

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

SUPERVISORS

Phillip Peters District 1
Chris Parlier..... District 2
Jeff Flores..... District 3
David Couch District 4
Leticia Perez..... District 5



KATHLEEN KRAUSE
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
Kern County Administrative Center
1115 Truxtun Avenue, 5th Floor
Bakersfield, California 93301
Telephone (661) 868-3585
TTY Relay 800-735-2929

June 30, 2025

The Honorable Vince Fong
U.S. House of Representatives
243 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20003

The Honorable David Valadao
U.S. House of Representatives
2465 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jay Obernolte
U.S. House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: H.R. 3132 (Bergman), CHOICE for Veterans Act of 2025 – OPPOSE

Dear Kern Delegates,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to express our opposition to H.R. 3132, the Certified Help Options in Claims Expertise (CHOICE) for Veterans Act of 2025, as currently written. While we appreciate the intent to protect veterans from fraud and ensure competent representation in their benefits claims, the bill introduces provisions that, in practice, may increase costs and legal complexity for vulnerable claimants while shifting administrative burdens onto already overwhelmed veterans.

According to estimates from the California Department of Veterans Affairs, Kern County is home to approximately 40,000 veterans, many of whom rely on VA-accredited services for assistance in navigating an often complex and bureaucratic system. By expanding access to fee-based representation in initial and supplemental claims, this bill risks undermining long-standing protections designed to keep the VA system accessible and free at the earliest stages. For low-income or disabled veterans, even “regulated” fees up to \$12,500, as authorized in this bill, could become a financial barrier to benefits they earned through service.

Additionally, while the bill outlines new compliance requirements, knowledge testing, and reporting mechanisms for agents and attorneys, it also provides pathways for temporary and conditional recognition of unverified representatives. This contradiction could expose veterans to bad actors under the appearance of legitimacy, especially in rural areas like ours where oversight is limited.

The legislation also opens the door to federal preemption over state consumer protection laws, stripping states of their ability to enforce stronger safeguards or recourse options when misconduct or abuse occurs. This raises serious concerns about accountability, particularly in a system already struggling to monitor unscrupulous practices in veterans' representation.

While we support the goal of increasing awareness of accredited assistance and penalizing predatory behavior, we strongly believe those protections should not come at the cost of increasing the commercialization of veterans' benefits claims. Instead, Congress should focus on increasing funding and staffing for VA-recognized Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), expanding access to no-cost legal clinics, and enhancing internal VA claims processing capacity.

For these reasons, the Kern County Board of Supervisors respectfully urges you and your colleagues to vote **NO on H.R. 3132**. Veterans deserve seamless access to their earned benefits without the risk of incurring debt from private companies. Thank you for your commitment to serving our community and honoring our veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Leticia Perez', with a stylized, cursive script.

Leticia Perez, Chair
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Jose Lopez, Kern County Veterans Services Director
Townsend Public Affairs