



Date: May 9th, 2013

To: Members of the Committee on Veterans

From: Representative Petryk

Re: Testimony regarding Assembly Bill 130 (Senate Bill 117), Assembly Bill 134 (Senate Bill 120), and Assembly Bill 135 (Senate Bill 118)

Good Morning Chairman Weatherston and members of the Committee. I appreciate this opportunity to come before the Committee today to speak on Assembly Bill 130, Assembly Bill 134, and Assembly Bill 135. All three of these bills aim to strengthen our Department of Military Affairs and also provide much needed assistance to our service men and women. Also, these bills were drafted and introduced at the request of General Dunbar.

I have with me today Colonel Julio Barron the Legislative Liaison with the Department of Military Affairs. Colonel Barron, along with General Dunbar, was vital in the drafting of these three pieces of legislation and he will assist in answering any questions from the committee. Please note that the Senate versions of these bills, Senate Bill 117, 120, and 118 have already passed the Senate Committee and were voted on and passed the by the full Senate with unanimous bi-partisan support.

Assembly Bill 130 would allow a member of the Wisconsin National Guard, who is called into state active duty, to receive the same amount of travel expenses as the federal government pays to an officer or enlisted member of equal rank in the corresponding branch of the U.S. Armed Forces. Under current law, a member of the Wisconsin National Guard only receives the state reimbursement rate. State employee mileage reimbursement is currently \$0.352 per mile, compared to \$0.56 per mile for federal employees. Similarly, state employees are paid \$34 per day for meal reimbursement, while federal employees are reimbursed \$46 per day.

Assembly Bill 130 will level the playing field between the Wisconsin National Guard and their federal counterparts who may be responding to the same mission. Currently, s. 321.35(1) mandates that every officer and enlisted person on state active duty in the National Guard shall receive the base pay and allowances of an officer or enlisted person of equal rank in the corresponding branch of the U.S. armed forces.

Assembly Bill 130 will have a very limited financial impact to the Department of Military Affairs and any increase in cost may be absorbed within the agency's budget.

Assembly Bill 134 will provide financial assistance (not financial school aid) to members of the National Guard and Reserves who are not on active duty. This bill would also include single service members with no dependents, traditional or part-time members assigned to the National Guard and Reserves, and also full-time members on active duty.

The Department of Military Affairs currently provides financial aid to certain resident family members of an active duty service member who is a Wisconsin resident and a member of the reserve unit of the U.S. Armed Forces or the Wisconsin National Guard. Service members themselves are not eligible at this time for financial assistance.

Assembly Bill 134 will extend the financial aid eligibility to certain family members under the existing criteria but will delete the requirement that a service member be on active duty and also extends the aid to service members.

The funding for financial assistance is provided through voluntary donations by Wisconsin taxpayers on their state income tax return (check-off). Again, let me point out that this is a voluntary contribution and no GPR funds are used. We do not expect that the fund will be in any financial jeopardy with this expansion of the benefits. There is currently \$292,000 available in the relief fund. The Department of Revenue expects the fund to total approximately \$400,000 at the end of the current tax season.

This bill will also have a limited financial impact on the Department of Military Affairs and any increase in cost may be absorbed within the agencies budget.

Assembly Bill 135 would authorize the Department of Military Affairs to have an additional Deputy Adjutant General. Currently, the Department of Military Affairs is led by Adjutant General Donald Dunbar. Under General Dunbar, the Army and Air National Guard are each led by a Deputy Adjutant General and one Joint Chief of Staff. The role of the Joint Chief of Staff is to oversee all joint staff functions between the Army and Air National Guard.

Assembly Bill 135 will eliminate the position of Joint Chief of Staff and put a third Deputy Adjutant General in place to coordinate the Department's response to disasters and other domestic requests for assistance as well as additional roles that fell under the Joint Chief of Staff position.

This bill does not change the total number of positions in the department. The change in pay structure is not expected to cost the state, but rather will be paid for through federal funds.