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Committee on Colleges and Universities  
Public Hearing, AB 361  
September 12, 2019

Thank you Chairman and members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify on AB 361, relating to requirements for colleges when college students are called into active military service.

As I'm sure we can all agree, our military members make a lot of sacrifices in order to serve their country. Specifically to our Reserve and National Guard force, these men and women find a way to navigate both a civilian and a military career, which can come with many challenges. As a state, we work hard to ensure these service members are taken care of and given the protections they deserve when called into active duty service. While current law protects their employment status, there are still some questions on the protections guaranteed to them as students enrolled in a college.

In Wisconsin, National Guard members may be called into state active duty to respond to natural disasters, public disturbances and other emergencies, at any time. If a call to active duty comes during the academic year, activated students risk potential financial loss since they are not always entitled to a refund of tuition or room and board fees. Current law allows for student protections if the active military service is "*at least 30 days*", but what about students who have orders for three weeks to help clean-up a natural disaster? Missing that much time in a class can greatly impact academic performance.

It is for this reason, Senator Duey Stroebel and I have introduced AB 361. This bill provides the protections necessary in order to help our National Guard and Reserve military members who are also students. These protections include:

- 1) Ensures protections apply to all calls to service not just 30 days or more;
- 2) Requires all institutions of higher education, trade and professional schools, and post-secondary schools in the state to give service members the option of a tuition refund and refund of pro-rated room and board fees (if applicable), or reenrollment for no additional cost in the next available offering of that class;
- 3) Holds students harmless for re-registration or re-enrollment; and
- 4) Requires institutions of higher education, trade schools and post-secondary schools to give service member students the chance to accelerate completion of a class if that class is scheduled to be concluded within 30 days of the initial call to active duty, within reason.

It is my hope that the Committee will support AB 361 in order to provide protections for military members who are also students.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Representative Cindi Duchow



# DUEY STROEBEL

STATE SENATOR • 20<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

## Testimony on AB 361

*September 12, 2019*

Chairman Murphy and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of AB 361. I am proud to join Rep. Cindi Duchow and many others in bringing this legislation forward.

Approximately 10,000 men and women serve Wisconsin in both the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard. These individuals stand ready to be activated at a moment's notice to serve our country. In particular, members of the National Guard may be activated by the Governor to provide assistance to our communities in times of natural disaster.

Although state law includes robust protections for service members when it comes to leaving their job to serve, the protections for college students who must leave school are weaker. AB 361 contains several important changes to state law that will remedy this situation.

First, this bill eliminates the current requirement that orders to active duty must be 30 days or longer before protections kick in. When the National Guard is summoned to duty in response to an emergency, the very nature of the situation often precludes a specific end-date being established. Students should not be penalized for the open-ended and tentative nature of timelines associated with emergencies.

Second, this bill expands the option some students currently have to place a class on hold or obtain a tuition refund if they are called to active duty while taking classes. This provision currently only applies to certain schools in Wisconsin. Under AB 361 all post-secondary institutions would have to offer service member students the option of a tuition refund or placing the class on hold for completion at a later date.

Finally, if a student is required to leave school because they are called to active duty, this bill ensures that they are guaranteed re-enrollment in future classes. This means that a service member doesn't lose their "place in line" so to speak when it comes to re-enrolling at a specific school or in a specific class.

Wisconsin is home to some great educational institutions. With this bill we can work with them to standardize protections for service members, giving them the peace of mind they need to continue to effectively serve our communities and our state.

Thank you.

**AB 361 Testimony: Committee on Colleges and Universities**  
**12 September 2019**  
**Maj. Brian Faltinson, Wisconsin National Guard**

I am Maj. Brian Faltinson, Deputy Director, Public Affairs of the Wisconsin National Guard (WING) and member of the Joint Staff, which is the planning cell for WING domestic operations.

The Wisconsin National Guard has two primary missions. The first is as the primary combat reserve to the U.S. Army and Air Force. Deployments for these missions generally are planned in advance and range from six months to a year. School protections for this mission set generally are covered under current legislation.

Our second mission is as the first military responder within our state and nation and this is a mission unique to the National Guard. These missions like disaster response and recovery have the most direct impact on the citizenry. These little-to-no-notice missions can be as short as a day or extend into weeks. These deployments can happen anywhere within Wisconsin. And under the auspices of Emergency Management Assistance Compacts they can happen anywhere in the United States.

There have been several prolonged periods of state active duty by the WING in recent history:

Floods in 2008

Burlington flooding (2017)

Hurricane Irma (2017)

Madison flooding (2018)

Debris clearance—Polk/Barron/Langlade counties (2019)

Our latest response occurred over Labor Day weekend. We mobilized 400 Soldiers and Airmen to deploy to Florida in anticipation to Hurricane Dorian as part of an EMAC response. Our troops reported to their armories less than 24 hours after notification for a potential two-week mission. Fortunately, the storm track changed and were able to send our troops home after one day of State Active Duty and without any impact to the upcoming college enrollment period.

The Soldiers and Airmen of the Wisconsin National Guard stand ready at a moment's notice to set their civilian lives on hold to serve their state and nation in their time of need. They can only accomplish these missions with the strong support of their family, employers, schools and communities. Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.