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*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs and Constitution and Federalism
State Senator André Jacque
December 14, 2021*

Chairman Wimberger and Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 226, legislation with strong bi-partisan support which Rep. Sortwell and I have introduced to expand eligibility for the Wisconsin Veterans Status on an operator's license or identification card. I appreciate the assistance of the DVA, CVSOs, Veterans Service Organizations and several legislators in the drafting and amending of this proposal, which passed the Assembly Transportation Committee unanimously.

All 50 states now offer a military veteran designation that can be printed on state-issued driver's licenses or IDs. Wisconsin's veterans' designation was first implemented seven years ago and has quickly become popular as an easy way for veterans to demonstrate proof of their military service without having to carry around their DD-214 form or other documents with sensitive personal information. There is no cost to veterans for including the veteran designation, although there has been confusion for some veterans who have gone to the DMV for a new license and had their request for a veterans identifier declined due to not meeting the requisite active duty requirements in current law. For example, with limited exceptions neither National Guard duty nor service in a reserve unit qualifies for being able to include the veteran identifier on a Wisconsin driver's license.

SB 226 would expand eligibility for the veterans identifier to include a former member of the U.S. armed forces who received a discharge under honorable conditions, or a former member of a reserve unit of the U.S. armed forces or the national guard who met the requirements for satisfactory completion of his or her initial term of obligated service and received a discharge of either honorable or under honorable conditions. As amended, this legislation would also allow for the rightful recognition of our Hmong Veterans with the veteran identifier, utilizing the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act.

Over the years, a number of veterans from my district have contacted my office to express their frustrations with the lack of clarity on what currently qualifies under the law and why their service prevented them from displaying their veteran status on their ID. About three years ago, I was pleased to learn from the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs was putting a proposal similar to SB 226 together, and since first introducing this legislation last session I have heard from many more veterans from across the state as well.

Earlier this year I had the honor of requesting a U.S. flag be flown over our State Capitol building in memory of retired Army Reserve Sgt. Dale Manteufel, who had just passed away from an extended illness. Sgt. Manteufel served in the Wisconsin Army Reserves from 1960 to 1966, received several marksmanship awards and was called up during the Milwaukee riots. Upon being honorably discharged, he went on to a distinguished career as a hydraulic designer and held several patents. His family is rightfully proud of his service, as he was, but he was not eligible for Wisconsin's current veteran's identifier- something SB 226 would correct for those like him as a simple way to provide respect and express gratitude.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 226.



SHAE SORTWELL

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 2nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Hearing Testimony

Senate Committee on Veteran and Military Affairs and Constitution and Federalism

December 14, 2021

Senate Bill 226

Chairman Wimberger and members of the Senate Committee on Veteran and Military Affairs and Constitution and Federalism – thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on SB 203, relating to indication of veteran status on an operator's license or identification card.

Senate Bill 226, as amended in the Assembly, expands the eligibility for the veterans identifier on state-issued driver's licenses or ID's to include any current or former member of the U.S. armed forces, including in the reserve component who was not dishonorably discharged, or those qualified under section 4 of the federal Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act (Hmong-Lao veterans).

Since 2014, veterans in our state have the option to identify themselves and their service to our country by a red "VETERAN" identifier printed on their Wisconsin driver license or state identification (ID) card from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

Under current law, this veteran's designation is only available to individuals who have served a specific period of active duty in the U.S. armed forces.

Senate Bill 226 is a small, no cost change, which will allow **all** of Wisconsin's veterans to have the recognition they deserve with the option to have the veteran identifier printed on their state driver's license or ID. Anyone serving is important and we do not want that to be ignored. All veterans deserve the chance to be recognized for their service.

I want to thank the committee for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions members of the committee may have.

The American Legion,
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Founded on four pillars:
• Veterans Affairs &
Rehabilitation
• National Security
• Americanism
• Children & Youth

The mission of The American Legion, Department of Wisconsin is to provide service to veterans, their families and their communities.

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding this hearing on SB-226. I want to thank the authors and their staffs for the work they have put into this proposal.

The American Legion is the largest Veterans Service Organization in the Nation. In Wisconsin, we have over 50,000 members. We have just over a century of advocating for veterans and service members.

The role of the active and inactive reserve and National Guard has changed in the last two decades. Members of these units have more required of them than any other time since WWII. They are deployed both overseas and domestically on a regular basis. They should be recognized.

This bill provides some of that recognition. There is no fiscal impact to the state with this bill. It does not change the eligibility for Chapter 45 benefits. It only identifies an individual as a veteran on a driver's license or state issued identification card. The identifier may enable someone to get a discount at some private sector establishments especially on Veterans Day.

As drafted, this bill is an improvement over the bill introduced in the last legislature. I have received feedback from several of our members in favor of this proposal advancing. There has also been a concern that there is a minority of individuals who have been transferred to the Individual Ready Reserve for not participating in the required drills. If they have prior service beyond initial training, they are still eligible for the identifier. This is not a problem. The National Guard recruits directly from the population. The Navy Reserve recruits from those with prior service. The guard has a small portion of members who receive their initial training and do not continue in drill status. These individuals should not be able to obtain the identifier. I believe we can work this issue out with those concerned and work with the authors for an amendment.

The American Legion thanks you for addressing this issue and providing recognition to those who serve.

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul Fisk
Legislative Chair
The American Legion, Department of Wisconsin



State of Wisconsin
2021 - 2022 LEGISLATURE

LRBa0471/P1
ZDW:emw

PRELIMINARY DRAFT - NOT READY FOR INTRODUCTION
ASSEMBLY AMENDMENT ,
TO ASSEMBLY BILL 203

1 At the locations indicated, amend the bill as follows:

2 **1.** Page 2, line 4: delete lines 4 to 7 and substitute:

3 “1. A current member of the U.S. armed forces or the national guard or, if the
4 person qualifies for a loan from the U.S. department of veterans affairs under 38 CFR
5 part 36, a current member of a reserve unit of the U.S. armed forces.

6 2. A former member of the U.S. armed forces or the national guard who received
7 a discharge under honorable conditions or, if the person qualifies for a loan from the
8 U.S. department of veterans affairs under 38 CFR part 36, a former member of a
9 reserve unit of the U.S. armed forces who received a discharge under honorable
10 conditions.”.

11 **2.** Page 2, line 16: delete “forces.” and substitute “forces. An applicant with
12 service in a reserve unit of the U.S. armed forces shall also provide a certificate of

1 eligibility for a loan under 38 CFR part 36 from the U.S. department of veterans
2 affairs.”.

3 (END)