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Testimony before the Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Veterans and Military Affairs

Senator André Jacque

Senate Bill 134

April 3, 2025

Colleagues on the Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Veterans and Military Affairs:

Wisconsin is currently home to over 15,000 children of active duty and National Guard and Reserve members. This bill would give military parents better access to more education options for their children by extending deadlines for open enrollment applications across Wisconsin school districts.

Military families not only move frequently between posts; they also move from temporary to permanent housing at times that are not always in sync with the school calendar and open enrollment application cycles. These limited housing options too often result in limited educational options.

Wisconsin should seek to remove any obstacles standing between military families obtaining quality education for their children. That's why this bill extends the current 30-day deadline to 90 days after their orders are issued for a military parent to apply under open enrollment in our state. It also clarifies that this policy also applies to military orders from guard and reserve units from any state.

This increased flexibility for military parents is one more thing we can do to make Wisconsin the best state in the union for our military members. This legislation was drafted in consultation with and at the request of the Department of Defense state liaison office.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 134. I'm happy to answer any questions committee members may have.



April 3, 2025

Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Veteran and Military Affairs

**Department of Public Instruction Testimony
2025 Senate Bill 134**

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) thanks Chair Jacque and members of the committee for the opportunity to share testimony on Senate Bill 134 (SB 134) and provides information only on proposed changes to alternative open enrollment (AOE) under SB 134.

The DPI believes that each learner deserves access to rigorous, engaging instruction, which is especially challenging but equally important for parents and guardians serving in our nation's military. While open enrollment allows parents/guardians to apply for their children to attend public school in a school district other than the one in which they reside, SB 134 attempts to further address the unique needs of military families.

Wisconsin law already acknowledges that several students and their families may have difficulty in applying for open enrollment during the traditional application period, which is a three-month application period beginning in the February of the school year prior to anticipated enrollment. In response, [2011 Wisconsin Act 114](#) established a procedure through which a student's parents/guardians may apply for open enrollment outside of the regular application period. There are seven criteria under which a parent or guardian may submit an AOE application, including when their child's residence has changed due to military orders. Under SB 134, the AOE application deadline is extended from 30 days to 90 days after applicable military orders are issued. SB 134 also expressly includes orders from a reserve component of the U.S. armed forces and the national guard of any state as applicable military orders for AOE purposes.

In terms of utilizing the AOE process, 2023-24 school year data indicates that of the 16,111 AOE applications received, only 30 applicants requested eligibility using the "military orders" criteria, accounting for only 0.2 percent of all applications. However, a military family may also utilize other AOE eligibility options, such as applying with the "best interest of the pupil" criteria, which is not subject to the 30-day application limitation. The majority of AOE applications in the 2023-2024 school year utilized this option.

In terms of the type of military order required for AOE eligibility, the DPI is not aware of AOE applications having been denied because of the type of military orders provided. Current Wisconsin Administrative Code Public Instruction 36 (PI 36), which is the administrative rule governing the open enrollment program, does not contain a definition of military orders.

While Wisconsin law already provides a "best interest of the pupil" option through which military and other families may access an alternative open enrollment period, the DPI acknowledges that a military family relocated within or to Wisconsin may prefer to utilize the military orders option and might have difficulty meeting the current 30-day AOE application window. For these families,

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SB 134 may provide greater clarity and ease anxiety during a stressful transition.

Thank you for allowing DPI to share this testimony. Please direct any questions to Michael Bormett, Assistant Director – Parental Education Options, at openenrollment@dpi.wi.gov.