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WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

Senate Bill 164

May 27, 2015

Good morning, members of the committee, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today on Senate Bill 164.

The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, passed by the United States Congress last session, requires all public institutions of higher education to provide in-state residency tuition to qualified veterans and their immediate family members enrolled at that institution, regardless of their residency status at the time. Under the provisions of the bill, qualified veterans are those who were discharged or released from at least 90 days of active service within three years of their date of enrollment.

While the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents has already moved to incorporate this provision, this bill makes the necessary statutory change to bring the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) into compliance with this federal mandate. Failure to comply could result in the loss of nearly \$23 million per academic year in Post-9/11 GI Bill payments for approximately 6,600 student veterans. This includes \$5.2 million per academic year in lost tuition payments and \$17.7 million per academic year in lost housing allowance to students. This amount does not include other federal veteran education benefits that would also be forfeit without passage of this bill. In comparison, the fiscal estimate from the WTCS indicates this bill will result in the loss of approximately \$117,500 per year, although this amount is likely to be less, as the system does not currently track the number of student veterans enrolled within three years of discharge.

While the federal Act originally required this provision to be in place for all semesters beginning after July 1, 2015, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has recently provided a waiver to the states to extend the deadline to meet this requirement until January 1, 2016. Nevertheless, I believe it is important that the Legislature have this in place in time for the fall semester.

There is one technical amendment to the bill. After reviewing the original bill, the U.S. DVA suggested this amendment to ensure that student veterans maintain the in-state tuition rate even if they change schools or enroll at the end of the three year window, in compliance with the Act.

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

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SB 164 Testimony

5/27/15

Senate Committee on Veterans and Transportation

Good Morning Chairman Petrowski and Committee Members. Thank you for taking time today to address the legislation relating to charging resident fees to nonresident veterans and their family members attending schools within the Wisconsin technical colleges system.

Last year, the United States Congress passed Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. This Act required all public institutions of higher education to provide in-state residency tuition to qualified veterans and their immediate family members enrolled at that institution

In Wisconsin, the proposed changes in SB 164 are required to ensure that Wisconsin Technical College System is eligible for reimbursements for the educational costs of veterans who are using federal grants such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Under this bill, veterans living in Wisconsin, regardless if they are a resident can qualify for resident tuition as long as they are enrolling within the proper time frame. Once these veterans have enrolled at resident rates, veterans as well as qualifying spouses or children will continue to be eligible for resident tuition as long as they are continuously enrolled in a Wisconsin Technical College System college.

Last year the Wisconsin Technical College System served 64 veterans who were not residents. It is imperative that the Wisconsin Technical College System adopt this policy immediately for all courses that commence on or after July 1, 2015. Failure to comply with this mandate could result in the loss of nearly \$23 million per academic year in Post-9/11 GI Bill payments made for tuition and housing allowances for student veterans.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of this bill.