

# JON ERPENBACH

---

## STATE SENATOR

May 23, 2016

Governor Scott Walker  
115 East State Capitol

Governor Walker,

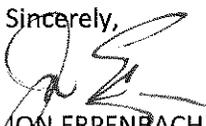
Your legislatively enacted 2015-2017 state budget, upon recommendation of the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), significantly changed how the County Veterans Service Office (CVSO) grants are paid to counties for services provided to local veterans. Most notable is the elimination of the salary support for local officers that directly serve veterans which was the intent of the original legislation in 1973. Starting in 2018, not one state dollar can be used to pay for the veteran-to-veteran counseling that CVSO officers currently conduct on behalf of the state helping veterans enroll and receive the benefits they deserve. That is a tragedy and a disservice to our veterans. Additionally, the added approval process by DVA has apparently caused some counties to be denied payment for statutorily allowable expenses in an unnecessary and arbitrary fashion.

A CVSO budget, just like any other county office, is created and approved by the local county board. The state has supported those county board decisions by granting funds to help pay for the county veterans office expenses. At these offices veterans can seek peer counseling on community supports, federal care and benefits, and state benefits and care. Finally, veterans can have the face-to-face support we know helps veterans best. Without the need to drive to Madison to meet with a bureaucrat on the Capitol square, veterans receive invaluable support in every corner of Wisconsin.

I am left wondering how we have gotten to this position. The DVA has always had the authority to write a rule to further describe how they want state dollars to be used at CVSO offices, they have simply not done that in the past. Now the Legislature has directed them to do so and still they have not written the rules? The failure to act on a Legislative order is astonishing. If the DVA was truly interested in higher accountability for CVSO grant spending, they have missed the boat because they failed to set the standard. This failure to act on a Legislative order reflects poorly on your administrations treatment of veterans in Wisconsin and it should be rectified immediately.

We can assume that the sampling this office has been given is reflective of statewide actions. Of 30 counties surveyed, ten were completely denied their statutory CVSO grant. Fourteen were denied in part. Only six of the thirty counties received their allowable grant in the application process. Please direct the DVA to reopen the CVSO grant process immediately and order them to work with the counties to remedy this situation.

According to the US Census 395,931 veterans live in Wisconsin. They reside in communities across our state and Wisconsin's local County Veterans Service Offices are their connection point. We need to make sure Wisconsin upholds our commitment to veterans and we need to work together to make that happen. Please let me know how I can help reopen the grant process immediately for the counties not only in my district, but statewide.

Sincerely,  
  
JON ERPENBACH  
State Senator  
27<sup>th</sup> District

JE;jal