



# PATRICK TESTIN

## STATE SENATOR

DATE: January 10, 2024

RE: **Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 744**

TO: Senate Committee on Labor, Reg. Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs

FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

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Good morning Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 744.

There are currently about 9,600 members in the Wisconsin National Guard. They reside in all of the state's 72 counties, ranging from fewer than ten in several lightly populated counties in the northeastern part of the state to about approximately 1,100 each in Dane and Milwaukee counties.

Its state mission is to help civil authorities protect life and property and preserve peace, order, and public safety in times of natural or human-caused emergencies.

The Guard offers many assistance programs to help pay tuition costs and other educational expenses. The National Guard offers many programs for every type of student, whether you're still in high school, attending college or working toward a vocational certification.

This bill makes a minor procedural change for the National Guard tuition reimbursement grant program. Under this bill, instead of a reimbursement to the student, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) will pay tuition directly to the educational institution.

This change makes the program administratively less burdensome on two fronts. Qualified National Guard service members avoid the need to take out student loans to cover their education before they are reimbursed. These upfront payments will also reduce the number of students who will need to pay back certain types of federal aid, such as Pell, because the National Guard grant can be taken into consideration before financial aid is disbursed to the student. This reduces administrative burden for both the student and the UW System.

The bill retains the program's strong claw back provisions in the rare instances when students are unable to meet the requirements for the program.

Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your consideration of this bill and I am happy to take any questions.



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**Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs  
Testimony on Senate Bill 744  
National Guard Tuition Payments  
January 10, 2024**

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 744, relating to the tuition grant program for national guard members administered by the Department of Military Affairs. I'd also like to thank Sen. Testin, Sen. Hesselbein, and Rep. Joers for their hard work on this idea.

A few years ago, Representative Hesselbein, now Senator Hesselbein, and I were in a committee hearing together. Witnesses from the University of Wisconsin commented on one aspect on the administrative side of the National Guard Tuition Reimbursement Program, and Rep. Hesselbein mentioned that she had a constituent struggling with the current reimbursement program. We started collaborating on a solution that day.

Current law allows the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) to reimburse tuition costs to National Guard members if certain eligibility criteria are met. A reimbursement causes two issues. First, students either have to pay tuition out-of-pocket or take out student loans. Second, the university has to repay certain types of federal aid the student may have received.

To lower this administrative burden, this bill slightly modifies the reimbursement program. Instead of a reimbursement to the student serving in the National Guard, the legislation would have the Department of Military Affairs simply pay the tuition up front to the university. This lets students avoid student loans, and relieves the UW from certain administrative burdens.

Other program requirements remain the same: minimum GPA of 2.0, active drilling, and continuing to be a guard member in good standing, and strong clawback provisions.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.



# ALEX JOERS

WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
79TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony of Representative Alex Joers**  
**Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs**  
**SB 744: the tuition grant program for national guard members**  
**January 10, 2023**

Chairman Testin and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing on Senate Bill 744. As one of the authors, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in favor of this bill to better support our students serving in the National Guard.

Since 1977, Wisconsin has offered tuition payments for National Guard service members. This program operates similarly to many other service member tuition programs, where up to 100% of tuition is covered for National Guard members in good standing. However, unlike many other programs for service members, for guard members this functions as a reimbursement at the end of the semester instead of a direct tuition payment.

Due to this fact, many National Guard service members have had to take out costly student loans to cover their tuition expenses until the reimbursement arrives later on. This should not be the case. Any eligible guard member in good standing is intended to receive a grant covering 100% of their tuition, additionally obligating them to the administrative confusion of student loans and costly interest payments is an unnecessary burden to those serving our state and nation.

This bill shifts the program so that the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) will pay tuition directly to the educational institution at the beginning of the semester, bringing it in line with many other service member tuition programs. This will make the tuition payment process much easier both for the educational institution and, of course, for the student. These upfront payments will keep students from relying on student loans while they wait for the tuition reimbursement to arrive. The bill also includes a requirement for the Department of Military Affairs to work together with institutions of higher education in order to maximize administrative efficiency while maintaining necessary clawback provisions. This is a common-sense solution that takes a financial burden off of our service members.

