



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

JESSE JAMES

Dear Chairman Murphy and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to come before your committee today to discuss Assembly Bill 161.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear and testify before you regarding Assembly Bill 161. Late last year and extending into this year we had a government shutdown occur. This government shutdown impacted many lives, which included those veterans receiving educational benefits. Those receiving GI Bill benefits to attend our post-secondary schools were sometimes delayed in receiving such benefits. This had an impact on moving their education forward.

I read an article from Military Time Reboot Camp, dated January 19, 2018, and it stated, "The Veteran Affairs (VA) Department has a contingency plan in place for student veterans." This may be comforting, however when the shutdown happened later in the year, those calling in to the Veterans Affairs administrative branch received a busy signal. "If you're a GI Bill user, and you have a question — which happens frequently — if you call in, essentially you're going to get a busy signal," Hubbard said. Will Hubbard is the vice president of government affairs for Student Veterans of America.

Why would this occur? The VA administrative branch would be understaffed by thousands of employees, and education call centers and counseling services would be suspended. I can see how frustrating this would be for our veteran students in Wisconsin.

This bill would allow our veterans in Wisconsin to continue their education, register for their classes on time, without being charged late fees, and not have to drop their classes due to lack of payment from the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Congress was able to pass the Veterans Benefits and Transition Act, December 31, 2018. Assembly Bill 161 replicates language of federal law, and applies it to the State of Wisconsin. It will protect our student veterans by prohibiting the UW system or the technical college system from taking action against them due to financial aid being delayed.

Veterans should never have to find themselves in this type of position. They should not be penalized due to the shutdowns of our federal government, or listening to the "busy signals" from the Department of Veteran Affairs. Thank you for hearing Assembly Bill 161.



DALE KOOYENGA
WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

State Capitol · P.O. Box 7882 · Madison, WI 53707-7882 · (608) 266-2512

September 12, 2019

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
FR: Senator Dale Kooyenga
RE: Assembly Bill 161

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 161. This bill would prohibit any University of Wisconsin System school or technical college from taking adverse action against a student veteran as a result of the UW school's failure to receive payment of federal veterans tuition benefits by the tuition deadline.

At the end of 2018, thousands of veterans and military dependents across the nation were forced to wait longer than normal to receive their tuition benefits from the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA). As a result, several of these students were charged late fees, barred from registering for classes, or forced to drop courses until the payment was received.

Fortunately, Congress responded with passage of the Veterans Benefits and Transition Act, which was signed into law on December 31, 2018. The law requires that in order for a school to be approved for GI Bill benefits, they must adopt a policy that disallows the school from imposing a late fee, denial of access to facilities, or such penalties against a veteran or eligible dependent due to late payment of tuition or fees from the VA. Schools are then allowed to require students to provide documentation to ensure that they are entitled to GI Bill benefits.

Assembly Bill 161 provides further protection for students by replicating the federal law at the state level. Specifically, it prohibits any UW System school or technical college from taking adverse action against a student veteran whose financial aid package includes federal veterans tuition benefits based upon the benefits not being timely received.

By enacting this bill into law, we further prevent students from paying the penalty for the mistakes of the VA. Thank you again for hearing Assembly Bill 161 and I respectfully ask for your support.



Office of the President

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September 12, 2019

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

FROM: Ray Cross, UW System President

RE: Assembly Bill 161 Testimony - For Information Only

Thank you, Chairman Murphy and committee members, for holding this public hearing on AB 161, and thank you to Representative James and Senator Kooyenga for authoring this bill to support student veterans.

Student veterans make up 2.8% (4,774 students) of the student population at UW System institutions. We owe it to these students who served our state and country to provide access to a quality education, and to provide the necessary support to them and their families so they can succeed. The UW System offers a variety of services and benefits that veterans and their families can use, such as the Wisconsin GI Bill and the Federal GI Bill, among others. In addition, every institution has staff that specialize in providing support to these students. Our institutions promote awareness of these services and encourage students to use them if they are in need.

