

From: Senator Romaine Robert Quinn  
To: Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs  
Re: **Testimony on SB 251 with an amendment**  
**Relating to: Members of the Council on Veterans Programs**  
Date: August 29, 2023

Thank you to the Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs for hearing this bill today, Senate Bill 251, which relates to the membership of the Council on Veterans Programs.

By statute, the Council on Veterans Programs (CVP) advises the Board of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Veterans Affairs on “solutions and policy alternatives relating to the problems of veterans.” [Wis Stat. 45.03(3)(a)]. The council consists of numerous representatives of various veterans organizations who are appointed by those organizations for one-year terms.

I have introduced an amendment to the bill that would substitute the one year terms for staggered 3-year terms. The amendment also adds an additional member to include a veteran services coordinator who is employed at a college or university that is a member of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU). A list of the current members is attached with my testimony, along with a list of the inactive organizations, which are statutorily required to participate on the council.

SB 251 as amended removes seven inactive groups from the council and adds three members in their place: veteran service coordinators employed at a Wisconsin technical college, at a University of Wisconsin System institution, and at a college or university that is a member of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

By removing and updating the participating organizations, we can make the CVP more relevant and responsive to today’s needs for our state’s veterans. I ask you to please support SB 251.



# DIANNE H. HESSELBEIN

STATE SENATOR • SENATE DISTRICT 27

Testimony of Senator Dianne Hesselbein  
Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs  
SB 251: Members of the Council on Veterans Programs  
August 29, 2023

Chairman Testin and members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 251. I am pleased to be an author of this important legislation. As stated in the analysis, this bill changes the makeup of the Council on Veterans Programs, ensuring relevant perspective and important recommendations by Wisconsin veterans.

Under current law, the Council on Veterans Programs advises the Board of Veterans Affairs and Department of Veterans Affairs on solutions and policy alternatives relating to the challenges of veterans. The council consists of representatives of various veterans organizations who are appointed by those organizations for one-year terms.

This bill adds a veteran services coordinator employed at a Wisconsin technical college and a veteran services coordinator employed at a University of Wisconsin System institution. SB 251 also updates council participation by removing representatives of veterans' organizations that are inactive, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The inactive organizations identified in the bill are:

- Navy Club of the U.S.A.
- American Ex-prisoners of War.
- Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
- Catholic War Veterans of the U.S.A.
- The Army and Navy Union of the United States of America.
- U.S. Submarine Veterans of World War II.
- Blinded Veterans Association of Wisconsin.

A constituent, who is a veteran, contacted me in the fall of 2020 suggesting changes to the Council on Veterans Programs. He was interested in adjusting the membership and focus of boards, committees, and state agencies to better match today's veteran population. This recommendation makes sense, and I have introduced this legislation in every session since, each time making various revisions based on constituent recommendations.

I participated in a zoom meeting December 15, 2022 with members of the Council on Veterans Programs, and shared my plan to reintroduce legislation to change the make-up of the council. The members expressed strong support for the proposal. Following the call, the office of former DVA Secretary Mary Kolar sent an updated list of groups that are no longer active. Those groups are included in the bill.

The Assembly Veterans and Military Affairs Committee passed the companion bill, AB 231 as amended. The amendments from AB 231 were rolled into one as an amendment to SB 251 that is before the committee. The amendment would add an additional member to the council that is a veteran services coordinator who is employed at a college or university that is a member of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities and who is selected by the president of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities or his or her designee. In addition, the amendment adds provisions that would modify the term length served by all council members from one-year terms to staggered three-year terms. These changes were the result of recommendations after the Assembly Veterans and Military Affairs Committee hearing.

Please join me in supporting SB 251, a bill that will keep the Council on Veterans Programs staffed by active veteran organizations in tune with the needs of today's Wisconsin veterans.



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# TONY KURTZ

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 50<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## 2023 Senate Bill 251

*Relating to: Members of the Council on Veterans Programs*

August 29, 2023

Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs

Thank you, Chairman Testin, for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 251, and thank you to the members of the committee for taking the time to hear my testimony.

The Council on Veterans Programs provides insight to the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that Wisconsin is meeting the needs of all those who have served. Occasionally, it has been necessary over the years to update the membership list to reflect the modern composition of Wisconsin's veteran community. Senate Bill 251 does just that. It removes organizations that have been inactive or have dissolved and allows for new voices to join the council.

The intent of this bill is to expand membership to include as diverse a range of knowledge as possible. Currently, there is no representation in the council from student veteran focused organizations. This bill addresses that oversight by adding Veteran Service Coordinators from the UW-System, the Wisconsin Technical College System and the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

The organizations whose seats are being removed, such as the US Submarine Veterans of World War II, have left their council seat vacant for years. In many cases, this is because their particular demographic in Wisconsin has dwindled beyond the capacity needed to maintain an active organization. As the veteran community shifts through the generations, we should strive to keep membership of the council dynamic to best represent their changing needs. This bill is a necessary step in that direction.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 251. I'd be happy to answer any questions.





Office of Government Relations

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DATE: August 29, 2023

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans, and Military Affairs

FROM: UW System Office of Government Relations

RE: Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 251

Thank you, Chair Testin and committee members, for giving the UW System (UWS) an opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 251 (SB 251). Thank you to the bill authors for bringing this important legislation forward.

This bill would make common sense changes to the current membership of the Wisconsin Council on Veterans Programs. There are currently eight inactive groups statutorily required to be members of the Council. SB 251 would remove the eight inactive groups and replace them with two active members: veterans services coordinators at both the UWS and the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). Senate Amendment 1 also adds a representative from the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU).

The Council on Veterans Programs advises the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) on policy issues and solutions related to veterans. The veterans services team at the UWS is well suited to expertly advise the DVA on veteran policy. This legislative change is long overdue and will help our state as we continue to face legislative issues regarding veteran affairs.

The UWS veterans service department is at the forefront of current veteran policy concerns. The team is on the ground working with veteran students as they navigate the many challenges associated with prior military service. As an example of the UWS's commitment to veteran causes, total UW costs for veteran tuition remission in FY23 are nearly \$30M. The state reimbursed about \$5.4M of that, leaving over \$24M to be funded by UWS. UWS supports Wisconsin's veterans in numerous ways and has a vested interest in our state's veteran affairs.

SB 251 does not affect the 18 other active members of the Council. Instead, this legislation removes the inactive groups that are listed on the Council's membership page as "inactive/vacant."

UWS stands ready to partner to resolve current veteran issues affecting Wisconsin. Letting our veterans services team have a seat on the Wisconsin Council on Veterans Programs will help veterans across our state for years to come.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill.