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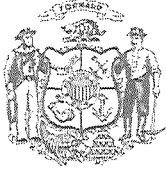
Testimony on Assembly Bill 161 **Disability rating for Veterans for Hunting & Fishing Authorizations** Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage

Hello, Chairman Pronschinske and Members of the Committee. Thank you for holding a hearing today on Assembly Bill 161, a bill that is important for our veterans.

This bill will provide a single minimum required disability rating for the discounted resident disabled veteran approvals. This is an important minor change that will reduce confusion for resident disabled veterans and sales agents alike.

As the DNR stated last session, adjusting the required minimum disability rating eligibility criteria so it is consistent across products eliminates the uncomfortable situation where a license sales agent must explain to a resident disabled veteran that their disability is significant enough to meet the eligibility criteria to purchase a disabled veteran recreation card, but that the veteran is not “disabled enough” to qualify for the disabled fishing license.

I urge your support of this important bill for our veterans who have done so much. The VFW is in support of this bill. Thank you.



ANDRÉ JACQUE

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*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage
Senator André Jacque
January 12, 2022*

Chair Pronschinske and Members of the Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage,

Thank you for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 161, the Disabled Veteran Sporting Opportunities Act. This strong bi-partisan legislation will modify and standardize the disability rating required for a disabled veteran to qualify for certain authorizations issued by the Department of Natural Resources and for exemptions from certain admission fees. Under current law, the qualifying disability rating is either 50 or 70 percent depending on the authorization or exemption, causing considerable confusion in accessing and administering these programs. The bill provides for a standard qualifying disability rating of 50 percent for these authorizations and exemptions.

The DNR testified for informational purposes on this proposal last session, stating, "Providing a single minimum required disability rating for the discounted resident disabled veteran approvals is a simplification that will likely reduce confusion for resident disabled veterans and sales agents alike. Adjusting the required minimum disability rating eligibility criteria so it is consistent across products eliminates the uncomfortable situation where a license sales agent must explain to a resident disabled veteran that their disability is significant enough to meet the eligibility criteria to purchase a disabled veteran recreation card, but that the veteran is not "disabled enough" to qualify for the disabled fishing license."

Wisconsin Conservation Congress leadership was consulted on and supportive of this legislation, based on past input and proposals that have gone through the WCC process to allow our disabled veterans to enjoy the outdoors. This legislation was originally initiated within the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs and is formally supported by Disabled American Veterans of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. I am pleased that the Senate companion legislation has already cleared committee unanimously this session.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 161.



FULFILLING OUR PROMISES
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

Department of Wisconsin

**STATEMENT OF
AL LABELLE
DAV WISCONSIN BENEFITS PROTECTION TEAM LEADER
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON SPORTING HERITAGE
WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY
JANUARY 12, 2022**

Chairman Pronschinske and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon! Thank you for allowing DAV (Disabled American Veterans) this opportunity to present our view on Assembly Bill 161 (AB 161) Relating to: *the disability rating at which veterans qualify for certain hunting and fishing authorizations and exemptions from state park and trail admission fees.*

As you may know, DAV is a non-profit veterans service organization (VSO) comprised of over 1 million wartime service-disabled veterans, nationwide. In Wisconsin, we have nearly 15,000 members.

Each year, DAV helps more than 1 million veterans with Benefits, Transportation, Advocacy, Employment, and Volunteerism. Well over Eighty percent (80%) of our total expenditures go to Service.

All our members are wartime wounded, injured or ill veterans, many of them severely. They have sacrificed much in defense of our freedoms.

Currently, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources or DNR honors Wisconsin's disabled veterans with a WE SALUTE OUR VETERANS program. Under this program, the DNR offers discounts to eligible Wisconsin disabled veterans for certain licenses and cards.

They are the Spring Turkey Harvest License, the Disabled Veteran Recreation Card, the Disabled Veterans Fishing License, and the Disabled Veteran Park Admission Card.

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To be eligible for a Spring Turkey License, a service-connected disability rating of 50 percent or greater, as determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is needed. The discounted fee is \$10.00.

To be eligible for the Disabled Veteran Recreation Card, a service-connected disability rating of 50 percent or greater is required. The privileges granted under this card are for fishing, small game hunting, State Park Admission, and a State Trail Pass. The fee is \$7.00.

To be eligible for the Disabled Veteran Fishing License, a service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or greater is required. The fee is \$3.00.

To be eligible for the Disabled Veteran Admission Card, a service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or greater is required. The privileges granted under this card are for State Park Admission and a State Trail Pass. There is no fee.

As you can see, there is no consistency in the disability rating needed for the fee discount. The Spring Turkey License and the Disabled Veteran Recreation Card have a disability rating of 50 percent or greater to receive the fee discount.

While the Disabled Veterans Fishing License, and the Disabled Veteran Park Admission Card have a disability rating of 70 percent or greater.

AB 161 will lower the disability rating for the Disabled Veterans Fishing License, and the Disabled Veteran Park Admission Card to 50 percent. This will add consistency to the current program and lessen the confusion which it generates.

Additionally, DNR has a Conservation Patron License for the avid sportsperson. Purchasing this license offers many different privileges. These include:

- Gun Deer Hunting License
- Archery License
- Crossbow License
- Small Game License
- Pheasant Stamp
- Annual Fishing License

- Great Lakes Trout & Salmon Stamp
- Inland Trout Stamp
- Sturgeon Hook & Line Licenses
- Trapping License
- Otter Application
- Fisher Application
- Turkey Licenses and Stamp
- Goose Permits
- Waterfowl Stamp

AB 161 will require the DNR to issue a Conservation Patron License to Wisconsin veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 50 percent or greater at a reduced fee. The current fee is \$165.00. The discounted fee will be \$60.25 plus a surcharge of \$4.00, making the total fee \$64.25.

In our opinion, the bill will alleviate the confusion contained in the current licensing process and the savings of over \$100.00 will be greatly appreciated by Wisconsin's disabled veteran hunters who will qualify.

Pursuant to our Resolution 2021-78¹, DAV Wisconsin strongly supports AB 161 and urges this Committee and the legislature to pass the bill in an expeditious manner.

This concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you or other Committee Members may have.

¹ Resolution 2021-178: *Support the Reduction of Fees for All Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Sporting Licenses Granted to Qualified Disabled Veterans* passed by the DAV, Department of Wisconsin, assembled in State Convention in Green Bay, Wisconsin, June 10-12, 2021.