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*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage
Senator André Jacque
January 30, 2020*

Chairman Stafsholt and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 673, the Disabled Veteran Sporting Opportunities Act, relating to the disability rating at which veterans qualify for certain hunting and fishing authorizations and exemptions from state park and trail admission fees.

The **Disabled Veteran Sporting Opportunities Act** modifies and standardizes the disability rating required for a disabled veteran to qualify for certain authorizations issued by the Department of Natural Resources and for exemptions from certain admission fees. Under current law, the qualifying disability rating is either 50 or 70 percent depending on the authorization or exemption, causing considerable confusion in accessing and administering these programs. The bill provides for a qualifying disability rating of 30 percent for these authorizations and exemptions.

Wisconsin Conservation Congress leadership has been consulted on this legislation and is supportive, based on past input and proposals that have gone through the WCC process to allow our disabled veterans to enjoy the outdoors.

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 673.



Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage

2019 Assembly Bill 673

The disability rating at which veterans qualify for certain hunting and fishing authorizations and exemptions from state park and trail admission fees

January 30, 2020

Good morning Chairman Stafsholt and members of the Committee. My name is Linda Olver, and I am the Bureau of Customer and Outreach Services' Policy Advisor with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on 2019 Assembly Bill 673 (AB 673) relating to the disability rating at which veterans qualify for certain hunting and fishing authorizations and exemptions from state park and trail admission fees.

Under current law, a resident veteran receiving disability compensation benefits due to a disability rating of at least 70% or greater for a service-related disability may purchase an annual fishing license for the reduced fee of \$3. Current law also establishes that a resident veteran receiving disability compensation benefits due to a disability rating of at least 50% or greater for a service-related disability may purchase a disabled veteran recreation card, which includes small game, fishing, and entrance to state parks and state trails, for \$7. In addition, current law provides that resident veterans receiving disability compensation benefits due to a disability rating of at least 50% are eligible to purchase a spring turkey harvest authorization for any management zone or time period, even if authorizations are sold out. AB 673 would modify the eligibility criteria for these approvals by decreasing the required disability rating to 30% or greater for a service-related disability.

Providing a single minimum required disability rating for the discounted resident disabled veteran approvals is a simplification that will likely reduce confusion for resident disabled veterans and sales agents alike. Adjusting the required minimum disability rating eligibility criteria so it is consistent across products eliminates the uncomfortable situation where a license sales agent must explain to a resident disabled veteran that their disability is significant enough to meet the eligibility criteria to purchase a disabled veteran recreation card, but that the veteran is not "disabled enough" to qualify for the disabled fishing license.

Decreasing the minimum disability rating percentage required for the resident disabled veteran annual fishing license and the resident disabled veteran recreation card increases the number of resident veterans eligible for an annual fishing license and disabled veteran recreation card at the discounted fee. With additional resident disabled veterans eligible for a discounted fishing license or disabled veteran recreation card, the Department and its license agents may spend more time issuing these discounted products. However, the extent to which transactions may increase is indeterminate, as some of the newly-eligible resident disabled veterans may have previously purchased full-price approvals. The Department anticipates existing sales channels offering these products (retail agents and DNR Service

Centers) will be able to accommodate a potential increase in the number of sales transactions for disabled resident veteran approvals.

As detailed in the Fiscal Estimate, this legislation could result in a net annual revenue decrease of up to \$468,700 for the Fish and Wildlife and Parks accounts. The ultimate fiscal impact is indeterminate, however, since the Department cannot predict the discounted products disabled resident veterans may purchase, nor does the Department have the capacity to analyze disabled veteran historical buying behavior since we do not currently maintain disability ratings within customer accounts.

One-time implementation costs are required to implement the provisions of this bill. Approximately \$7,000 is required to modify the licensing system, train Customer Service Representatives, and update web pages, license agent resources, and public communication materials.

Since the bill before us today would improve consistency amongst qualifying disability criteria for disabled resident veteran products, I wanted to respectfully bring one item to your attention at this time. 2019 Assembly Bill 79 establishes a discounted Conservation Patron license for veterans with a 50% or greater service-connected disability. Should that bill be passed and enacted, there would again be resident veteran products authorized by statute with varying minimum disability rating eligibility criteria.

On behalf of the Bureau of Customer and Outreach Services, I would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



FULFILLING OUR PROMISES
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

Department of Wisconsin

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
MATTHEW KEMPAINEN
DAV SENIOR VICE COMMANDER
DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON SPORTING HERITAGE
WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY
JANUARY 30, 2020**

Chairman Stafsholt, Ranking Member Milroy and Members of the Committee:

Good morning! Thank you for allowing DAV (Disabled American Veterans) this opportunity to present our view on Assembly Bill 673 (AB 673) Relating to: *the disability rating at which veterans qualify for certain hunting and fishing authorizations and exemptions from state park and trail admission fees.*

As you may know, DAV is a non-profit veterans service organization (VSO) comprised of over 1 million wartime service-disabled veterans, nationwide. In Wisconsin, we have nearly 15,000 members.

Each year, DAV helps more than 1 million veterans with Benefits, Transportation, Advocacy, Employment, and Volunteerism. Over Eighty percent (80%) of our total expenditures go to Service.

All our members were wounded, injured or became ill while in service to our nation, many of them severely. They have sacrificed much in defense of our country and state.

Under current law, vehicle admission receipts and state trail passes for a state forest, state park, state natural area or to enter a state trail are not required for state veterans with service-connected disability ratings of 70 percent or greater, as determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Also under current law, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must issue wild turkey hunting licenses and tags to state veterans with a VA service-connected disability rating of 50 percent or greater.

Additionally under current law, the DNR must issue an annual disabled person fishing license to state veterans with a VA service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or greater.

Furthermore under current law, the DNR must issue a disabled veterans recreation card which entitles the holder to a resident small game hunting license and a resident fishing license for veterans with a VA service-connected disability ratings of 50 percent or greater.

AB 673 reduces the qualifying VA disability ratings for each of these categories to 30 percent.

Thank you Rep. Tusler for cosponsoring AB 673.

Pursuant to DAV National Resolution No. 202¹, DAV Wisconsin supports AB 673. This concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you or other Committee Members may have.

¹ Resolution 202, *Support the adoption of programs and legislation to reduce barriers to employment, education and full use and access to other benefits earned through service in the military* passed at DAV National Convention held in Orlando, Florida on August 6, 2019.