AB 161 puts into state statute a prohibition that prevents the UW System and Wisconsin Technical College System from taking any adverse action against a student who receives federal veteran benefits for tuition if the benefits are not paid to the institution by the institution's deadline for tuition and fees. We appreciate the authors for communicating with us on this legislation. UW System institutions are already compliant and do not take adverse action in these cases. At each institution, a veteran certifying officer works with the bursar to identify students receiving veterans benefits and to ensure that any tuition or late charges are deferred in cases in which benefits are delayed. Congress also passed the Veterans Benefits and Transition Act on December 31, 2018, at the federal level with the same type of prohibition.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide additional information on AB 161, and as a veteran myself, I appreciate any efforts to support veterans and their family members who attend our institutions to pursue their education.



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Analysis of AB 161/SB 142: Veteran Tuition Payments

Relating to: Late payment of tuition benefits for student veterans enrolled in the University of Wisconsin System or a technical college.

Authors: Representative James (R-Altoona) and Senator Kooyenga (R-Brookfield)

Overview:

This bill puts into state statute a prohibition that prevents the UW System and Wisconsin Technical College System from taking any adverse action against a student who receives federal veteran benefits for tuition if the benefits are not paid to the institution by the institution's deadline for tuition and fees.

Areas of Support:

- UW System institutions are already compliant and do not take adverse action in these cases.
- Student veterans make up 2.8% (4,774 students) of the student population at UW System institutions.
- The UW System offers a variety of services and benefits that veterans and their families can use, such as the Wisconsin GI Bill and the Federal GI Bill, and every institution has staff that specialize in providing support to these students.
- Similar protections exist at the federal level since Congress passed the Veterans Benefits and Transition Act on December 31, 2018.

Areas of Concern:

- No concerns identified.

Honorable David Murphy
Room 318 North
State Capital
PO BX 8953
Madison WI, 53708

RE: 2019 Assembly Bill 161 (*An Act to create 36.27 (7) and 38.24 (9)*)

Chairman Murphy, State Representatives,

It is first and honor and privilege to be asked to be here today and represent the State's veteran population and provide testimony on Assemble Bill 161. Thank you for your time in this matter as it has great significance to my family and myself.

As a former student veteran I am fully aware of the benefit that the tuition assistance, Veterans Rehabilitation and GI Bill programs present to returning veterans. Further, this group of students does not need the added stress of collections and state tax garnishment actions against them due to the process time that is associated with Federal programs. I do feel that the government's process is good, all though slow and at this time overwhelmed as it was following World War I and II.

I gained the experiences that challenge a student while trying to balance getting an education, home life and working. I had to overcome most all of the challenges of these programs through research and questioning to further my progress, with perseverance being my greatest ally. If it was not for my educational institution going the extra mile to assist me with navigation through the veteran system, I may not have finished my education. Only one time was I asked to look into a late bill because it had gone too long. Turns out the delay was my fault, I corrected it immediately and my institution was paid at the next process of payments.

If the undue hardship of late payments is placed on a veteran, most will stop going to school until they are right again with the institution. It is our nature to do what is right. This will extend their schooling process and delay their transition back into society and the work force. It may further drive them away from society into a job they do not like because they have to work during these delays. During this time away from school, families begin to grow and the need to support and protect them takes over the time needed to complete an education. If the position is satisfying some of the steps as outlined in "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs" they may become complacent and never finish school.

In my current position at a technical college I continue this process of navigating the veteran's educational system, by request of students. I also have navigated the State GI Bill system and have used that experience to compliment a veteran's family by helping them as well obtain an education through the state benefit program. All though this is not a direct connection to Assembly Bill 161 it is important to veterans to be able to take care of and better their family which in turn gives them a greater piece of mind.

GERALD E. VAN ERT JR.

Additionally, it is of great benefit for us to retain our veterans and train them for our local workforce needs within our great State. This is one of the greatest needs of returning veterans, to be part of society. You asked us to defend our great nation and we did, as volunteers and without hesitation. Now that we are home all we ask is for an education and a job, we feel that we can still contribute to society and be a viable part of our communities.

V/r

"Red"

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GERALD E. VAN ERT JR.

Honorable David Murphy
Room 318
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Madison, WI 53708

RE: 2019 Assembly Bill 161

Chairman Murphy, State Representatives,

I would like to thank you all for your time, and state that it is an honor and a privilege to be here in front of you today to provide my testimony on Assembly Bill 161. This Bill could potentially have a great impact on not only my family, fellow brothers and sisters in arms, but also myself.

