



STATE SENATOR

Eric Wimberger

DISTRICT 30

Testimony on Senate Bill 517

Senate Committee on Universities and Technical Colleges

Wednesday, December 15, 2021

Chairman Roth and Members,

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on Senate Bill 517, which would modify the residency requirement for the tuition and fee remission program for certain veterans and their spouses and children enrolled in University of Wisconsin System institutions and technical colleges.

Under current state law, qualifying veterans, their spouses and 17- to 25-year-old children are eligible for full remission of tuition and fees at UW System schools and technical colleges for up to eight semesters or 128 credits, whichever is longer. It is currently required that a veteran must be a resident of this state when he or she entered military service or for at least five consecutive years immediately before they register at a UW System school or technical college.

This bill will help provide veterans with more opportunities to utilize Wisconsin's GI Bill by lowering the residency requirement from five years to three years. Three years is also generally when the federal GI Bill ends.

With a national workers shortage sweeping the country, it is vitally important we do everything we can to attract hardworking, motivated people to move to our state and join our workforce. By allowing veterans to access their benefits in a timely manner, we believe this legislation will help bring more people to Wisconsin.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our testimony this morning.

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JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony for the Senate Committee on Universities and Technical Colleges Senate Bill 517 Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021

Thank you Chairman Roth and committee members for holding a public hearing and allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 517, bipartisan legislation that eases the residency requirements for military veterans who would like to take part in Wisconsin's GI Bill program.

It is always commendable for us to help veterans who have sacrificed so much to ensure that we remain the land of the free. While SB 517 does just that, it also tries to address the worker shortage crisis we are facing right now in our state.

With this bill, I am confident that we will be able to encourage more of this desirable population to move to Wisconsin and make our state a permanent home. As a result, we will have more people here to fill the nearly 130,000 jobs that are currently available.

SB 517 attempts to accomplish this by modifying the residency requirement for the tuition and fee remission program for certain military veterans and their spouses and children who are enrolled in University of Wisconsin System institutions and technical colleges.

Under current state law, qualifying veterans and their spouses and 17- to 25-year-old children are eligible for full remission of tuition and fees at UW System schools and technical colleges for up to eight semesters or 128 credits, whichever is longer.

It is currently required that a veteran must be a resident of this state when he or she entered military service or for at least five consecutive years immediately before they register at a UW System school or technical college.

SB 517 lowers the five-year requirement to three years. We decided to make this change because the federal GI Bill ends after three years. This will ensure that a student can take advantage of the state program without having their education interrupted.

Our legislation also eliminates the provision that a student must be a Wisconsin resident at the time of entry into active duty as a condition of eligibility for the nonresident tuition exemption for veterans. By making this change, veterans will be able to qualify for in-state tuition at the time they enroll at a UW System institution.

This should also make it more attractive for veterans and their families to move to our great state and help our economy recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. It truly is a win-win for everyone.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony and I hope that you will consider supporting SB 517. I can now answer any questions if you have them.

The American Legion,
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wilegion.org



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-517 relating to tuition and fee remission for certain veterans and their dependents. I also want to thank the authors and their staffs for the work they have put into this important 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.

Senate Bill-517 is another tool for improving the economy of Wisconsin. Current law is not an incentive for recently discharged service members to come to Wisconsin. We see many employers looking for skilled employees. We need to encourage the future workforce to come to Wisconsin not discourage them.

The reduction of the residency requirement is a good compromise position. Resident tuition is always lower than non-resident. The soon we can get the new residents of Wisconsin paying resident tuition the better. This is a good way for industry to sell this state to skilled workers. The same reasons apply to the remission of fees.

Another important change this bill provides for is the reduced cost to educated dependents. This is important to separating service members. My spouse may need to complete the requirements for Wisconsin certification in a profession. My children may be starting their post-secondary school. Education. It needs to be affordable if I am going to move to a position in Wisconsin.

We must remember this bill is about tools for ensuring Wisconsin has sufficient numbers of skilled people to grow the economy.

We thank you for your consideration of this issue and urge you to recommend to the Senate adoption.

Respectfully Submitted,


Paul Fisk

Legislative Chair

The American Legion, Department of Wisconsin



University Veteran Services

STUDENT AFFAIRS

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Assembly Committee on Universities & Technical Colleges

2021 Senate Bill 517

Tuition and fee remission or grants for certain veterans and their dependents enrolled in the University of Wisconsin System and nonresident tuition exemption for certain veterans

December 15, 2021

Chairman Roth and members of the Senate Committee on Universities & Technical Colleges:

The University of Wisconsin-Madison thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Senate Bill 517, relating to tuition and fee remission or grants for certain veterans and their dependents enrolled in the University of Wisconsin System, nonresident exemption for certain veterans.

