

Rep. Sargent: Legislature shouldn't get too comfortable after latest LAB audit on Wisconsin Veterans Home at King

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(MADISON) – Today State Representative Melissa Sargent (D-Madison), ranking Democratic Assembly member on the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, expressed her optimism about the results of the nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB)'s audit of the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King ("King"), which is operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). The audit ([report 17-14](#)) is the second phase of the LAB's evaluation of King, prompted by [reports of gross mistreatment and mismanagement](#) which surfaced last year.

"Let's not get too comfortable," said Sargent. "While I'm cautiously optimistic about today's performance audit results, there's still plenty of work for us to do in the Legislature to ensure our veterans are receiving care with the dignity and respect they deserve—there are still unanswered questions about King's finances, why it continues to see understaffing and turnover, why it's generating tens of millions in revenue, and whether it's using the revenue it generates to put money back into services and programs to actually help our veterans."

Today's audit highlighted that King is still spending a significant portion of its operating expenditures on wages and fringe benefits, which comprise 80% of its

operating expenditures. According to the audit, King is also generating \$56 million in excess revenue, while still facing serious staffing shortfalls with 46 full-time positions remaining vacant.

“We also have to ensure there continues to be legislative oversight,” Sargent suggested, “And that includes removing DVA’s authority to unilaterally transfer money to the Trust Fund or Loan Repayment Fund without legislative approval, which is a provision unanimously approved by the Joint Finance Committee that should absolutely remain in the 2017-19 biennial budget and be signed by Governor Walker.”

The audit released today comes on the heels of the DVA [nearly losing \\$1 million in annual federal funding for homeless veterans](#), and follows a financial audit ([report 17-8](#)) released earlier this year, which revealed \$55 million has been transferred from King over the last decade to programs that do not directly benefit King while the home was understaffed and care for veterans deteriorated. Despite these alarming results, co-chairs for the Joint Legislative Audit Committee still have yet to hold a public hearing on the audit released in May.

“Our veterans have earned the right to access affordable, exceptional care and services at our VA hospitals, and I think the Legislature and the Joint Legislative Audit Committee still have plenty to keep us busy to make sure that’s a reality for veterans here in Wisconsin,” Sargent concluded.