After attending multiply technical colleges, in multiple states as a student veteran, I have become well versed in the use of tuition assistance for veterans. I was fortunate to never have any negative effects during my use of the Post 9/11 GI Bill while attending school. This proposed Bill will have a positive impact on future student veterans who are planning to attend schools throughout the state of Wisconsin. It will ease the burden of being punished for the federal government delaying benefits that were earned through blood, sweat and tears.

Many veterans exiting the military are struggling financially to make ends meet and provide for their family. The penalties for late payments being placed on the veteran can make things even harder and persuade them into different life choices, some of which could be for the worse. These fees being charged to the veteran, many times the issues stem from above the student, whether it be paperwork at the school's level or with the government. Many veterans, like myself, have sacrificed substantial amounts of time, energy, and finances for the country, state, and citizens within, and this is one way to give back to them.

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September 11th, 2019

Wisconsin State Capital
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Honorable Representatives,

On this day 18 years ago, a small contingency of terrorist changes the face of our Nation not seen since December 7th, 1941. In response to our Nation being under attack, we have utilized America's fighting force to fight Terrorism since 2001.

Many of these honorable American's return from War with futures yet to be untapped, they are future Mothers, Fathers, leaders, educators, business owners, and possibly elected officials. With the exception of becoming parents, a key passage way that is beneficial to their future success is education.

Personally, I can attest to this important phase of development. After serving in Iraq in the Infantry in 2004, 2005, 2009, and 2010. I retired from the United States Army in 2013 after 22 years of service. I contemplated where my future would lead me next; the most sensible decision was to utilize earned benefits from the GI Bill and return to college to finish my degree.

During this time, I was fortunate not to have educational funding interrupted by the inability of Washington DC Federal politics not being able to agree on legislative issues and forcing a government shutdown. I was fortunate not to be a victim of gridlock, however, our state has the opportunity to ensure this issue will not affect those that committed their life to our nation.



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Upon hearing of Assembly Bill 161, I immediately made contact with the AMVETS Department of Wisconsin Legislative Committee. Shortly thereafter, they advised me that they unanimously support this legislation.

Therefore, as the elected Commander of the State of Wisconsin for the AMVETS Organization entrusted to advocate for 350,000 Wisconsin veterans, I hereby endorse Assembly Bill 161. Furthermore, I ask all elected officials serving the citizens of Wisconsin advancing this Bill to appear on the desk of Governor Evers for his signature as expeditiously as possible.

Sincerely,

Michael Hanke

Commander

AMVETS Department of WI



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September 10, 2019

Chairperson Murphy and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities.

RE: Assembly Bill 161

On behalf of the County Veteran Service Officers Association of Wisconsin, thank you for the opportunity to voice our support for Assembly Bill 161 relating to student veterans' late payment of tuition benefits. Unfortunately, due to prior scheduled commitments, members of our leadership team are unable to testify in person at this hearing.

It is no secret the Federal VA Education Benefit Department and their Vocational Rehabilitation program move slowly in processing applications and authorizing payment. For obvious reasons the backlog of applications tends to be much greater at the start of each fall semester. To add to that processing time their software is archaic and fragile and at any time could have a catastrophic failure further disrupting the timely processing of student veteran aid applications.

Many of the students waiting for federal VA education benefits to pay their tuition are also using the Wisconsin GI Bill tuition remission benefits. Under the regulations governing use of the Wisconsin GI Bill, these student veterans must first use the Federal Post 911 GI Bill prior to using their state education benefits if they have eligibility (bringing in Federal dollars).

This bill would protect the student veterans from any adverse action due to late payment of tuition fees caused by the slow pace of the federal VA Education Benefit Department.

Respectfully submitted,

Rock Larson
Legislative Committee Chairperson
CVSO Association of Wisconsin



2019 Wisconsin Assembly Bill 161. Thursday September 12, 2019.

To: Mr./Madame Chair and Committee Members

From: Dr. Margo Keys, Vice President Student Services at Chippewa Valley Technical College, Eau Claire WI

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Assembly Bill 161.