My name is Joe Rasmussen, and I am the Director of University Veteran Services at UW-Madison. I am a veteran of the United States Marine Corps and served on active duty from 2002 to 2006. I am an alum of UW-Madison, where I earned my Master of Social Work and I received my bachelor's degree in Social Work from UW-Whitewater. I just started my 10th year supporting military connected students at UW-Madison.

The mission of University Veterans Services is to support the Wisconsin Experience of military-connected students and their families by fostering personal transitions and pursuit of academic success. We certify both state and federal GI bills and advise students on the use of education benefits and assist students with applying for new benefits. University Veterans Services also develops programming to build community among our military-connected students, including peer support programs. In 2020, there were over 800 student veterans and over 2,000 students who are children and spouses of veterans or current service members enrolled at UW-Madison. There were 670 students using G.I. Bill benefits to attend school at UW-Madison.

We would like to express our appreciation to Senator Wimberger and Representative Kitchens for sharing our goal in creating and facilitating a seamless process for veterans and their families to navigate the benefits process. We remain focused on working with legislators on changes at the state level that focus attention on attracting and retaining the best student veterans and military-connected students to UW-Madison and institutions of higher education in Wisconsin.



University Veteran Services

STUDENT AFFAIRS

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

The legislation would lower eligibility from five years to three years the durational residency requirement for veterans and their spouses and children under the tuition and fee remission program and other grant programs under certain circumstances. While this is certainly a change that would align the Wisconsin G.I. benefits with the timeline at the federal level, there are several considerations:

- Punitive nature of GPA requirements vs. using Satisfactory Academic Progress
- Types of programs the benefits can or cannot be used for, such as study abroad
- Eligibility process and applying through WDVA and on campuses
- Staffing levels: There is a need to keeping pace with staffing levels which directly and indirectly support military connected populations across the entire university

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the impact this legislation would have on UW-Madison. If you have any questions, please reach out to me (Joe.Rasmussen@wisc.edu) or UW-Madison Director of State Relations Crystal Potts at crystal.potts@wisc.edu or (608) 265-4105.



Office of Government Relations

Van Hise Hall
1220 Linden Drive
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DATE: December 15, 2021

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

FROM: Deej Lundgren, UW System Interim Associate Vice President for Government Relations

RE: Testimony on Senate Bill 517

Thank you, Chair Roth and committee members, for providing the UW System (UWS) an opportunity to submit testimony on Senate Bill 517 (SB 517). We thank the authors of this legislation for addressing a desire to attract more veterans and their families to attend Wisconsin higher education institutions.

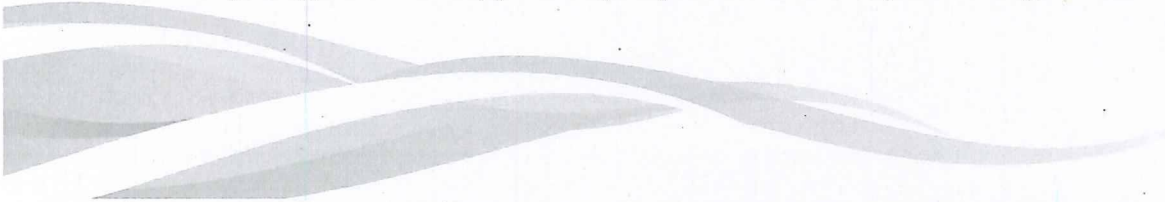
The UW System, with 13 universities, has one of the most robust programs for veterans in the country. We strive to provide a welcoming higher educational setting for service members, veterans, and their families. Each of our universities has a veteran service department that provides comprehensive support to veterans. Dedicated campus staff assist veterans with transferring credits, navigating benefits, and connecting veterans with each other and the campus community.

UWS already provides qualifying veterans, spouses, and children full tuition and fee remission up to eight semesters or 128 credits. This year, UWS has provided nearly \$27 million in tuition and fee remissions to veterans and their qualifying family members. This sets the record for tuition remission, which has increased every year since 2010. Since 2016, the yearly remission amount for veterans is over \$11 million. Over the same period, child and spousal remissions has increased from \$10 million in 2016 to a record of \$15 million in 2021. A table of payments for the past five years is attached.

