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WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

Testimony on Senate Bill 221

Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing, and State-Federal Relations

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Members of the committee, thank you for hearing testimony today on Senate Bill 221. I also want to thank Representative Stuck for leading on this issue in the Assembly.

The Wisconsin Works program, also known as the W-2 program, provides low-income parents with work experience and benefits. The Department of Children and Families administers the W-2 program, which includes job access loans.

Job access loans provide financial assistance to individuals to obtain or continue employment, and this includes loans to repair or purchase a vehicle.

Senate Bill 221 would require an individual to possess a valid driver's license in order to receive a job access loan for a vehicle purchase or repair. It would also require individuals on probation, parole, or extended supervision to get permission from an agent or parole officer before becoming eligible for a job access loan.

Thank you committee members for hearing SB221 today and I will be pleased to answer any questions.

AMANDA STUCK

State Representative ♦ 57th Assembly District

Thank you Mr. Chairman for co-authoring this bill and to you and all the Committee members for hearing this bill today.

As you can probably tell from the list of co-sponsors, this is a bi-partisan and common sense bill, it is not every day that you have Democrats and Republicans agreeing to and working together on a public benefit reform bill. I would also like to thank Rep. Horlacher for working on this bill with me.

This bill makes 2 changes to the Job Access Loan program, a piece of the larger W-2 program. For some background, the Job Access Loan program provides individuals with loans of \$25 to \$1,600 in a 12 month period. Current eligibility for the Job Access Loan program include that they are in an immediate financial crisis, that they need the loan to obtain or continue employment, that they are not in default for repayment of previous job access loans or any W-2 grant or wage overpayments, and they are not a migrant worker. This program is used by individuals to purchase or repair a vehicle so that they can obtain or continue a job.

This bill adds 2 additional requirements for eligibility for receiving a job access loan. Firstly, they must have a current and valid driver's license. Secondly, if the person is on probation, parole, or extended supervision they must receive permission from their supervision agent.

I drafted this legislation after meeting last Spring with a constituent of mine, who works as a parole officer in the Fox Valley. They relayed to me that they have seen and had to revoke individuals' parole, who were not allowed to possess a vehicle as a condition of their parole without approval from their parole officer, who received funding through the job access loan program to purchase a vehicle. As a result of receiving public funding, these individuals' parole was revoked and they went back to prison.

It simply does not make sense that a state program designed to help low-income individuals to obtain and maintain employment and their ability to get to and from work, should be the result of revocation without a new offense.

This is a common sense proposal which will help to make sure that this does not happen again, and that state assistance programs do not contribute to unnecessary revocations in our state. I thank you again for taking the time to hear this bill today, and I hope that this common sense proposal will continue to receive strong, bi-partisan support.