

DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS
JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

July 25, 2017

Senator Alberta Darling, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Finance
317 East, State Capitol

Representative John Nygren, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Finance
309 East, State Capitol

Dear Senator Darling and Representative Nygren:

We are writing today to respectfully request that the Joint Finance Committee convene as soon as possible to reopen the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) budget. Because these matters are both time-sensitive and concern the care of our veterans, we hope you will understand the critical nature of the conversation we need to have and notice a meeting for this week.

Since the committee acted on the DVA budget in May, we have learned that the homeless veterans program at Union Grove and King is slated to lose federal funding. We have significant concerns about the fact that DVA has stated that they could not fund this program past December 2017, and we believe that homeless veterans deserve a commitment from the state to do everything possible to ensure their success.

We have also learned that Secretary Zimmerman is pursuing offering fewer beds at the Veterans Home at King. While we understand that the proposed bed decrease is due largely to the chronic staffing shortages at King, this could have a significant impact on both residents and other DVA programs – particularly given the department's reliance on the surplus generated at King to supplement the Veterans Trust Fund over the years. We would like the committee to examine how the bed decrease could affect our veterans, including the care they receive, the access issues veterans looking for a care facility may encounter, and the effect on the DVA budget.

Given the fact that the state budget is now over three weeks past due and we have not been given notice of an executive session, we are confident the committee has the time to immediately give these two veterans issues the attention they deserve.


We look forward to your timely response and the opportunity to address these issues on a bipartisan basis. After all, if the state cannot commit funds to our homeless and elderly veterans first, then there should not be any available funds to argue over voucher expansions or business tax exemptions.


Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


Sen. Lena Taylor
4th Senate District


Sen. Jon Erpenbach
27th Senate District


Rep. Gordon Hintz
54th Assembly District


Rep. Katrina Shankland
71st Assembly District