Please join me in supporting SB 744.



# DIANNE H. HESSELBEIN

STATE SENATOR • SENATE DISTRICT 27

Testimony of Senator Dianne Hesselbein  
Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs  
SB 744: the tuition grant program for National Guard members administered by the Department  
of Military Affairs  
January 10, 2024

Chairman Testin and members of the Committee:

A constituent, who is a veteran and works with veterans enrolling in secondary education, contacted me in the fall of 2020 suggesting changes to the way National Guard members were paid tuition.

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 744. I am pleased to be an author of this important legislation. This bill makes a minor, but very important and helpful, procedural change for the National Guard tuition reimbursement grant program. Under this bill, instead of a reimbursement to the student, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) will pay tuition directly to the educational institution.

This change makes the program administratively less burdensome on two fronts. Qualified National Guard service members avoid the need to take out student loans to cover their education before they are reimbursed. These upfront payments will also reduce the number of students who will need to pay back certain types of federal aid because the National Guard grant can be taken into consideration before financial aid is disbursed to the student. This reduces administrative burden for both the student and the Universities of Wisconsin.

The bill retains the program's strong claw back provisions in the rare instances when students are unable to meet the requirements for the program.

Please join me in supporting Senate Bill 744, a bill that simplifies and improves the way National Guard members are paid tuition.



**Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 744**

Major General Paul Knapp, The Adjutant General

Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs

January 10, 2024

The Department of Military Affairs (DMA) is providing the following testimony in favor of Senate Bill 744, relating to the tuition grant program administered by DMA and its positive impact for all National Guard members who serve Wisconsin.

Under current law, DMA awards tuition grants to national guard members to reimburse them for higher education tuition costs, subject to certain eligibility criteria. This reimbursement is equal to 100 percent of the actual tuition charged by the school, or 100 percent of the maximum resident tuition charged by the University of Wisconsin-Madison for a comparable number of credits, whichever amount is less. Currently, National Guard members must first pay tuition to the school, complete the semester successfully with a minimum grade point average of 2.0 and continue to be an actively drilling guard member in good standing to qualify for reimbursement under this grant program.

Many National Guard members struggle to find funding to pay tuition directly to the school upfront and is a potential barrier to pursuing higher education for younger and lower ranking Airmen and Soldiers, because of the inability to pay, and the waiting period for reimbursement.

One of the key advantages of Senate Bill 744 is the alleviation of some the personal financial burden placed on our National Guard members. Many of these individuals juggle their military service with civilian responsibilities, and the prospect of paying tuition from personal funds can be a significant obstacle to pursuing educational goals. This bill acknowledges the need to support our service members in their pursuit of higher education, promoting a more sustainable and inclusive system that recognizes their dedication

However, it is crucial to address the staffing limitations within the Department of Military Affairs. The effective administration of the Tuition Grant Program necessitates adequate resources, and the current staffing levels are insufficient to handle the increased demands that will accompany the implementation of Senate Bill 744. I urge the committee to consider the importance of providing the Department of Military Affairs with the necessary resources, including one additional Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) position, to ensure the seamless and efficient execution of the grant program.

Military recruiting is at a near crisis level. The ability to maintain the all-volunteer force is key to maintaining the defense of our nation, and every opportunity to draw our young people to service should be maximized, and this effort is no different. Removing barriers to service should be one of all of our top priorities.

Investing in our National Guard members through Senate Bill 744 not only demonstrates our gratitude for their service but also strengthens the foundation of our state. By expanding access to education and addressing the administrative needs of the program, we are fostering a more resilient and skilled military force that will continue to serve and protect Wisconsin effectively.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your dedication to supporting our National Guard members. I urge you to pass Senate Bill 744 to ensure a brighter future for our service members and the state of Wisconsin.



