



## Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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May 11, 2017

Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #658

### **Crisis Intervention Services and Women Veterans Study (Veterans Affairs)**

[LFB 2017-19 Budget Summary: Page 474, #12 and Page 475, #14]

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#### **CURRENT LAW**

The Department of Veterans Affairs administers a variety of grant and assistance programs for veterans. The costs of administering grant and assistance programs, as well as general administrative costs of the Department, are generally funded through the Department's "administration of loans and grants" appropriation. The base funding for that appropriation, which is supported from the veterans trust fund, is \$8,983,500. Although this appropriation supports what could be considered "administrative" costs of the Department, it also is the source of various direct services, as so cannot be considered exclusively for administration. For instance, the Department uses this appropriation to support the cost of veterans claims officers, who work directly with veterans on applying for federal veterans benefits.

#### **GOVERNOR**

*Crisis Intervention Services.* Provide \$60,000 SEG in 2017-18 and 2018-19 in one-time funding from the veterans trust fund to support a crisis intervention services pilot program for veterans in Kenosha and Racine counties.

*Women Veterans Study.* Provide \$20,000 SEG in 2017-18 from the veterans trust fund to support a study on the needs of women veterans in Wisconsin.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

1. This paper provides a discussion of two one-time funding initiatives addressing the needs of veterans. Funding for both initiatives would be provided from the veterans trust fund

(VTF), in the Department's administration of grants and loans appropriation. Because of ongoing concerns regarding the sufficiency of VTF revenues, the Committee may wish to carefully consider proposals for new VTF spending. To that end, this paper provides a description of the proposed funding initiatives.

2. Under the crisis intervention services initiative, the administration anticipates contracting with Kenosha County to hire a full-time crisis intervention specialist for veterans in Kenosha and Racine counties. The crisis intervention specialist would help connect veterans with existing public programs and organizations that provide mental health and substance abuse services, as well as provide follow-up case management. Since the funding would be provided on a one-time basis in the 2017-19 biennium, the program is envisioned as a demonstration of the impact of providing crisis services in this manner.

3. In testimony before the Committee, the DVA Secretary indicated that the crisis intervention services demonstration project would seek to fill an unmet need. Many veterans with a need for mental health or substance abuse treatment are either unaware of the resources available to veterans to serve these needs, or have difficulty accessing help. As a result, the symptoms associated with acute mental illness or drug addiction are left untreated, leading to suicide, drug overdose, and mental anguish.

4. Similarly, the women veterans study is intended to address an unmet need. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that there are approximately 34,000 women veterans in Wisconsin, accounting for approximately 9% of the total number of veterans in the state. According to the Secretary's testimony before the Committee, the demographic profile of women veterans, as well as the issues women veterans face, are different than men veterans. As an example, the Secretary noted that women are more likely to have experienced sexual harassment while serving in the military, which can be a source of continuing distress after leaving service. The study would investigate these issues and identify any policies that may be needed to address the unique needs of women veterans.

5. While the bill would provide funding for both initiatives, it would not provide any statutory authorization for either. Instead, DVA would pay the costs for these initiatives from the administration of loans and grants appropriation under the Department's general authority to administer veterans programs.

6. Funding provided in the administration of loans and grants appropriation that is unspent or unencumbered at the end of each fiscal year is lapsed to the veterans trust fund. The Department has lapsed at least \$0.7 million from this appropriation each year for the past several biennia. In 2015-16, the lapse from this appropriation was just under \$1.1 million. These lapses are perhaps an indication that the appropriation is more than sufficient for the Department's current programs. If the Committee is concerned about providing new funding for the two initiatives, the funding increase could be eliminated and the Department could, instead, be directed to allocate funding, up to the amounts that the bill would provide, for these initiatives from the base appropriation (Alternative A 2 or B 2).

7. While there may be justifications for these two initiatives, both the Department and

counties have existing programs and initiatives that arguably have been established to address these issues. As an example, during the 2015 session the Legislature created the nonprofit grant program to provide a total of \$250,000 annually to organizations that assist veterans. Several of the grants under this program have gone to projects or organizations addressing the mental health needs of veterans. Likewise, under the veterans assistance program (also known as the veterans housing and recovery program), the Department provides direct assistance to veterans facing a number of circumstances that have or could lead to homelessness. According to the Department's administrative rules for the program, among the circumstances addressed by the program are acute or chronic physical or mental health problems. In addition to DVA programs, each county has a county veterans service office to provide assistance specifically to veterans, and every county human service agency is required to have an emergency mental health services program.

8. If the Committee determines that funding should not be provided or allocated for one or both of these items, these items could be deleted (Alternative A 3 or B 3). The Department would then have to use existing programs and funding for these or similar initiatives.

**ALTERNATIVES**

**A. Crisis Intervention Services**

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to provide \$60,000 SEG in 2017-18 and 2018-19 in one-time funding from the veterans trust fund to support a crisis intervention services pilot program for veterans in Kenosha and Racine counties.

<b>ALT A1</b>	<b>Change to</b>	
	<b>Base</b>	<b>Bill</b>
SEG	\$120,000	\$0

2. Delete the proposed \$60,000 SEG annual increase to the appropriation for administration of grants and loans and instead direct DVA to allocate up to \$60,000 annually from that appropriation for a crisis intervention services demonstration program.

<b>ALT A2</b>	<b>Change to</b>	
	<b>Base</b>	<b>Bill</b>
SEG	\$0	- \$120,000

3. Delete provision.

<b>ALT A3</b>	<b>Change to</b>	
	<b>Base</b>	<b>Bill</b>
SEG	\$0	- \$120,000

**B. Women Veterans Study**

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to provide \$20,000 SEG in in 2017-18 from the veterans trust fund to support a study on the needs of women veterans in Wisconsin.

<b>ALT B1</b>	<b>Change to</b>	
	<b>Base</b>	<b>Bill</b>
SEG	\$20,000	\$0

2. Delete the proposed \$20,000 SEG increase in 2017-18 to the appropriation for administration of grants and loans and instead direct DVA to allocate up to \$20,000 in the 2017-19 biennium from that appropriation for a study of the needs of women veterans in Wisconsin.

<b>ALT B2</b>	<b>Change to</b>	
	<b>Base</b>	<b>Bill</b>
SEG	\$0	- \$20,000

3. Delete provision.

<b>ALT B3</b>	<b>Change to</b>	
	<b>Base</b>	<b>Bill</b>
SEG	\$0	- \$20,000

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