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Veterans benefits companies under government scrutiny

Company charged for services that should be free

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# Company charged for services that should be free

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- By: Alan Cohn

TAMPA - As we honor those who fought and died for our country on this Memorial Day, local companies claiming to be in the business of helping veterans get the benefits they've earned are under scrutiny.

That's after an ABC Action News investigation revealed that a local company was charging for veterans services that should be free.

The Inspector General's Office at the Veterans Administration is investigating what Bob Bober of Assisted Living Benefits Inc, is claiming he can do for elderly veterans and their families filing for veterans benefits.

In the case of Pat Snair, Bober charged her 2000-dollars to prepare a claim for her elderly father who never received any of the benefits he was promised to help with the costs of assisted living.

"He got out other forms and filled them out and said OK we're going to get this sent in and that should take care of it," Snair said.

Snair says the VA never responded to the papers Bober filed and her father Sydney has since passed away.

Bober is not accredited by the VA and according to the VA "no individual may act as an agent or attorney in the preparation, presentation or prosecution of any claim unless such individual has been recognized for such purposes by the VA."

When we asked Bober about that, his response was.

"What it boils down to is if there are things that are not in compliance we'll take steps to be in compliance," Bober told us.

After our "Taking Action Investigation" aire,d Bober claimed to us the fee agreement he gave clients like Pat Snair was a "Hastily put together early draft that unfortunately did not accurately explain the services being provided."

Snair says since our story aired she's received two interesting phone calls. One from Bob Bober asking her if she "turned him in" and the other from an investigator at the VA's Office of Inspector General."

"There are a lot of people out there who spend their life savings in order to try to do these things and the guy takes advantage of that and those are the people who I'm really trying to help," Snair said.

U.S. Congressman Gus Bilirakis says he wants to help too. After we alerted him about the situation Bilirakis contacted the Department of Veterans Affairs and tells us he wants unaccredited companies "shutdown. "It is

clear to me," Bilirakis says "We must do more to ensure veterans and their families are not being taken advantage of by non-accredited companies who are charging for services which should be free."

Pat Snair says her goal now is to make sure other families don't make the same mistake. And Congressman Bilirakis says if that requires a tougher law that cracks down on unaccredited companies making money off of veterans and their families, he'll introduce one in Congress.

Read more: http://www.abcactionnews.com/dpp/news/local_news/investigations/government-investigating-veterans-benefits-companies#ixzz1g4Zdnloy