

4-12 Failed

Senator Taylor
Senator Erpenbach
Representative Taylor
Representative Hintz

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Veterans Trust Fund Condition and Other Related Items
[LFB Paper #701]

Motion:

Move to adopt Alternative C1 of LFB Paper #701, which would transfer \$8,000,000 in 2015-16 and \$13,500,000 in 2016-17 from the general fund to the veterans trust fund.

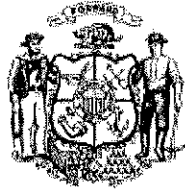
In addition, modify a current statutory provision that authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to transfer unencumbered program revenue balances from state veterans homes program revenue appropriations to the veterans trust fund by prohibiting a transfer unless the transfer is approved by the Joint Committee on Finance under a 14-day passive review process.

Note:

This motion would transfer \$21,500,000 in the 2015-17 biennium from the general fund to the veterans trust fund, an amount estimated to be needed to maintain solvency of the fund in the 2015-17 biennium. In addition, the motion would require the Joint Committee on Finance to approve any transfers of unencumbered balances from program revenue appropriations for the veterans homes to the veterans trust fund.

[Change to Bill: \$21,500,000 GPR-Transfer; \$21,500,000 SEG REV]

Posted By:
Wheeler Reports, Inc.



DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

March 16, 2015

Secretary John Scocos
Department of Veterans Affairs
201 West Washington Avenue
Madison, WI 53707

Secretary Scocos,

While you were not asked to appear before the Joint Committee on Finance (JCF) during the scheduled agency briefings, there were a number of issues related to the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) budget that came up after publication of the Legislative Fiscal Bureau summary that we would like you to address in a reply.

One of the biggest issues for the DVA and all of the veterans in Wisconsin is the long term stability of the Veterans Trust Fund. The Governor and Legislature have a responsibility to those who have courageously served our country. The long term stability of the Veterans Trust Fund should be a top priority. In the last budget, Governor Walker and the Legislature transferred funds from the Veterans Homes revenue to the Veterans Fund. These revenues are derived from an exemption from the Nursing Home Bed tax, the Federal "per diem" paid to facilities that care for Veterans, the higher "state rate" for reimbursement for Medicaid and private pay from Veterans. For these reasons, there is an approximate \$30 million in surplus generated from the Veterans Homes over the past 3-4 years. Expenditures in the 2015-2017 budget for the Veterans Fund exceed revenues by \$27.7 million.

- If your department is taking all of this money from patient care funds is our patient care truly meeting the needs of the veterans we serve?
- Has the deficit ever been this great without infusing the Veterans Fund with GPR?
- How much profit is the DVA collecting from each specific nursing home they operate that serves veterans in Wisconsin?
- If this is the way you are going to continue to fund the Veterans Fund shouldn't JCF approval be required so we can discuss the funding shifts at a public forum?

The cut to the Veterans Tuition Reimbursement Program is of great concern. The fund was not fully used in the last biennium which is presumably the state's reasoning behind the cut. However, perhaps we should look into why Veterans are not using this program.

- Has the DVA effectively reached out to the Veterans community to try to encourage their participation in higher education?
- Are their currently campaigns to raise awareness about this opportunity among returning veterans?

Our Veterans deserve our support in every possible way. The Veterans Tuition Reimbursement Program exists to provide Veterans with the educational opportunities they may have missed out on while fighting overseas. It is our responsibility to not only give them the opportunity to participate in such a program, but notify them that such a program exists. It seems outreach is needed to have this program reach its full potential.

Thank you for your work to ensure our veterans receive the respect and care they deserve after serving our country. We look forward to working with your agency in this budget process and hope we can find ways to improve the services we provide to our veterans.

Sincerely,

LENA C. TAYLOR
State Senator
4th District

CHRIS TAYLOR
State Representative
76th District

JON ERPENBACH
State Senator
27th District

GORDON HINTZ
State Representative
54th District

cc Governor Scott Walker, Senator Alberta Darling, Representative John Nygren