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*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs
State Senator André Jacque
January 16, 2020*

Chairman Skowronski and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 689, the Recognizing Residency Act - relating to tuition and fee remission for certain veterans and their dependents enrolled in the University of Wisconsin System or a technical college.

Wisconsin has rightly sought to recruit service members completing their deployment to relocate to our state, and veterans with ties to Wisconsin to return. This proposal, the **Recognizing Residency Act**, modifies the residency requirement for the tuition and fee remission program for certain veterans and their spouses and children enrolled in University of Wisconsin System schools and technical colleges.

The Recognizing Residency Act is a great way for the State of Wisconsin to help veterans to relocate to Wisconsin by eliminating the current five-year durational residency requirement for veterans and their spouses and children under the tuition and fee remission program, under circumstances in which the veteran was not a resident of this state when he or she entered military service. This requirement presently discourages or delays veterans who entered the military from outside Wisconsin and relocate here from being able to access both their Federal and Wisconsin GI Bill benefits seamlessly in a way that allows them to further their training and bring their greatly needed skillset into the Wisconsin workforce.

We want Wisconsin to be a destination for veterans and this proposal will serve as a great recruitment tool for our state to attract more veterans to settle in Wisconsin.

This proposal is supported by the Wisconsin American Legion, the VFW-Department of Wisconsin, the County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs), the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans and the Wisconsin Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 689.



DAVE MURPHY

State Representative • 56th Assembly District

Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs

Public Hearing, January 16, 2020

Assembly Bill 689

Testimony of State Representative Dave Murphy

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for hearing Assembly Bill 689 today.

Wisconsin faces an uphill battle in securing a workforce large enough to meet our growing economy's needs, particularly in light of shrinking demographics. Fortunately we have a solution that not only attracts highly trained workers, but honors American veterans.

Assembly Bill 689, the Recognizing Residency Act, expands the UW System and the Wisconsin Technical College System tuition and fee remission programs for certain veterans, their spouses, and children. Specifically, the bill permits any veteran, their spouse, or child to be offered tuition and fee remission if the veteran becomes a resident of Wisconsin prior to enrollment in college.

This bill gives veterans and their family the freedom to move to Wisconsin without sacrificing benefits they might have elsewhere. And who wouldn't want to move to Wisconsin?

Simply put, this bill is a win, win, win. It honors veterans, it grows our workforce, and it will result in a more skilled workforce due to increased degree attainment.



Department of Wisconsin

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
MICHAEL HERT
DAV STATE COMMANDER
DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY
JANUARY 16, 2020**

Chairman Skowronski, Vice Chair VanderMeer, Ranking Member Hesselbein, and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon! Thank you for allowing DAV (Disabled American Veterans) this opportunity to present our view on Assembly Bill 689 (AB 452) Relating to: *tuition and fee remission for certain veterans and their dependents enrolled in the University of Wisconsin System or a technical college.*

I am DAV State Commander Mike Hert and accompanying me is our Benefit Protection Team Leader or legislative liaison, Al Labelle.

DAV is a congressionally chartered national veterans' service organization of more than one million wartime veterans, all of whom were injured or made ill while serving on behalf of this nation. In Wisconsin, we have approximately 15,000 members.

Each year, we help more than 1 million veterans with Benefits, Transportation, Advocacy, Employment, and Volunteerism. Over Eighty-five percent (85%) of our total expenditures go to Service.

Historical, DAV Wisconsin has been a strong supporter of the Wisconsin G.I. Bill Tuition and Remission Program and its various permutations. We along with others worked hard to secure expansion of the original residency requirement and later the expansion of the eligibility for family members.

Under current law, the veteran needs to be a resident of the state upon entering military service or a resident of the state for at least five consecutive years.

Furthermore veterans, their spouses or their 17-to-25-year old children may use the Wisconsin GI Bill if the veteran has been awarded a service-connected disability rating of at least 30 percent from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or died in the line of duty or as a result of a service-connected disability.

