OFFICERS

President
Susan Ellenberg
Santa Clara County

1st Vice President
Luis Alejo
Monterey County

2nd Vice President
Kent Boes
Colusa County

Past President
Jeff Griffiths
Inyo County

CEO
Graham Knaus

January 28, 2026

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 694 (Archuleta) Deceptive practices: service members and veterans.
As enrolled on January 27, 2026 – REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Honorable Governor Newsom,

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), representing all 58 counties in California, we write to **request your signature** on Senate Bill 694 (Archuleta). This measure strengthens consumer protections for veterans in California by ensuring that only accredited individuals may charge for services related to filing claims for U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits.

Veterans' benefits are a crucial support system for those who have served this country in the armed forces. As with other government benefits, applicants may need assistance in applying for these critical benefits. California veterans who need assistance with filing a claim for disability benefits can get help at no charge from their VA-accredited county veterans service office (CVSO) or from nonprofit veterans service organizations (VSOs). CVSOs are county agencies established to assist veterans and their families in obtaining benefits and services accrued through military service. In addition to CVSOs and nonprofit VSOs, which provide assistance free of charge, the VA also accredits attorneys and claims agents to represent veterans and assist with benefit claims. Accredited attorneys and claims agents cannot charge money for assistance with an initial claim for veteran's benefits, but, subject to limits set and enforced by the VA, they can charge for other services. The VA accreditation program exists to ensure that veterans receive competent and fair representation on their VA benefits claims.

Despite this structure, counties witness firsthand how vulnerable veterans can be misled by unaccredited actors who charge illegal or excessive fees, jeopardize personal data, and often leave veterans worse off. Prohibiting unaccredited claims agents and lawyers from charging a veteran for help with an initial benefits claim not only protects veterans, but it also ensures

OFFICERS

President
Susan Ellenberg
Santa Clara County

1st Vice President
Luis Alejo
Monterey County

2nd Vice President
Kent Boes
Colusa County

Past President
Jeff Griffiths
Inyo County

CEO
Graham Knaus

that counties continue to play a crucial role in connecting their resident veterans with benefits and services available to them. County governments often collaborate with federal and state agencies, as well as local nonprofit organizations, to ensure that veterans are aware of and have access to the benefits they are entitled to. By working with veterans and their families, counties can ensure that those who have served their country receive the support and assistance they deserve.

SB 694 reinforces a strong framework for ethical and qualified representation, taking steps to eliminate unethical practices that exploit vulnerable veterans. We believe California's veterans deserve the most transparent and accountable support when applying for the benefits they have earned through service.

For these reasons, CSAC is pleased to support SB 694 and **respectfully requests your signature** on this measure. Should you have any questions or concerns please contact me at ejungwirth@counties.org.

Sincerely,



Emma Jungwirth
Senior Legislative Advocate, CSAC

CC : The Honorable Bob Archuleta, California State Senate
The Honorable Pilar Schiavo, California State Assembly
Christine Aurre, Legislative Secretary, California Governor's Office
Sam Miller, Deputy Legislative Secretary and Chief of Legislative Operations, California Governor's Office