



SHAE SORTWELL

STATE REPRESENTATIVE * 2nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Hearing Testimony
Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
June 24, 2021
Assembly Bill 294

Representative Murphy and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities – thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on AB 294, relating to technical college fees covered by the Wisconsin GI Bill.

Enacted in 2005, the WI GI Bill is a state of Wisconsin program that provides certain tuition and segregated fee benefits for qualifying Wisconsin veterans, spouses of eligible veterans, unremarried surviving spouses of eligible veterans, and children of eligible veterans at Wisconsin public post-secondary educational institutions [Wis. Stats. §36.27(3p)].

Usually, tuition and fees are fully covered. However, certain *student activity and incidental fees* that are set by the WI technical college districts are not covered (but are covered by UWS) and GI Bill-covered individuals could still receive a bill to pay. The situation was brought to my attention from one of my constituents, from whom you will receive written testimony. As he writes, he was still getting billed for items which did not make sense since he thought the GI bill covered every fee.

We want to support our veterans and integrate them into the workforce. The American Legion noted to me that workforce shortages are more of an issue for veterans in the trades rather than within the UW system. Let's not deter them from going to the tech colleges because of fees. This bill will incorporate student activity and incidental fees into the GI bill to expand coverage for them. I would appreciate your support on this matter.

I want to thank the committee for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions members of the committee may have.

For examples of such fees, please see the other document of my testimony.

Southwest Wisconsin Technical College:

- “Activity Fee. 6 percent of tuition, per credit, per semester. The Student Senate determines annually the distribution of these fees which are **used to support programs such as student-led organizations, student government, intramural sports, special campus events and services.**” <https://www.swtc.edu/student-resources/financial-resources/tuition-fees>

Midstate Technical College:

- **Activity Fee:** Six percent per credit. Charged each semester to help cover student activities such as student government and to help support various clubs and student activities. <https://www.mstc.edu/tuition/tuition-and-fees>

Waukesha County Technical College:

- Student activity fees are administered by the WCTC Student Government Association (SGA), and the money is used to finance **projects, events and clubs that are of interest to students.** Student fees support a **fitness center**, and “**student organizations**”: “WCTC has many student organizations that are associated with academic programs and several that are not program-related. Each organization has a staff or faculty advisor and student membership of 10 or more students. The Student Government Association provides financial support to each club through student activity fees.” <https://www.wctc.edu/site-pdfs/student-handbook.pdf>

Madison Area Technical College:

- **COMMUTER SERVICES SUPPLEMENTAL FEE:** Charged when taking at least one degree credit at any Madison campus. It covers:
 - Madison Metro bus passes.
 - Campus-to-campus shuttle services.
 - Parking permit fees.
 - Para-Transit services.
 - Madison B-Cycle System access throughout the city.
- **SUPPLEMENTAL FEE, MADISON OR REGIONAL CAMPUS:** Supports **co-curricular activities and programming** including student **newspapers, athletics**, performing **arts**, Student **Senate, leadership** programs, clubs and organizations, the Programs and Activities Council, **the Student Life Office** and provides access to the Madison College **Fitness Center** and **student health services and programs**. Regional campus rate difference is due to varying levels of service. <https://madisoncollege.edu/tuition>

Nicholas Hitt

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Dear Honourable Representatives of the Committee on Colleges and Universities:

Good day. My name is Nicholas Hitt. I'm an honorably-discharged Army Guardsman. I had the pleasure of serving eight great years with the 2nd 127th Inf in Green Bay, Wis. In 2005 our unit deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. It's been an honor to serve the US and also my State.

I left the service in 2008 with the intent on turning the next page in my life—college. I was accepted at UW Green Bay in 2008 and graduated with a bachelor's degree in communications in 2009. While at UWGB I began using the Wisconsin GI Bill—ultimately though I did change to Vocational Rehabilitation as it was the greater benefit based on my service connected disabilities.

After college I was fortunate to get a job with the Veterans Benefits Administration in Milwaukee as a veteran's service representative. Ten years working here and I found myself back in Green Bay and out of touch with my degree. In order to keep relevant and adjust for the current job market, I enrolled with Northeastern Wisconsin Technical College in Fall of 2019 under the Project Management technical certificate program. In addition to meeting with financial aid and academic advisors I also met with that school's veteran representative. I had a lot of unused benefit from the Wisconsin GI Bill and we decided to use this benefit.

After my first semester I encountered a balance of around \$6.94, this was for accident insurance. The subsequent semester I owed a very small amount and the same with the next one. But, the summer of 2020 semester was interesting. I owed the University around \$130 that they said the VA could not cover—this included online course fees along with segregated fees. Fall of 2020 I incurred \$115 for the same rationale. The University's on campus activities and courses were closed due to COVID yet still responsible for a special surcharge for online course fees despite the lack of other options

I most certainly am not alone and am confident that for every one of me who asks the "why" questions, there are myriad more who are not and really should. My accounts with NWTC never fell into the red and I am all paid in full and subsequently reimbursed but I really would like to beg the question: why should a veteran have to incur anything on a tuition remission plan or policy. In turn this sounds more of reimbursement—semantics but still a wake-up call.

In addition to being a student, I'm also a father of 2, working full time and serving on two boards of non-profits. Managing my finances and being diligent of costs and spending is very important to me and my pursuit of extra schooling would not have been possible without the State's support. Overall I'm very grateful this bill exists and is taking care of thousands of WI Veterans. With some fine-tuning I'm really hoping we can get our service men and women more confident in the ability to pay and afford costs w/o a looming balance.