

JERRY PETROWSKI

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

Senate Bill 419: Veterans Employment and Entrepreneur Grant

January 14, 2016

Good morning, members of the committee, and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on Senate Bill 419. This bill was authored in consultation with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA). Representatives from the department are available today should you have any questions.

This bill would eliminate the Veterans Employment Grant program in the Department of Veterans Affairs, and creates a new grant that would focus on veterans employment and entrepreneurship. The Veterans Employment Grant program has never been used, due to the fact that the grant requirements are such that no veteran or disabled veteran has met the eligibility requirements. We believe that creating the new program would better meet the intent and expected results of the original program.

The bill would create a \$500,000 grant program in WDVA to be used by the department to provide grants to veterans, employers, and nonprofit organizations to improve employment outcomes for veterans. The grants would be focused on veteran entrepreneurs, giving employers incentives to hire veterans, with a focus on veterans with a service-connected disability, and job training.

To ensure transparency and accountability, the awards will not be issued until WDVA confirms that the goals of the award have been met. WDVA must also submit an annual report detailing the awards and results of the program to the Governor and Legislature.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

29TH SENATE DISTRICT

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NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Transportation and Veterans Affairs

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: January 14, 2016

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of SB 419

Thank you Chairman Petrowski and members of the Senate Committee on Transportation and Veterans Affairs for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 419 today. As the author of this legislation, along with Senator Petrowski, I am pleased to testify before you and to take any questions that committee members may have.

Senate Bill 419 would eliminate the Veterans Employment Grant program in the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), and creates a new grant that would focus on veteran employment and entrepreneurship.

The Veterans Employment Grant program has never been used, due to the fact that the grant requirements are such that no veteran or disabled veteran has met the eligibility requirements. The Department on Workforce Development (DWD) currently has 51 veterans in Job Ready status rated at 50% Service-Connected Disability (SCD), and 557 veterans in training programs that are also rated at 50% SCD. Under current law, none of these veterans are eligible for this program with the way it is currently worded.

The Veteran Employment Grant program is too important to not be working properly and we believe that creating the new program would better meet the intent and expected results of the original program.

The bill would create a \$500,000 grant program in WDVA to be used by the department to provide grants to veterans, employers, and nonprofit organizations to improve employment outcomes for veterans. The grants would be focused on veteran entrepreneurs, giving employers incentives to hire veterans, with a focus on veterans with a service-connected disability, and job training.

To ensure transparency and accountability, the awards will not be issued until WDVA confirms that the goals of the award have been met. WDVA must also submit an annual report detailing the awards and results of the program to the Governor and Legislature.

In closing, I ask that you join Senator Petrwocki and myself in support of this legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation - a \$2B endowment focused on entrepreneurship and education - has research proving veterans are uniquely talented, trained, and experienced to be entrepreneurs and succeed at higher rates than civilians. Kauffman and U.S. Census data show 9 percent of businesses in America are veteran-owned, generating \$1.2 trillion in receipts and employ 5.8 million workers.

According to the Institute on Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University, among the generation of World War II veterans, 49% of veterans started or owned a business after returning home. This incredible commitment to entrepreneurship among the “greatest generation” led to an unprecedented post-war economic boom. Today, 25% of all returning Afghanistan & Iraq War veterans want to start a business, but less than 6% of them will.

It is vital to Wisconsin’s startup economy and necessary for our state to attract, retain, and support entrepreneurs that will drive future job growth. We all want and need entrepreneurs in Wisconsin who will create jobs, generate tax revenues, build success stories to attract more risk capital to our state, and improve the lives of those who served our country. DVA’s grant program will help accomplish these goals.

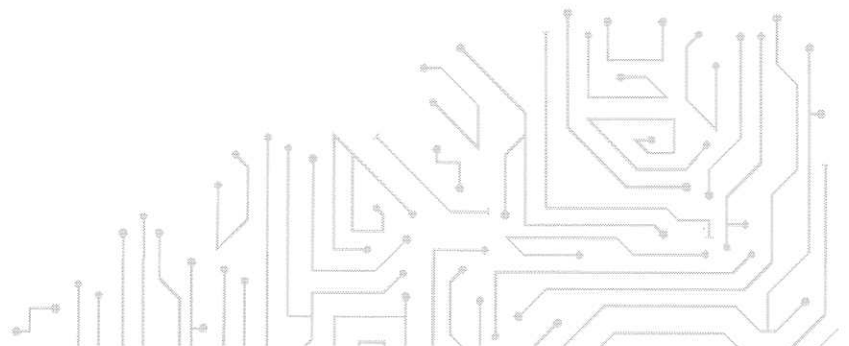
Clearly, the proposed legislation is an important step forward for Wisconsin’s startup economy and vital proof that our state embraces innovation and its military veterans.

Sincerely,



Michael T. Ertmer

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Scott Walker, Governor

John A. Scocos, Secretary

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January 14, 2016

Senate Committee on Transportation and Veterans Affairs

Chairman Petrowski, Senator Carpenter and Members of the Committee,

I write in support of Senate Bills 339, 418 and 419. Senate Bill 339 will serve to bring more military veterans into State of Wisconsin permanent employee positions. The value that our military veterans bring to the workforce will assist in enhancing the quality and dedication of all our state employees and show our veteran community we value their service and experience.

SB 418 would authorize WDVA to annually provide grant funding to Wisconsin nonprofits which provide financial assistance or other services to veterans and their families.


Grants awarded in 2014 supported services including UW-Milwaukee and UW-Superior veteran student programs designed to assist in the retention of returning student veterans from Active Duty (AC) and overseas deployments. Additionally, the grant money provided therapy to veterans suffering from PTS and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), along with supporting veterans struggling to furnish their new found homes or fill their food pantries. SB 418 will allow WDVA to continue supporting such private nonprofits which continue to have a significant and positive impact on our Wisconsin veteran community.

Finally, SB 419 would eliminate the current veteran employment grant program and replace it with a more effective veterans employment and entrepreneurship grant program. The program requirements under current law present a barrier to effective use of the employment grant. The changes proposed in SB 419 will enable the DVA to more effectively incentivize the hiring of disabled veterans. The bill also adds an entrepreneurial aspect to the program that will help veterans build their own small business. Under current law, the grant program restrictions which were tied to unemployment (UI), disqualified most veterans from qualifying for the program.

The DWD currently has 51 veterans in Job Ready status rated at 50% Service-Connected Disability (SCD), and 557 veterans in training programs that are also rated at 50% SCD. None of these veterans are eligible with this program the way it is currently worded. SB 419 would change that status.

I respectfully request your support of SB 339, SB 418 and SB 419.

Sincerely,
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



JOHN A. SCOCOS
Secretary