



## Legislative Fiscal Bureau

One East Main, Suite 301 • Madison, WI 53703 • (608) 266-3847 • Fax: (608) 267-6873

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April 29, 2009

Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #820

### **Mission Welcome Home (DVA-- General Agency Provisions)**

[LFB 2009-11 Budget Summary: Page 668, #9]

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#### **CURRENT LAW**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) is required under s. 45.03(13)(j) of the statutes, to provide materials to eligible persons who administer a program to identify, train, and place volunteers at the community level to assist National Guard members, members of the U.S. armed forces, and members incorporated in the U.S. armed forces, and their spouses and dependants, who return to Wisconsin after serving on active duty about state and federal benefits for veterans and their families. Base funding for the program is \$17,000 GPR annually. The appropriation authority sunsets on June 30, 2009. The program authority should have been modified to match this date, but the statutes regarding DVA's required duties expired on June 30, 2007.

#### **GOVERNOR**

Provide \$94,900 SEG in 2009-10 and \$105,400 SEG in 2010-11 and 1.0 SEG position annually for Mission Welcome Home. Costs would be supported by revenues from the veterans trust fund.

Modify the current law sunset date for the Mission Welcome Home program from June 30, 2007 [under 2007 Wisconsin Act 20 the date should have been modified to June 30, 2009 but the statutes do not reflect this change] to June 30, 2011. Delete the current GPR-supported Mission Welcome Home appropriation and instead provide funding for Mission Welcome Home under the veterans trust fund-supported veterans assistance program appropriation. Base level GPR funding for Mission Welcome Home (\$17,000 GPR annually) is removed as a non-continuing item under standard budget adjustments.

Specify that no more than \$201,000 SEG annually may be expended from this appropriation for Mission Welcome Home. Base level funding under the veterans assistance program, which does not currently fund Mission Welcome home, is \$279,900 SEG annually.

## **DISCUSSION POINTS**

1. The Department states that funding under this program is provided for the following: (a) \$51,300 SEG in 2009-10 and \$68,300 SEG in 2010-11 for salary and fringe benefits for 1.0 agency liaison position for Mission Welcome Home; (b) \$37,100 SEG annually for supplies and services; (c) \$6,500 SEG of one-time funding for a computer, software, a workstation and office furniture and equipment. Of the amounts provided for supplies and services, DVA indicates that \$20,000 SEG annually would be used to support promotional materials and outreach activities.

2. The Department currently has 1.0 agency coordinator position that is split funded from the Veterans Homes institutional operations and the program operations for the veterans trust fund and the mortgage loan repayment fund that serves as a liaison for Mission Welcome Home. This position has been vacant since July, 2008, though the DVA indicates that it is close to filling the position.

3. The Department indicates that the additional position provided under AB 75 would assist DVA in making veterans of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) aware of federal and state benefits. The position would also act as a liaison that would connect veterans with veterans service organizations, county, state, and federal resources, and health care facilities.

4. The Department states that the current Mission Welcome Home coordinator serves as the sole liaison to work with public agencies and the private sector to assist service members and their families transition from active duty back to Wisconsin Communities. The Department states that, "due to the ambiguous and extreme nature of the combat duty and atypical operational tempo, the needs of the GWOT veteran are multifaceted and often need to be addressed in subsequent steps rather than in a single reintegration brief. Assisting these veterans through the process is difficult, time consuming and continuous, but has proven to be successful. Multiple points of contact will ease the burden and will help to prevent burnout of a single point of contact who can be easily overwhelmed by the demand."

5. Under 2005 Wisconsin Act 25, the Legislature approved one-time funding of \$25,000 GPR annually for Mission Welcome Home for the 2005-07 biennium. The Department expended \$17,000 GPR in 2005-06 and \$17,800 GPR in 2006-07.

6. For 2007-09, the Legislature extended the program for another two years, but reduced funding to \$17,000 GPR annually. The Department expended \$11,800 GPR in 2007-08 and has expended \$12,600 GPR in 2008-09 through March 23, 2009.

7. Given the large number of service members returning from active duty in conflict areas, it could be argued that there is additional need for ensuring that veterans receive medical,

educational, and financial assistance made available through the state and federal government.

8. In addition, some may argue that there is still need for Mission Welcome Home services, since service members continue to serve in conflict areas in the Middle East and Afghanistan. With the complexity of issues facing returning service members, there is significant need for veterans' advocates and information providers. If the Committee believes that additional support for this activity is justified, it could approve the Governor's recommendation.

9. Alternatively, it could be argued that DVA already has a position dedicated to Mission Welcome Home programs. In addition, the Department maintains an Office of Public Affairs and a Division of State Veterans Benefits at the state level and provides funding for county veterans service offices at the local level. This is in addition to services provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. While the Department indicates that this position would work in conjunction with and act as a bridge between these resources, it could be argued that the efforts of such a position would be duplicative.

10. Further, the Department has, to date, never expended the resources that have been made available for Mission Welcome Home. The Department has also left the current Mission Welcome Home liaison vacant for eight months. It could be argued that doubling the current number of positions and the amounts expended on supplies and services are not warranted at this time. The Committee may wish to delete this recommended funding and position.

11. Under the bill, the program would be extended for two years, but the position would be added to permanent classified staff. If the Committee wishes to continue the program through the 2009-11 biennium, and wishes to support the additional liaison position, it may wish to consider providing the position on a two-year project basis. Since, the program is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2011, the positions funded through this program could also sunset on that date. In conjunction with the 2011-13 budget, the Committee could review whether U.S. armed forces are continuing to serve during armed conflict periods at rates significant enough to necessitate continued support of this program.

12. The Committee could also consider providing only \$17,000 SEG annually, which would provide continued supplies and services for information distribution to support the current agency liaison position. Under this alternative, 1.0 SEG position and increased funding for the program could be deleted.

13. Finally, the amounts provided under the bill would be funded under the biennial veterans assistance program appropriation which is supported from the veterans trust fund. Under the bill, no more than \$201,000 SEG annually may be expended from this appropriation for Mission Welcome Home, even though no more than \$105,400 SEG is provided for the program in either fiscal year.

14. The State Budget Office indicates that it was not the Governor's intent to provide flexibility between the veterans assistance program and Mission Welcome Home. Therefore, the

Mission Welcome Home program could be funded from a separate annual SEG appropriation, which would ensure that the Legislature would determine the amounts made available for each program.

## ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to provide \$94,900 SEG in 2009-10 and \$105,400 SEG in 2010-11 and 1.0 permanent position annually for Mission Welcome Home and to do the following: (a) extended the program sunset state date to June 30, 2011; (b) delete the current GPR-supported appropriation for Mission Welcome Home; and (c) specify that no more than \$201,000 SEG annually may be expended from the veterans assistance program appropriation.

2. Modify Alternative 1 to specify that the position would be a two-year project position scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2011.

3. Modify the Governor's recommendation by providing a total of \$17,000 SEG annually for Mission Welcome Home. [Delete \$77,900 SEG in 2009-10 and \$88,400 SEG in 2010-11 and 1.0 SEG position annually compared to AB 75.]

ALT 3	Change to Bill	
	Funding	Positions
SEG	-\$166,300	- 1.00

4. Modify Alternative 1 or 3 to specify that the Mission Welcome Home program be funded under a separate appropriation funded from the veterans trust fund.

5. Delete the Governor's recommendation.

ALT 5	Change to Bill	
	Funding	Positions
SEG	-\$200,300	- 1.00

Prepared by: Darin Renner