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*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform
State Senator André Jacque
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Chairman Sortwell and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 298, relating to license fee waivers for veterans' spouses.

Under current law, veterans are eligible for a fee waiver for certain licenses and certifications.

Unfortunately, while Wisconsin remains a leader in employing veterans, active duty military spouses face a 24% unemployment rate, and over 31% are working part-time even if they would prefer to work full-time. Blue Star Families 2016 survey estimated unemployment rates of military and veteran spouses combined to be 21 percent and in June 2017, Hiring Our Heroes released a survey on military spouses in the workplace citing an unemployment rate for active duty and veteran spouses of 16 percent, illustrating how military service inherently burdens the ability of a dual-income family from, in fact, being a dual-income family.

Research by the Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families finds that up to 35 percent of military spouses are employed in fields that require licensure, primarily in health- and education-related fields in high state workforce demand. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), "Military spouses may be deterred by the high cost of licensure, particularly those who have experienced frequent moves. To reduce the number of military spouses who leave the workforce because of these costs, licensing authorities can grant specific fee waivers to these individuals."

This bill expands eligibility to include the spouse of any veteran included in the current license fee waiver program.

This proposal has previously been supported by the Wisconsin American Legion, the County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs), the Wisconsin Economic Development Authority (WEDA), the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans and the Wisconsin Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and passed the Assembly Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform last session with an 8-0 vote and the full Assembly on a voice vote.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 298.