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Rep. Hesselbein: Democratic lawmakers introduce legislative package to honor Wisconsin's veterans

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Democratic Lawmakers Introduce Legislative Package to Honor Wisconsin's Veterans

Dems call for audit of Veteran's Trust Fund, introduce legislation that would benefit state's veterans

Madison – With Veterans Day being recognized and celebrated this weekend, a group of Democratic legislators introduced four bills today aimed at honoring, assisting, and empowering Wisconsin's veterans. The bills call for waiving and lowering state fees for things like driver's licenses and access to our state parks. Other bills in the package would acknowledge the role PTSD can play when a veteran returns home from service while another would streamline connecting veterans and National Guard members to affordable higher education opportunities. A list of the proposals are as follows:

LRB 0338/1 relating to: considering post-traumatic stress disorder as a mitigating factor in sentencing certain criminal offenders.

LRB 4662/1 relating to: resident tuition for certain members of the Wisconsin

National Guard or a reserve unit of the U.S. armed forces enrolled in the University of Wisconsin System.

LRB 4656/1 relating to: waiving operator's license fees for disabled veterans.

LRB 0339/1 relating to: vehicle admission receipts issued to certain members of the military.

Additionally, Rep. Amanda Stuck (D-Appleton) circulated a letter for co-sponsorship calling for the state's Legislative Audit Bureau to conduct an audit of the Veterans Trust Fund.

"An audit of the Veterans Trust Fund is absolutely necessary so that we know why money is being transferred away from the direct care of our veterans to pay for the Department's administrative costs," stated Rep. Stuck. "The Veterans Trust Fund must be transparent and clear about where the money is going, so that the Legislature can adequately address this issue to make sure that the trust fund is solvent in the future without relying on transfers from veterans nursing homes."

Rep. Don Vruwink (D-Milton), is lead author of legislation that would allow courts to consider PTSD as a mitigating factor in sentencing and a bill that would waive driver's license fees for veterans with service-related disabilities.

"As much as we pay tribute to our military sons and daughters on Veterans Day, there clearly are failings in the support and services we provide to them in civilian life," Vruwink said. "These bills show our gratitude to veterans who sometimes are short-changed."

Rep. Beth Meyers (D-Bayfield) said, "I'm proud to support this entire legislative package that calls for commonsense ways to say thank you to our veterans. There is always more we can do to advocate for those who have served our state and our country in our Armed Forces and I hope legislative leaders will take a serious look at moving these proposals forward in a timely manner."

Author of LRB 4662/1, a bill that would grant in-state tuition rates to National Guard members based in Wisconsin from the day they arrived, Rep. Christine Sinicki (D-Milwaukee) also called for these bills to be taken up before the conclusion of the legislative session saying, "These bills range in scope from ensuring we are recognizing the hardship some veterans face in their return to civilian life, to simply

saying ‘thank you’ to those that decided to serve our country. Streamlining affordable educational opportunities for our service members while they are stationed in Wisconsin is practical policy proposal I believe it will help Wisconsin retain service members after their service concludes.”

Rep. Hesselbein (D-Middleton), the ranking-Democrat on the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs concluded, “I want to thank all our service members and veterans a happy Veterans Day. We should never stop working to move our state forward on behalf of our veterans and I am hopeful this legislative package will be seriously considered by the majority party prior to the adjournment of the 2017-18 legislative session.”