

DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

July 20, 2017

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

Dear Secretary Zimmerman:

We are writing today to ask the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to file a 13.10 request with the Joint Committee on Finance to seek the release of state funds for critical veterans grant programs, capital improvements at the Veterans Home at King, and the preservation of facilities for homeless veterans.

On May 11, the Joint Committee on Finance voted unanimously to approve funding for the following veterans programs: an increase of \$80,000 annually to the Disabled American Veterans; an increase of \$60,000 annually for veterans service organization grants; an increase of \$25,000 annually to the American Legion; a new crisis intervention services pilot program for veterans in Kenosha and Racine counties; and a new study on the needs of women veterans in Wisconsin. In absence of the passage of the state budget, funding for these programs remains frozen or nonexistent.

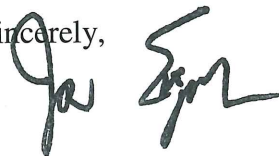
There are also \$12.4 million in improvements to the struggling Veterans Home at King enumerated in the building program portion of the budget. No action has been taken on these projects due to the ongoing budget impasse. Improvements to the Veterans Home at King are desperately needed, with reports of questionable drinking water quality, moldy walls and stained floors, and potentially unsafe equipment. While we believe Governor Walker's budget proposal does not go far enough, it at least contains long-requested improvements for food service, water supply, and electrical substation replacement.

We are concerned about the recent news that there will be fewer beds at the Veterans Home at King available, forcing veterans to travel further to access veteran home care. We would welcome the opportunity for you to come before the committee so we can discuss your newly released plan and address the caregiver shortage in a way that best serves our veterans.

Finally, news that federal funds have been eliminated for two homeless veterans facilities at King and Union Grove deals another blow to veterans seeking help in their time of need. While DVA has said that they will work to transition these veterans into another homeless veterans program, we are asking for a commitment to keep these facilities open by requesting the necessary funds through the 13.10 process. Failure by the federal government to continue these programs is no excuse for the State of Wisconsin and the DVA to not step in to ensure that every single homeless veteran has a place to live and the resources they need to gain independence.

These urgent measures cannot wait for a state budget that may not be passed for weeks or even months. We therefore respectfully ask you to file a 13.10 request with the co-chairs of the Joint Finance Committee for the release of the needed funds. We appreciate your consideration of our request and welcome your response.

Sincerely,



JON ERPENBACH
State Senator
27th District



GORDON HINTZ
State Representative
54th District



LENA TAYLOR
State Senator
4th District



KATRINA SHANKLAND
State Representative
71st District