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Testimony in Support of Assembly Bills 596 and 597

Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs

Wednesday, October 29, 2025

Chairman Penterman and committee members, thank you for holding this public hearing today and allowing me to speak in support of Assembly Bills (AB) 596 and 597. I appreciate the opportunity to bring this important legislation forward with Representative Franklin, Senator Wimberger, and my other legislative co-authors.

Despite a 15% funding increase for the Veterans Housing and Recovery Program (VHRP) in the recently enacted state budget and adequate funding in the veterans trust fund, the Evers-Rodriguez administration chose to close the VHRP facilities in Green Bay and Chippewa Falls. In each of the past several budgets, there have been significant amounts of money in the veterans trust fund that have gone unspent at the end of the biennium. In this last budget, which ended on June 30th, over \$4 million went unspent. These bills will do what Governor Evers and his administration refuse to do — use the funding provided in the bipartisan state budget to support our state’s homeless veterans through a new state matching grant.

Under federal law, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs awards per diem payments to qualifying organizations that provide services to homeless veterans up to \$82.73 per day for each veteran housed. This proposal creates a state matching grant program of \$25 per day, per veteran housed, to any non-state entity that is also receiving federal per diem payments for serving homeless veterans. AB 597 creates this new matching grant program and AB 596 appropriates \$1.9 million (\$950,000 in each year of the biennium) to fund this program once it is created. With this state matching grant, qualifying entities would receive a total of \$107.73 per day for each veteran served. If you do the math, that comes out to over \$3,200 in a 30-day month to house each veteran and provide them with the services they need to get back on their feet.

What is exciting about this new matching grant program is that homeless veterans will not need to come to Chippewa Falls, Green Bay, or Union Grove to receive services. If a shelter in Wausau or Whitewater would like to provide services to homeless veterans, they can apply for the federal per diem payment and become eligible for the matching grant from the state. I have already spoken with Hope Gospel Mission in Eau Claire, and they have expressed interest in pursuing this opportunity.

Mr. Chairman and members, I ask for your support of these proposals, and thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.