



DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS
JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

November 13, 2017

Secretary Daniel J. Zimmerman
Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs
201 West Washington Avenue
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Secretary Zimmerman:

We are writing regarding the 13.10 request submitted to the Joint Committee on Finance for the extension of 8.0 FTE project positions in the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP) on behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). These positions formally ended on September 29, 2017 with the discontinuation of federal grant funding.

We value the services VORP provides to homeless and at-risk veterans. That's why we advocated for continued funding for VORP in the biennial budget. However, we have a number of questions about the timing of this request and the future sustainability of the program after the federal funding lapses. Earlier this year, the state nearly lost federal funding for housing for homeless veterans due to the department's failure to meet updated grant requirements, despite warnings from the federal government a year prior. As such, we are not confident that the department is fully prepared to meet the needs of the veterans whom VORP serves once the program expires.

We have raised an objection to this request and have asked that the Joint Committee on Finance review the request at an upcoming meeting. However, we would be happy to withdraw our objection if the department provides us answers to the following time-sensitive questions by December 1, 2017:

- On what date did DVA originally submit this request to the Department of Administration (DOA)? Can you explain why the request was not referred to the Joint Committee on Finance until October 24, 2017 – almost a month after the positions expired?
- With DVA's position authority for VORP having expired in September, how has the department supported these positions pending Joint Committee on Finance approval?
- What is DVA's concrete plan to meet our state's need for the services that VORP currently provides? How will DVA ensure that there is no lapse in access to the services that homeless and at-risk veterans rely on? Has DVA considered replacing the expiring federal funding with state funding, as proposed in one of our budget motions?

We look forward to your timely response and appreciate your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Sen. Lena Taylor
4th Senate District

Sen. Jon Erpenbach
27th Senate District

Rep. Chris Taylor
76th Assembly District

Rep. Katrina Shankland
71st Assembly District

CC: Sen. Alberta Darling and Rep. John Nygren, Joint Finance Committee Co-Chairs