DATE: January 10, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs

FROM: Universities of Wisconsin Office of Government Relations

RE: Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill 744

Thank you, Chair Testin and committee members, for providing the Universities of Wisconsin (UWs) an opportunity to submit testimony in favor of Senate Bill 744. We appreciate the authors willingness to partner with us to make it easier for our national guard members to pursue postsecondary education in Wisconsin.

The Universities of Wisconsin, with 13 universities and 26 campuses, has one of the most robust programs for veterans and service members in the country. We strive to provide a welcoming higher educational setting for service members, veterans, and their families. Each of our universities has a service department that provides comprehensive support to active military members and veterans. Dedicated campus staff assist active military members and veterans with transferring credits, navigating benefits, and connecting them with each other and the campus community. UWs is always looking at paths to make it easier and more accessible for veterans and service members to attend our universities. SB 744 will help our active military members by modifying Wisconsin's National Guard Tuition Grant program.

Currently, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) awards tuition grants to national guard members to reimburse them for higher education costs if certain eligibility criteria are met. SB 744 would modify current law and allow national guard members to receive this payment before the semester's completion. This would align Wisconsin's National Guard Tuition Grant program with other state and federal veteran benefits that pay the tuition up front. SB 744 does have a clawback provision if a student fails to achieve satisfactory academic progress, fails to be an active guard member, or is not a guard member in good standing. In these cases, the grant must be paid back in full.

Allowing a national guard student to receive this tuition upfront instead of having to wait for a reimbursement check will make it easier for these students to attend a Wisconsin institution of higher education and reduce student debt. Currently, a student cannot submit a reimbursement request to DMA until the end of the semester, and then they might wait up to 30 days to receive the reimbursement. Having to pay tuition upfront can be a huge obstacle for national guard students and may dissuade them from receiving a postsecondary degree. SB 744 will help ensure that national guard members do not have to worry about the cost of their education. SB 744 will also encourage these students to remain in Wisconsin by making the Wisconsin National Guard Tuition Grant program more attractive.

(Cont.)

We have worked with the bill authors on this important legislation and are excited that this bill makes it easier for Wisconsin's national guard members to pursue a path to higher education. The Universities of Wisconsin wants to increase accessibility of Wisconsin higher education institutions for all Wisconsinites, including our national guard members.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of this important legislation.



## University Veteran Services

STUDENT AFFAIRS

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

### Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs

2023 Senate Bill 744

*The tuition grant program for national guard members*

January 10, 2024

Chairman Testin and members of the Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs:

The University of Wisconsin-Madison thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 744, relating to the tuition grant program for our Wisconsin National Guard members, known as the National Guard Tuition Grant.

My name is Joe Rasmussen, and I am the Director of University Veteran Services at UW-Madison. I am from Janesville, Wisconsin, and a veteran of the United States Marine Corps. I am also an alum of UW-Whitewater and UW-Madison and I have been supporting military connected students at UW-Madison for over a decade.

The mission of University Veterans Services is to support military-connected students and their families create their own success. We certify both state and federal GI bills and advise students on the use of education benefits and assist students with applying for new benefits. University Veterans Services also develops programming to build community among our military-connected students, including peer support programs. There were 915 students eligible for G.I. Bill benefits, including about 90 eligible for this Guard Grant program, at UW-Madison last semester. We are home to about 2,000 veterans, Guard/Reserve, children/spouses, and ROTC students. UW is also home to the Mission in Action Recovery Project, Odyssey Beyond Wars, and the Veteran Education to Workforce Affinity and Success Study.



I'd like to express my appreciation to the bill authors Senator Testin and Representative Duchow, along with the bipartisan group of co-sponsors for sharing in our goals to better support our Wisconsin National Guard members. This legislation has the potential to go a long way to addressing debt, stress, and readiness for the men and women who've signed up to serve Wisconsin and our country.

