



SHAE SORTWELL

STATE REPRESENTATIVE * 2nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Hearing Testimony
Assembly Committee on Transportation
April 27, 2021
Assembly Bill 203

Chairman Plumer and members of the Assembly Transportation Committee – thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on AB 203, relating to indication of veteran status on an operator's license or identification card.

Assembly Bill 203 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, a reserve unit of the U.S. armed forces, or the National Guard that was not dishonorably discharged.

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 veterans of the U.S. armed forces, which is defined in state statute to include individuals who have served a specific period of active duty in the U.S. armed forces.

Assembly Bill 203 is a small, no cost change, which will allow **all** of Wisconsin's veterans to have the recognition they so 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 recognize 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.



ANDRÉ JACQUE

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*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Transportation
State Senator André Jacque
April 27, 2021*

Chairman Plumer and Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation,

Thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Assembly Bill 203. Rep. Sortwell and I have introduced this legislation to expand eligibility for the Wisconsin Veterans Status on an operator's license or identification card.

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.

AB 203 would expand eligibility for the veterans identifier to include any current member of the U.S. armed forces, a reserve unit of the U.S. armed forces, or the national guard, or a former member of the U.S. armed forces, a reserve unit of the U.S. armed forces, or the national guard who received a discharge under honorable conditions.

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 AB 203 together, and since first introducing this legislation last session I have heard from many more veterans from across the state as well.

Last week 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 AB 203 would correct for those like him as a simple way to provide respect and express gratitude.

Thank you for your consideration of AB 203.

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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 AB 203. 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



THE AMERICAN LEGION
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Ladies and Gentleman,

I served in the Wisconsin National Guard in the 2-127th infantry for 6 years and I attempted to get the veteran designation on my driver's license. I was surprised to learn that according to the state of Wisconsin I did not qualify for veteran status. I learned that only if my unit was activated would I be eligible for veteran designation. When our young men and women enlist in the Wisconsin National Guard they go to basic training and advanced training for their military occupational specialty (MOS), they agree to serve our state in the event of an emergency and our nation when called upon.

The unit I was in has been deployed overseas several times since my enlistment ended. I knew that at any time during my service I could have also been called to duty because I was properly trained and a fully qualified member of the U.S. Cavalry Scout platoon for the Headquarters Company of 2-127th infantry.

Just because all members of the Wisconsin National Guard are not activated doesn't mean that they are not trained and ready to serve. Quite to the contrary, they stepped up and are prepared when others were unwilling or unable. Please consider allowing members of the Wisconsin National Guard and Reserve to receive veteran status in accordance with 2019 Assembly Bill 80.

Thank you,

Scott Gauthier