



**Senate Bill 546: Admission of Spouses to State Run Veterans Houses**  
**Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs**  
**Testimony of Senator Joan Ballweg**  
**January 10, 2024**

Good morning, Chair Testin and members of the committee. Thank you for hearing this important piece of legislation.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Senate District is home to one of Wisconsin's three state-operated veterans homes, located at King. The other veterans homes are located in Chippewa Falls and Union Grove. When I last visited the home, I discussed resident admissions with the homes' staff. This legislation was introduced at the homes' request.

Under current law, spouses of veterans cannot be admitted to state-run veterans homes before the veteran. This bill makes a simple change and allows veteran's spouses to be admitted to the homes prior to the veteran, or without the veteran ever being admitted to the home.

At my most recent visit to the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, we discussed that this simple change was necessary because there are veterans entering the home for care even though they do not need it, just to ensure their spouse can be admitted.

The language of the bill matches that of chapter 45.51 of state statute in that the veterans homes *may* admit non-veterans to the home. This clarity is necessary as federal funding requires each of the homes to have no more than 25% of their population be non-veterans. Exceeding this cap would result in the loss of federal funding for the operation of the homes. This bill allows spouses of veterans to be admitted to the state homes for care but does not require their admittance. After several discussions with the Legislative Fiscal Bureau and the Department of Veterans Affairs, we learned that the homes are nowhere near the 25% cap of non-veteran residents and that this bill and current state statute do not require state veterans homes to exceed this cap.

The population of each of the state run veterans homes in December of 2023 were:

- King – 288 residents
  - 237 veterans
  - 51 non-veterans
- Chippewa Falls – 68 residents
  - 63 veterans
  - 5 non-veterans
- Union Grove – 71 residents
  - 67 veterans
  - 4 non-veterans

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 546.



# KEVIN PETERSEN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Chairman Testin and honorable members of the Senate Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony on SB 546 which allows for the admission of a veteran's spouse, without the admission of a veteran, in veterans homes in Wisconsin.

In Wisconsin, veteran's homes are open to eligible veterans, certain eligible service members, their parents, spouses, and surviving spouses.

If any home is partially funded with federal funds, 25% of the occupants at any one time may be veteran-related family members, i.e., spouses, surviving spouses, and/or gold star parents, the remaining 75% of the occupants at the facility must be veterans. The homes are not open to the general public.

The Veterans Home at King, Union Grove, and Chippewa Falls are state veteran's homes that are open to Wisconsin veterans and their spouses.

Under current law, a spouse of a veteran may not be allowed into one of the veteran homes in the state if the actual veteran is not a resident in one of the facilities, but a surviving spouse or parent could be.

Senate Bill 546 will allow spouses of eligible veterans to be admitted to state veteran facilities before, or without, the admittance of the veteran.

If the spouse of the veteran meets all of the eligibility requirements that the actual veteran, surviving spouse, or parent are required to meet, there is no reason not to allow the spouse to enter and receive the care that our veterans are afforded.

*Rep. Petersen*

*"Veterans - we cannot; we will not, we must not forget who they are. For they reflect America. Whether we welcome them back to civilian life upon leaving the military or we ensure their comfort in their waning years, we have an obligation to those who have risked their all for all of us".*





KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO  
**AMERICA'S VETERANS**

## Department of Wisconsin

**STATEMENT OF  
AL LABELLE  
BENEFITS PROTECTION TEAM LEADER  
DISABILITY AMERICAN VETERANS (DAV)  
DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON LABOR, REGULATORY REFORM, AND  
VETERANS AND MILITARY AFFAIRS  
WISCONSIN STATE SENATE  
JANUARY 10, 2024**

Chairman Testin, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Good morning! Thank you for allowing DAV (Disabled American Veterans) this opportunity to present our view on SB 546.

DAV is a Congressionally Chartered, VA Accredited, nonprofit charitable veterans service organization (VSO) comprised of over 1 million wartime service-disabled veterans, nationwide. In Wisconsin, we have over 14,000 members.

For more than a century, DAV has been dedicated to a single purpose: empowering our nation's heroes, their spouses, and dependents to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity.<sup>1</sup> All our members are wartime wounded, injured or ill veterans, many of them severely. They have sacrificed much in defense of our freedoms.

Currently, the spouse of a veteran is eligible for State Veterans Home admission only if the veteran is a resident of said Home. This has led to some awkward situations where a healthy veteran seeks admission so the spouse will receive badly needed care. The veteran may be a Wisconsin resident or come from out-of-state.

For veterans with a service-connected disability rating of at least 70% or with a rating of total disability based on Individual Unemployability, the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) pays will pay for the majority of their nursing Home care.<sup>2</sup>

SB 546 provides admission to a State Veterans Home to a qualified spouse, despite the veterans not being a resident. To be qualified, the spouse must be incapacitated due to a disability or age, not convicted of certain crimes, submit a financial statement to Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), and the Home can provide the needed care.

For the non-veteran spouse, the State Veterans Home will lose the \$129.27 Federal VA payment. It is anticipated that there will be no dramatic increase in the number of non-veteran spouses. The Homes are under a Federal 25% limit for non-veteran residents.

DAV has provided service to veterans for over 100 years. We have come to realize that it is not only the veteran who serves, but the spouse who also serves. In many cases, they suffer from severe physical and emotional trauma.<sup>3</sup>

Pursuant to the DAV Statement of Policy and DAV National Resolution 103, we support SB 546 and urges the Committee and the Legislature to pass the bill in an expeditious manner.

This concludes my testimony on behalf of DAV, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions your or other Committee Members may have.

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<sup>1</sup> DAV Statement of Policy

<sup>2</sup> Veterans Benefits Manual (2012 edition) Section 10.7 (page 771)

<sup>3</sup> Resolution 103, *Support Programs to Provide psychological and Mental Health Counseling Services to Family Members of Veterans Suffering From Post-Deployment Mental Health Challenges or Other Service-Connected Conditions* passed at DAV National Convention assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey on August 5-8, 2023.