

March 2, 2000 *Note: both versions of the bill are in the Senate.*

Senate Bill 288/Assembly Bill 582 (Moen/Brandemuehl - Brandemuehl/Moen)

Military honors funerals for veterans.

Summary of Bill -

The bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to administer a program coordinating military honors details at funerals of deceased veterans.

Staff Comments -

This is a good bill and is strongly supported by veterans groups. Marv Friedman was thrilled to learn that it would be scheduled, and it's passage would be very well received by veterans groups across the state.

Standing Committee Action -

Both bills were recommended unanimously by their respective standing committees. They were both amended with identical simple amendments SA 1 to SB 288 and AA 1 to AB 582 which provided additional funding from the Veterans Trust fund beyond the amounts specified in the bills. The amendments have the support of DVA.

Recommended JFC Action -

Adopt SA 1 to SB 288 and AA 1 to AB 582.
Passage of SB 288 and AB 582 as amended.

Prepared by: Julie



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

One East Main, Suite 301 • Madison, WI 53703 • (608) 266-3847 • Fax: (608) 267-6873

March 2, 2000

TO: Members
Joint Committee on Finance

FROM: Bob Lang, Director

SUBJECT: Senate Bill 288/Assembly Bill 582: Military Honors Funerals for Veterans

INTRODUCTION

Senate Bill 288/Assembly Bill 582 (the bills) would create a new program, to be administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), which would provide for military honors at funerals for deceased veterans and make appropriations. SB 288 was introduced on November 10, 1999. That bill is identical to AB 582 which was introduced on November 5, 1999. SB 288 was referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Utilities, Veterans and Military Affairs; AB 582 was referred to the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs. Both Committees held public hearings on the respective bills on December 8, 1999, and subsequently adopted an identical amendment (SA 1 to SB 288; AA 1 to AB 528) which would provide additional funding to DVA above the amounts provided in the bills. The Assembly passed AB 582, as amended by AA 1, by a vote of 95 to 1 on February 8, 2000. The Senate Committee on Health, Utilities, Veterans and Military Affairs unanimously recommended passage of SB 288, as amended by SA 1.

SUMMARY

The bills would require that DVA administer a program which would coordinate the provision of military honors details at funerals of deceased veterans. The bills would also newly authorize the Adjutant General of the Wisconsin National Guard (WNG) to activate guard members for the provision of such services. The bills would require DVA to coordinate the provision of these honors details by existing veterans groups which currently provide these services and by WNG members who would be activated by the Adjutant General to also provide such honors details. The bills would also require DVA to provide reimbursement, under certain conditions, to the local veterans groups which provide such services.

The bills would provide DVA with increased administrative funding (\$113,000 SEG) from the veteran's trust fund and 2.0 positions to accomplish this coordinating role. The bills would also create a new biennial appropriation (\$55,000 SEG), also funded from the veterans trust fund, for DVA to provide reimbursement to the local units of veterans organizations for the cost of providing military honors at a funeral for a deceased veteran where the deceased veteran's family has insufficient resources to pay for the cost of that service. The maximum reimbursement a local veterans organization would be eligible to receive would be \$50 per funeral.

Amendment 1

The adopted amendment to the respective bills would increase the administrative funding provided to DVA by \$748,300 SEG and authorize an additional 16.0 SEG positions for the new military honors detail program. These increased funds would also come from the veterans trust fund. Under the bills as amended, DVA would be appropriated a total of \$227,800 SEG in 1999-00 and \$633,500 SEG in 2000-01 and authorized a total of 18.0 SEG positions for operation of the new military honors program, not including the funding provided for the reimbursement grants.

FISCAL EFFECT

Three components of the bill would have fiscal impacts. The first component would be for any DVA administrative costs for coordinating the new program. The second component would be for providing funds for reimbursement of the local units of the veterans organization. The last component would be any Department of Military Affairs (DMA) costs associated with activating WNG members for the military honors details. Each of these is discussed below.

DVA Administrative Costs. The bill would increase DVA's administration of loans and aids to veterans appropriation by \$27,500 SEG in 1999-00 and \$85,500 SEG in 2000-01 and provide an additional 2.0 SEG positions beginning May 1, 1999, to coordinate the new program. DVA anticipates the funding, which would be from the veteran's trust fund, would be used as follows: (a) \$13,300 in 1999-00 and \$79,100 in 2000-01 for salary and fringe benefit costs for a director and program assistant for the program; (b) \$14,000 in 1999-00 for one-time costs of computers and workstations for the new positions; and (c) \$200 in 1999-00 and \$6,400 in 2000-01 for supplies and services.