The current Guard Grant program pays tuition months after it is due, which forces too many Guard members to take out student loans. It also pays Guard members directly via paper check, which means Guard members must often use their parent's home address because many Guard members move between academic years and participate in summer military training. This also causes confusion administratively and Guard students don't receive accurate financial aid packages due to the delayed payments and payments made directly to students instead of the university. Due to these complexities, internal fixes or accommodations are impossible because colleges and universities do not know when, how much, or even if the Guard Grant funds will make their way to campus.

The most notable improvement this legislation makes is shifting payment timelines, so the tuition grant pays tuition when it's due, not months later. This means Guard members will not need to take out loans, financing the delayed payments with their own credit. It also restores dignity, Guard members are proud to earn and use this benefit and education is often one of the top reasons people join the military. However, they often chose loans or other programs like need based aid, because of the delayed nature of the program. And administratively, this legislation puts the Guard Grant in line with other tuition programs and National Guard students will receive more accurate financial aid packages and enjoy more time with veteran services and student success staff who will be armed with more time and better information.

Upfront Guard Grant payments can reduce debt, restore dignity, and positively impact Wisconsin's readiness to respond. Furthermore, direct payments to the universities allow for a system to be set up that puts the Guard Grant in line with other veteran and military benefits. Guard students will receive their hard-earned benefits on time, receive better support from financial aid, and allow for Wisconsin colleges and universities to create a working relationship with the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs to further support the men and women of the Wisconsin National Guard.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the positive impact this legislation would have on the Wisconsin National Guard students attending UW-Madison. If you have any questions, please reach out to me ([joe.rasmussen@wisc.edu](mailto:joe.rasmussen@wisc.edu)) or UW-Madison Director of State Relations Crystal Potts ([crystal.potts@wisc.edu](mailto:crystal.potts@wisc.edu)).



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Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans & Military Affairs (SB 744) – 1/10/2024 10am 300 SW  
Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs (AB 772) – 1/11/2024 10:30am 417 North (GAR Hall)

The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee is a military-friendly university. We have a diverse campus community of more than 1,000 veterans, active-duty service members and their families. Military Friendly ranked UW-Milwaukee as a Top 10 military-friendly school. We're one of only a dozen universities in the nation that offers a full range of military services and offices on-campus.

UWM boasts a combined space where students receive services from our Military and Veterans Resource Center success coaches, the Military Education and Benefits team, and Vet Success on Campus staff. The Mobile Vet Center visits campus three times a month during the semester so students can meet with Veterans Benefits Administration staff for individualized assessments and services. UWM also has a mental health and wellness endowment which allows for programming to assist military veterans and active-duty services students transition to college, achieve success and graduate.

Some of these programs include Project 22, a suicide prevention and awareness motorcycle ride and memorial walk held at the Harley Davidson Museum, a Veterans Week Brunch, the annual Military and Veterans Ball, and our Military Graduation Ceremony. Additionally, staff within MAVRC work as success coaches allowing them to connect students with tutoring, career planning and other campus and community resources to assist with their success while at UWM.

UWM is in support of AB 772/SB 744 because of the benefit to students. UWM has 149 National Guard member students and 144 used the Wisconsin National Guard Tuition Reimbursement Grant in 2022-23. We know receiving their payments during the semester instead of at the end will help them pay for school and their living expenses. These students may have families and other responsibilities making it critical they have access to these funds in a timely manner. Processing these checks through the university will alleviate the need to recalculate their financial aid packages. Our staff can also assist them with benefit processing questions. 4 of the 5 students who were not awarded at UWM did not meet the GPA requirement. 14 of the 144 students also used the benefit in either Winterim or Summer terms.

We do acknowledge there will be an additional burden to the University processing, distributing and possibly collecting back this funding. The VA updated its recommendation in December 2023 to suggest one full time School Certifying Official for every 125 GI Bill students and/or dependents. Under this recommendation UWM would need eight certifying officials and as of today we have two.

Thank you to Chair(s) Edming/Testin and members of the committee for holding this important hearing today. We'd be happy to take any questions you might have.

Submitted by: Yolanda Medina, Director Military and Veterans Resource Center  
James Cocroft, Assistant Director Military and Veterans Resource Center