your financial institutions if you suspect fraud.

For concerns related to VA benefits fraud, veterans can call 1-855-578-5492. For healthcare-related fraud, contact the Veterans Health Administration Office of Integrity and Compliance Helpline at 1-866-842-4357.

**Stay Informed, Stay Safe**

The SDDVA encourages all veterans to be aware and educate themselves on how to protect their rights and benefits. For more information, contact our Department at 605-333-6869 or your local veterans service officer.