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August 27, 2019

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children and Families

FROM: Ray Cross, UW System President

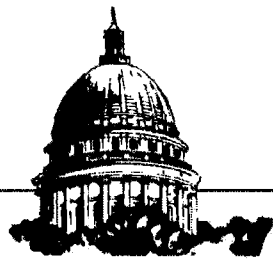
RE: Senate Bill 142 Testimony - For Information Only

Thank you, Chairman Kooyenga and committee members, for holding this public hearing on SB 142, and thank you to Senator Kooyenga and Representative James 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.

SB 142 puts into state statute a prohibition that prevents the UW System and 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 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 SB 142, and as a veteran myself, I appreciate any efforts to support veterans and their family members who attend our institutions to pursue their education.



**DALE KOOYENGA**  
WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

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August 27, 2019

**TO:** Members of the Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children and Families  
**FR:** Senator Dale Kooyenga  
**RE:** Senate Bill 142

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 142. 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.

Senate Bill 142 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 Senate Bill 142 and I respectfully ask for your support.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

# JESSE JAMES

August 27, 2019

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children and Families

FROM: Representative Jesse James *JJ*

RE: Senate Bill 142

I appreciate the opportunity to appear and testify before you regarding Senate Bill 142. 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. In time for the 2019 winter/spring semester to begin. Senate Bill 142 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 Senate Bill 142 and I thank you for your support.