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Rep. Kurtz: Five Kurtz bills signed into law

Posted on Wednesday, Dec 6, 2023

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MADISON – Today, Governor Evers signed five bills championed by Rep. Kurtz into law.

Three of the bills, Senate Bills 166, 167 and 168, now 2023 Wisconsin Acts 47, 48, 49 are products of the Joint Legislative Study Committee on Wisconsin National Guard Sexual Misconduct Procedures that Rep. Kurtz chaired last summer.
The federal National Guard Bureau completed an assessment of the Wisconsin National Guard (Guard) in 2019 that identified a number of concerns with how the Guard had handled allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Under Adjutant General Paul Knapp's leadership, the Guard has been diligently working to implement the recommendations contained in that assessment. The study committee identified a number of areas in which legislation will complement the Guard's continuing efforts to ensure that the men and women who volunteer to serve our state and nation are able to do so in an environment that takes their safety seriously.

Act 47 makes a variety of changes to the Wisconsin Code of Military Justice. Some of the changes are fairly technical, but others include important substantive updates based on recent changes to the federal uniform code of military justice. For example, the bill draft creates new punitive articles within the state code to parallel articles added to the federal code, including an article addressing sexual harassment. It also modifies the state code's article relating to sexual assault to align that offense with the same provision under the federal code. The bill addresses victims' rights by requiring the Adjutant General to prescribe and implement a policy that ensures that victims of offenses under the code are treated with dignity, respect, courtesy, and fairness.

Act 48 requires the Adjutant General and the Department of Military Affairs to compile and submit certain reports annually. First, it requires the Adjutant General to annually submit a report that includes various information related to sexual assault and sexual harassment reported by members of the Guard. This report would not include any personal identifying information. Second, it requires the Department of Military Affairs to annually notify the Legislature of any recent changes to the punitive articles in the federal uniform code of military justice and make recommendations regarding whether the federal changes should be incorporated into the state code.

Act 49 simply requires the National Guard to establish and maintain a case management system that enables the Guard to manage and track all case-related information for cases of misconduct within the Guard.

“I’d like to thank all of the study committee members for their time and dedication to the ensuring we had great bills that complement the National Guard’s efforts, while also providing accountability and ensuring a safe environment for everyone. I’d also like to thank Adjutant General Knapp and his team at the Department of Military Affairs for their willingness to work with the study committee,” said Rep. Kurtz.

The fourth bill, Senate Bill 251, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 70 makes updates to the statutory requirements for the Council on Veterans Programs. The bill updates the membership of the council to more accurately reflect the active veterans’ groups in Wisconsin, and includes representation for student veteran organizations at our higher education institutions.

The final bill, Senate Bill 249, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 69 establishes State Highway 80 as the Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm Memorial Highway.

“Historically, Wisconsin has honored its veterans by designating a highway or bridge to be commemorated in their honor. Currently, the state has dedicated highways for veterans of WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Purple Heart recipients. We even have a bridge honoring veterans of the American Revolution,” Rep. Kurtz said. “It is time that we extend the same honor to our veterans of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm.”