



# JULIE LASSA

## STATE SENATOR

May 23, 2016

Governor Scott Walker  
Room 115 East  
State Capitol

Governor Walker,

As you are aware, the 2015-2016 state budget was enacted with provisions that make substantial changes to how County Veterans Service Offices (CVSO) are funded for the services they provide to military veterans. The most significant change is that the state will eliminate support for the salaries of county officers who directly support and advocate for veterans. In addition, state support for CVSOs was changed from a direct block grant to reimbursements of expenditures. This, and WDVA's new restrictions regarding reimbursable expenses, have created a situation in which most of the requests for reimbursement from CVSOs are being denied.

Undermining state support for CVSOs hurts veterans. CVSOs are our "boots on the ground" in delivery of veterans' services, working face to face with veterans and advocating for their needs at county, state and federal levels. Given that many of our returning military veterans have unprecedented needs, and that they often go without help because of a lack of guidance through layers of government programs, the role of the CVSO is even more important than when this program was created in 1946. We should be doing everything we can to strengthen their ability to help our returning heroes, not restricting their funding and making them jump through bureaucratic hoops.

Exacerbating the current problem is that CVSOs have no clear guidelines as to what expenses WDVA will and will not reimburse them for. The budgetary language that changed CVSO funding required WDVA to promulgate rules specifying how the reimbursement system was to work. Yet, nearly a year after the budget was passed, that rulemaking process has not been initiated.

On behalf of the military veterans in my district, I urge you to call on WDVA to immediately issue an emergency rule establishing criteria and procedures for CVSO reimbursement, as is required by statutes. Second, I am requesting that you and your staff investigate charges from CVSOs that some counties have been reimbursed for salaries while others have not, and to determine why there is no formal appeals process for counties who are denied reimbursement. Finally, as you prepare your proposed 2017-2018 budget, I implore you reinstate the CVSO Grant as an annual block grant, and remove the unreasonable and unnecessary reimbursement restrictions. Counties should have reliable funding for CVSOs, and should not have to undergo bureaucratic restrictions as they provide vital help and support for Wisconsin veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie Lassa".

JULIE LASSA  
State Senator  
24<sup>th</sup> Senate District