This level of funding is the same as the costs identified in DVA's fiscal estimate. DVA indicated that these costs were premised on the assumption that the two positions would be responsible for promoting the new program, coordinating the provision of military honors services by the local veterans organizations or WNG members, responding to requests for information about the program from the general public, determining eligibility for reimbursement payments to local veterans organizations, providing administrative support for the program and coordinating up to 6,600 honors services annually.

Local Units Reimbursements. The bills would also create a biennial appropriation in DVA, funded from the veterans trust fund, for providing reimbursement to veterans organizations for the provisions of certain honors details. A total of \$55,000 SEG in 2000-01 is provided in the new appropriation. This level of funding is equal to annualized costs DVA projected in its fiscal estimate, based on providing approximately 1,100 reimbursements each year beginning in 2000-01, at \$50 per reimbursement.

National Guard Costs. The bills do not provide any additional funding for the Wisconsin National Guard. However, DMA did provide a fiscal estimate. Although no specific cost amounts were provided in its fiscal estimate, DMA did indicate two types of costs anticipated from the bill. First, DMA assumed there would be direct costs for activating National Guard members for honors details for an estimated 3,100 funerals annually. DMA's estimate assumed that these direct costs for WNG members' pay and allowances would be paid for by using federal funds provided by the federal National Guard Bureau. The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2000 (Public Law 106-65), authorizes the activation of National Guard members to perform military burials and the payment of costs associated with this duty. However, according to DMA, while federal funds are assumed to be available in the future, it indicates that as of this date, Department of Defense guidance has not yet been issued and DMA cannot predict the amount of funding that might ultimately be available.

The second type of costs identified in the DMA fiscal estimate is for administrative costs. The Department stated in its fiscal estimate that 4 to 6 additional staff may be required to coordinate the activities and assignment of WNG members to providing honors services at an estimated 3,100 funerals annually. However, no cost for such staff was identified in the fiscal estimate. DMA notes that it is uncertain whether the administrative costs to coordinate the DMA activities would be funded from federal sources. However, these are costs that DMA anticipated which would be separate from those costs for DVA's coordination activities which are funded in the bills.

Fiscal Effect of Amendment 1

The adopted amendments (SA 1/AA 1) to the bills would increase DVA's administration of loans and aids to veterans appropriation by \$200,300 SEG in 1999-00 and \$548,000 SEG in 2000-01 and authorize an additional 16.0 SEG positions beginning May 1, 1999 above the levels provided in the bills. DVA indicates that the increased funding would be used to create two seven-member honor guard teams and provide two additional administrative staff. Of the increased funding provided in the amendment, \$166,600 SEG in 1999-00 and \$468,700 SEG in 2000-01 would be to fund the two honor guard teams. DVA has indicated that these funds would be used as follows: (a) \$73,800 in 1999-00 and \$451,400 in 2000-01 for salary and fringe benefit costs for the 14 positions that would make up two seven-member teams consisting of a supervisor and 6.0 team members; (b) \$79,800 in 1999-00 for one-time costs associated with establishing the teams; and (c) \$13,000 in 1999-00 and \$17,300 in 2000-01 for supplies and services and travel. The remaining \$33,700 SEG in 1999-00 and \$79,300 SEG in 2000-01 and 2.0 positions would be for additional

administrative staff. These funds are anticipated by DVA to be used as follows: (a) \$12,900 in 1999-00 and \$77,700 in 2000-01 for the salary and fringe benefit costs of an administrative program coordinator and administrative support assistant; (b) \$14,000 in 1999-00 for the one-time costs of computers and workstations; and (c) \$6,800 in 1999-00 and \$1,600 in 2000-01 for other supplies and services.

According to DVA, the increased funding that would be provided by the amendment reflects a change in assumptions regarding how the Department intends to implement the program. With the funding provided under the amendment, DVA would establish two full-time DVA honor guard teams to perform services at funerals of veterans for an estimated 2,200 deceased veterans. This would be in addition to DVA's expected activities in coordinating the provision of these honors details services by the veterans organizations and activated National Guard members at other funerals for an additional 4,400 deceased veterans annually. The teams would be expected to be located in a northern and southern location (most likely the two state veterans cemeteries) in the state. The two additional administrative staff, for a total of four under the bills as amended, would be located at DVA headquarters in Madison. DVA estimated the number of burials by assuming that honors services would be requested for sixty percent of all veterans funerals annually and that DVA teams would be responsible for one-third of those services.

Prepared by: David Worzala