The Wisconsin GI Bill enables these qualified veterans, their spouses and children to attend all University of Wisconsin (UW) and Wisconsin Technical College Systems institutions tuition free. It provides tuition remission for 128 credits or 8 semesters, whichever is longer.

AB 689 eliminates the five year durational residency requirements for veterans, their spouses and children. If the veteran was not a resident of the state upon entering military service, the veteran is still eligible for the Wisconsin GI Bill as long as the veteran is a resident of the state immediately before registration at a UW System school or technical college.

Additionally, the veteran's spouse and children are still eligible for the Wisconsin GI Bill if they reside in the state immediately before their registration at a UW System school or technical college, provided the veteran resides in the state or if the veteran is deceased, he or she resided in the state at any time while an adult or a veteran.

We feel eliminating the 5 year residency requirement for these eligible veterans, their spouses and children is potentially a useful tool in attracting veterans and their families to reside in Wisconsin.

Pursuant to DAV National Resolution 389¹, DAV Wisconsin strongly supports AB 689 and urges this Committee and the legislature to pass the bill in an expeditious manner.

This concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. We would be pleased to respond to any questions you or other Committee Members may have.


¹ Resolution 389, *Support Legislation to Improve and Protect Education and Employment Benefits for Disabled Veterans and Their Survivors* passed at DAV National Convention held in Orlando, Florida on August 6, 2019.



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January 16, 2020

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs
FROM: Ray Cross, UW System President
RE: Assembly Bill 689 Testimony - In Opposition 

Thank you, Chairman Skowronski and committee members, for holding this public hearing on AB 689, and thank you to Representative Murphy and Senator Jacque for engaging on this important topic. Although you will notice I am registered to speak against this bill, I want to first acknowledge that we shared our position with Representative Murphy's office, and I had a good discussion with Senator Jacque. Thank you both for listening to our input.

I am a veteran myself. I served as a combat engineer in Vietnam. Personally and professionally, I appreciate any efforts, like this bill, that honor those who served or who are serving in our armed forces. I also appreciate the intent behind this bill to leverage the university as a tool to attract talent to this state. As Wisconsin's population ages, the UW System is one of the few entities in this state that is positioned to attract people and talent to fill the workforce shortage and skills gap. When you look at the amount of people the university attracts from around the country and world, I like to remind everyone that people pay us a premium to come here.

With that being said, the reason I am unable to support this legislation is because the current program is not fully funded, and this bill does not include funding to cover the proposed expansion. Currently, about 3,415 student veterans and about 2,092 children and spouses earned the benefit of the Wisconsin GI Bill. This program is offered to those who were residents of the state when they entered service. The Wisconsin GI Bill offers a 100% tuition and fee remission, and we are proud that this is one of the most generous benefits in the country that many Wisconsinites have benefited from over the years. The UW System receives about \$4.5 million from the state to reimburse the university for the costs of the program, but this is not enough to cover the total cost of about \$25 million. Practically, this means that other students are subsidizing the cost of this program through their tuition.

AB 689 expands the program further without additional funding, which means that students will further subsidize this expansion to out-of-state residents. Currently, if someone entered military service and was not a resident of the state at the time, then they would have to be a resident of Wisconsin for five years immediately preceding enrollment at a UW institution before they could receive the Wisconsin GI Bill. AB 689 eliminates this five-year residency requirement, so a veteran, their children, and their spouse would be eligible for the Wisconsin GI Bill if they are a resident of the state immediately before they register at a UW institution. We estimate this cost would be about \$7 million over FY 2021 and FY 2022 with additional costs in the future. Once again, I appreciate the intent to leverage the university to attract talent to the state, but the cost of this expansion to the university is significant.

The UW System remains committed to supporting all our veterans, their spouses, and children, so they can succeed at our universities. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on AB 689, and I am happy to take any questions.

