DISABLED VETERANS SWINDLED BY OWN KITH AND KIN

Many cases of fraud and theft have come to light in the Department of Veterans Affairs program. The program was meant to protect disabled veterans and their assets. An article printed in the Houston Chronicle, has exposed that these VA-appointed fiduciaries are abusing their positions to exploit the vulnerable veterans they have been appointed to assist. Former VA employee and lawyer Joe Phillips, a professional fiduciary, is charged with robbing two dozen veterans of more than $2 million. The veterans were under his care in Southeast Texas. Phillips was assisted by his wife. Their action has been described as the "largest rip-off ever reported in the VA fiduciary program." Both of them are accused of forging bank officer's signatures, making fake money market accounts and transferring money between various banks. Philips has denied the allegations, but his wife has pleaded guilty and accepted that she conspired with her husband and filled false income taxes in April. The department said that they were now becoming extra-cautious in appointing new fiduciaries. Fiduciaries with more than ten clients are subject to an audit. Fiduciaries are also subject to background checks and must submit original bank documents in their annual reports. There have been many other cases, where VA-approved fiduciaries or family members, betrayed their trust and stole disabled veterans money, after assuring them that they would safeguard it. Mildred Fedd, apparently stole, as she had urgent bills to pay, parking tickets, repairing charges for a faulty sewage system, house payments and getting her truck released from the impound lot. She agreed to work, for a small fee, to take care of an eighty-two year old disabled veteran. She said that she would use his $5000, to buy him a burial plot. Instead she used that money to pay her own bills and exhausted his entire savings. The Veterans Affairs Inspector General has many a time cautioned that the national program, initiated to protect a whopping $3 billion in assets, belonging to veterans who were too disabled to manage their own financial affairs, was to vulnerable and soft a target, not to attract fraud and theft. The list of those convicted for theft, include family members, a former police officer, a federal employee, two attorneys and an optometrist. Not by any stretch of imagination, run-of-the-mill criminals. According to state records, some of these people have already been convicted whilst others have been charged with the heinous crime of stealing from those they were assigned to protect. Many double-crossings went undetected because the veterans were too feeble or ill to report the crimes. A San Antonio disabled vet's daughter's suspicions were aroused when a bill collector called for unpaid dues for a new Ford Focus. She knew that her dad did not drive, following his disability. Investigations revealed, that his sister Rosa Avila, and his niece had been fleecing him all the while. Over a period of five years they had stolen $180,000 of his money, all the while consoling him that "all his VA benefits were being saved." He was never given more than $20 at a time. David Autry, a spokesman for the non-profit organization, Disabled American Veterans, has appealed to the VA to keep an eye on the situation more rigidly and to punish those who exploit these vulnerable veterans. "It's an outrageous situation when someone takes advantage of veterans who have served and sacrificed for their county," he said. "I think that's one of the lowest things you can do." Alan Jackson, criminal chief of the Eastern District of Texas said that his office takes legal action against small-time family offenders, to serve as an example to other would-be thieves. "My thought is if we don't prosecute them, that's an invitation to somebody else to think: 'I can do it,' "he said."Your typical offender is not a repeat criminal sort of person - it's somebody who sees the opportunity and decides nobody is going to get hurt, and boom." Looking for all available jobs? Click here.