Chippewa Valley Technical College is one of 16 technical colleges in Wisconsin. We deliver innovative and applied education to support the workforce of west central Wisconsin in an 11-county district. As the Vice President of Student Services, I am responsible for student services including enrollment services (Admission, Financial Aid, Records & Registration, Advising) Veteran services, Student Activities, Textbook and Food services, to name a few.

CVTC serves 11,000 credit students and 9,000 noncredit students. In this current fall term, CVTC has 136 student Veterans receiving federal Veteran benefits.

CVTC provides enhanced service levels for our Veteran students. Our goal is to simplify their transition to college so they can complete their degree and start their career. To simplify things we provide: (1) One point of contact for our veterans. Our Certifying Officer is conveniently located in our enrollment center. (2) Priority registration so service members can register before other students. (3) Veteran events on campus like our *Fall Veteran Meet and Greet* where they learn about important resources such as medical, state benefits and credit for prior learning options.

I support the proposed Wisconsin Assembly Bill 161. It aligns with the Federal Veterans Benefits and Transition Act of 2018. This bill helps CVTC stay true to our goal to simplify and add convenience for our Veteran students.

If a delay in federal Veteran payment occurs, our Certifying Officer works with the student and our finance office to defer payment. In these cases, we allow students to charge books to their account and offer the student emergency funds. Students transitioning from the military do not need their earned benefits to be an obstacle or sense of stress when starting their education.

I support the proposed Wisconsin Assembly Bill 161.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Margo Keys'.

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Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs

Tony Evers, Governor | Mary M. Kolar, Secretary

Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

August 12, 2019

Assembly Bill 161

The Department of Veterans Affairs is pleased to support Assembly Bill 161 as an added, explicit protection for Wisconsin's recipients of federal veteran education benefits.

In 1963 Congress authorized State Approving Agencies (SAA) to review, approve, and monitor the educational programs in their states to ensure the programs are effectively and efficiently administered in accordance with the provisions of federal law. The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs is contracted with the federal VA to serve as the State Approving Agency for Wisconsin.

Our SAA monitors 94 institutions of higher learning, which includes public and private universities and colleges, including technical colleges. At the end of May of this year, those institutions had 7831 students receiving federal VA education benefits. This number includes both veterans and family members.

As we reviewed AB 161, staff noted the bill would apply to about 75% of the students receiving federal VA education benefits. This is because Chapter 33 benefits – the Post-9/11 GI Bill – are the only federal benefits paid directly to the school; all other programs pay the student, who in turn pays the institution.

WDVA would like to thank Representative James, Senator Kooyenga, and the cosponsors for introducing this bill to add a layer of protection to the educational benefits earned by veterans.

Chairman Murphy, State Representatives,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of Assembly Bill 161 today.

As a student currently serving in the US Army Reserve as well as Army ROTC here at UW-Madison, I have firsthand experience working with veterans benefits. I believe the VA is doing an excellent job and helps service members navigate through the forms and helps us get all that we are granted by the State and Federal Government.

For my education, I use the Wisconsin GI Bill, Chapter 1606 Montgomery GI Bill, as well as ROTC stipend. The Wisconsin GI Bill covers all of my tuition costs, up to 128 credits. Often times I receive my tuition reward late, and the University adds a late payment. The VA pays any fees for the state benefits however, which takes a large burden off of me. Federal benefits however are paid out directly to me, and are sometimes late. If I was using only federal benefits I would have to pay the late fees and other charges myself, which I may not be able to do.

With the large number of veterans and current service members from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq the VA has many claims to process every school year. The veterans should not have to worry about paying late fees or kicked out of the University because their benefits were delayed.

Joining the military wasn't easy for me, I went through years' worth of meetings and turning in forms before I was accepted. This was because I had cancer when I was 8, and was told I would not be able to join, despite my success on the high school track and cross country teams. I did not give up though because I wanted to be able to serve my country. Veterans and current service members didn't join just for the benefits. They join out of selfless service.

If service members and veterans are forced to leave or delay school because of delays in benefits, they might not go to school at all. Lack of education can start a negative spiral that could have drastic consequences in a veteran's life.

Veterans have fought and made many sacrifices for the security of the United States, the least we can do is secure their right to an education.

Thank you for your time and I ask you to support Assembly Bill 161.

Alex Franke