



# DUEY STROEBEL

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

## Testimony on SB 644

*January 17, 2018*

Chairman Testin and members of the Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Military Affairs and Senior Issues, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 644. It is an honor to join Rep. Cindi Duchow and others in bringing this bi-partisan legislation forward.

Approximately 10,000 men and women serve Wisconsin in both the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard. They are joined by hundreds of other reserve component service members in other branches at units across our state. 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 or local emergency.

Although state law includes robust protections for reserve component service members who must leave their job to serve, the protections for college students who must leave school to serve are less strong. SB 644 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 for 30 days or more before a student is entitled to relief. Often when the National Guard is summoned to duty in response to an emergency, the very nature of the situation 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 current option some students 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 SB 644, all post-secondary institutions, including trade schools, 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.

Third, 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 will not lose their "place in line," so to speak, when it comes to re-enrolling at a specific school or in a specific class.

Finally, this bill requires schools to give students, when possible, the chance to accelerate completion of a class if the call to active duty comes within 30 days of the conclusion of a class. Because we understand that the ability to accelerate completion of a class depends on the type of class involved and the resources required, we – the authors of the bill – support Senate

Amendment 1, which clarifies that the accommodation must be reasonably made. If such an outcome cannot be reasonably accommodated, then the student will be given one of the other two options outlined in the bill.

If passed, this bill will have a meaningful, positive impact on those in our state who serve in the reserve component of the military. According to the Department of Military Affairs, whom you will hear from later, 1,251 Soldiers and Airmen used the Wisconsin National Guard Tuition Grant program in Fiscal Year 2017. This grant pays out upon successful completion of a college course at or above the specified GPA. When Guard members are called to active duty, under current law, they could potentially be left paying for these courses without reimbursement.

Wisconsin is home to some great education institutions. Many of them work hard to accommodate service members, and with this bill we can work together to standardize protections for the men and women who stand ready to serve our state and our country whenever the call goes out.



# CINDI DUCHOW

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 99<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-3007  
Toll-Free (888) 534-0099

Rep.Duchow@legis.wi.gov  
P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708-8952

Committee on Workforce Development, Military Affairs and Senior Issues  
Public Hearing, SB 644  
January 17, 2018

Thank you Chairman and members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify on SB 644, relating to requirements for colleges when college students are called into active military service.

With the sacrifices our military members give to our state and country, it is important to ensure these brave men and women are treated with respect and are getting the services they need. When these service members are called into active duty, current law protects their employment status. Unfortunately, current protections for service members who are also college students are not as clear.

Specific to 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.

Recently, this situation hit home for our National Guard soldiers when the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team was mobilized in support of hurricane relief efforts under state active duty orders. National Guard members serving their country, who also happen to be college students, should not have to worry about what will happen to their tuition, as well as their financial future, if they are called upon to help our state and country.

It is for this reason, Senator Duey Stroebel and I have introduced SB 644. 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) Eliminating the requirement that protections apply only if the time of service exceeds 30 days.
- 2) Providing protections to students regardless of whether or not the call to active duty required the service member's consent.
- 3) Requiring 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.
- 4) Holding students harmless for re-registration or re-enrollment.

- 5) Requiring 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.

It is my hope that the Committee will support SB 644 in order to provide protections for military members who are also students.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Representative Cindi Duchow



Thank you Senate Chairman and fellow assembly members serving on the Committee of Veteran Affairs.

I am Major Bart Droessler with the Wisconsin Army National Guard serving as the State Education Officer.

I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 644. During this past year our Wisconsin Army National Guard was called upon to support statewide mobilizations to support Hurricane Irma. This short term state mobilization involved approximately 2600 Wisconsin Guardsman. Many of these soldiers were enrolled in various educational institutions.

167 were enrolled in State University Colleges

108 were enrolled in State Technical colleges

123 were enrolled in private colleges and apprenticeship Programs

These 398 soldiers represented approximately 15 percent of our mobilized force. Senate Bill 644 would provide additional protections for future soldiers called up for short term state mobilizations.

These measures will help our highly educated professional leaders and soldiers maintain the highest level of Readiness to be ready whenever called upon.

I strongly encourage support for SB 644.

Thank You.

MAJ Bartholomew Droessler  
WI Army National Guard  
G1 - Education Services Officer (ESO)  
2400 Wright Street  
Madison, WI 53704

608.242.3447 (o)  
724-3447 DSN