

Understanding the Accreditation Requirement for Representing Veterans

What is accreditation?

Accreditation is the authority granted by the Department of Veterans Affairs to an individual who represents veterans with claims for benefits and for any issues associated with those benefits. Accreditation is essentially a federal license for assisting veterans with their benefits. No individual can assist veterans on a regular basis without being authorized by VA to provide this assistance. **Title 38 USC 5901 and Title 38 USC 5902**

Can an organization be accredited?

There is no provision for accrediting an organization. Accreditation is only for individuals and any individual assisting a veteran must be accredited. Non-accredited individuals cannot assist veterans under the direction of an accredited individual. This violation is happening all too frequently. Exceptions to this rule are discussed below.

How does an individual become accredited?

Any individual desiring to be accredited must have a thorough knowledge of veteran benefits, and of the application process, and of appeals and of other issues dealing with representing veterans. The candidate must successfully pass a comprehensive exam administered by VA or by a recognized service organization. Attorneys are exempt from this requirement for studying and taking an examination and can be appointed by direct application to the Office of General Counsel. Being accredited also requires a standard of personal character as determined by the Office of General Counsel. The VA Office of General Counsel has oversight and approval authority for the accreditation process and maintains a list of all accredited individuals. **Title 38 CFR § 14.629(a)(b)**

How can you find out if someone is accredited?

A letter or written statement from an individual does not prove authorization for accreditation. The Office of General Counsel provides an accreditation letter to individuals who are accredited, and maintains an list of accredited individuals on its website. This list is the official accreditation authority. You can find this list by going to www.accreditlist.com

Are there penalties if assistance with application is provided by non-accredited individuals?

There is currently no criminal penalty for unlawful representation for veterans claims. Any person or organization promoting assistance on behalf of its employees or agents and found guilty of misrepresentation will be issued a cease-and-desist letter and barred from assisting veterans. Persisting in unlawful representation will likely result in further action against the individual or organization by the Department of Justice for Violation of federal law.

Senior Veterans Council

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