Currently, a non-Wisconsin veteran is required to have residency in Wisconsin for five years prior to entering military service or before registering at a UW System school to receive this benefit. This requirement for the non-Wisconsin veteran also extends to allow a spouse or child to receive the tuition and fee remission. Senate Bill 517 lowers the residency requirement to three years, expanding access to this benefit to more veterans and their families.

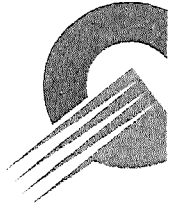
Senate Bill 517 also provides an opportunity for more veterans to access in-state tuition rates. The bill eliminates the requirement that a veteran be a Wisconsin resident when entering active duty to receive resident tuition rates. Again, this will expand access to our institutions for more veterans who now reside in our state.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on this legislation.

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of several overlapping, wavy, light-colored bands that create a sense of movement and depth.

UW System Veteran, Spouse, and Children Remission Payments

<u>Year</u>	<u>Veterans, Spouses and Children</u>	<u>Total Remissions & Supplemental Payments</u>	<u>State Reimbursement</u>	<u>Difference/UW Paid Costs</u>
2017	3,651	\$ 23,927,757.58	\$ 4,717,038.57	\$ 19,210,719.01
2018	3,676	\$ 24,511,334.91	\$ 4,845,136.00	\$ 19,666,198.91
2019	3,808	\$ 25,885,221.59	\$ 4,811,118.00	\$ 21,074,103.59
2020	3,878	\$ 26,625,644.85	\$ 4,961,093.55	\$ 21,664,551.30
2021	4,042	\$ 27,771,023.87	\$ 5,310,899.23	\$ 22,460,124.64



GREATER GREEN BAY
CHAMBER

Testimony in support of SB 517

By Rick Sense - Vice President of Development and Government Affairs

Greater Green Bay Chamber

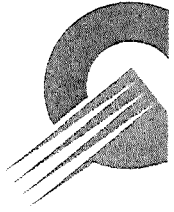
December 15, 2021

Walk through any of Greater Green Bay's downtown areas or drive through any of our industrial parks and you're more likely than not to see help wanted signs posted in the windows of shops and restaurants or plastered on the sides of manufacturing plants. Not only in Green Bay, but across all of Wisconsin, businesses are facing an unprecedented shortage of workers as thousands of jobs are left unfilled and employers across industries are struggling to find workers. However, this is not just a Wisconsin phenomenon as most other areas across America are also facing this problem. Workers are needed and skilled workers are in even higher demand.

At the Greater Green Bay Chamber, we have been working to address this situation. We have established multiple strategies to combat this problem and attract talent to our area from areas other than Northeastern Wisconsin. One area where we have seen success with this approach has been within the veteran community. Working with organizations like Green Bay's Mission Wisconsin, veterans are specifically being recruited to choose Wisconsin to seek new career paths. Veterans are workers that have the needed skills that can be further developed and applied to the products being manufactured, developed, and produced by Wisconsin manufacturers and businesses. Wisconsin is veteran ready.

However, despite being veteran ready, Wisconsin has an opportunity do more to attract the brave women and men that have served our country. The Greater Green Bay Chamber, along with organizations like Mission Wisconsin, applaud lead author Sen. Wimberger, Rep. Kitchens in the Assembly, and the many other sponsors and co-sponsors of this legislation looking to improve the Wisconsin GI Bill. By modifying the five-year requirement to three years this bill will ensure that a student's education is not interrupted. Additionally, by eliminating the provision that a student must be a Wisconsin resident at the time of entry into active duty as a condition of eligibility for the nonresident tuition exemption for veterans, those that served will be able to qualify for in-state tuition when they enroll in a UW System institution. These changes will make Wisconsin a much more attractive destination point for veterans to pursue educational opportunities, raise a family and start a career and as a result, help alleviate Wisconsin's workforce shortage.

The WI GI Bill is the best educational benefit in the country for Veterans and their families. Aligning the residency requirement with other traditional residency requirements is a great move for Talent Attraction for the following reasons. The economic impact of the veteran population just from Federal dollars coming into the state is upwards of 955 million dollars annually (2018 GDX Data). Keeping the provision that Federal educational benefits must be exhausted before using the state's benefits allows for our post-secondary schools to capitalize on those service members with existing benefits while not penalizing them for using those benefits during their



GREATER GREEN BAY
CHAMBER

service. It also allows us to better attract families to the state prior to starting post-secondary education. With 200,000 to 250,000 transitioning service members and their families transitioning every year, attracting the service member and family to live and work here while providing for their family's educational needs in our public and private post-secondary system is truly a win for Wisconsin.