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Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 245

Assembly Committee on Ways and Means

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

Good morning Chairman Macco and committee members. I am grateful for this opportunity to come before you today and speak in support of Assembly Bill (AB) 245. I would like to thank Senator Jacque for continuing to work with me on this important legislation.

For many years Wisconsin has been a national leader in providing benefits and services to our veterans. AB 245 builds upon that by expanding the eligibility for the Disabled Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit. Currently, a veteran's service-connected disability rating must be 100% in order to qualify for this credit. Under AB 245, veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 70% and above would now qualify. The maximum credit that an eligible person could claim is multiplied by the percentage of that person's service-connected disability rating. For example, an eligible veteran with a 70% disability rating may claim a 70% property tax credit.

As I've traveled around my district over the past few years, increasing the eligibility for the Disabled Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit is one of the primary concerns I've heard from veterans and veterans' organizations. From my conversations with colleagues here in the legislature and our statewide veterans' organizations, I've learned that this issue is also a priority for veterans across our state.

I am sure many of you have seen news stories of deserving wounded combat veterans receiving support from the community and non-profits to either build or renovate a home to accommodate their disability. However, these improvements often increase the property value and the amount of property tax owed. Due to their injuries, a number of these veterans are living on fixed incomes and struggle to pay their property taxes. Unfortunately, under current law unless a veteran has a 100% service-connected disability rating they do not qualify for property tax relief under the Disabled Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit.

As I'm sure you know, Wisconsin has some of the highest property taxes in the nation. I know there are some who have concerns that this legislation only provides property tax relief for a small number of Wisconsinites and feel that we should focus on providing broader property tax relief. While I support efforts to find ways to provide more property tax relief, I believe that increasing the eligibility for the Disabled Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit is a great first step.

When our veterans joined our nation's armed forces, they did so knowing that they may give their life in service to our country. It is only right, that we help to better support those who were significantly injured while serving in our armed forces. By expanding the eligibility for this tax credit we are providing needed property tax relief that will allow more of our disabled veterans to stay in their homes.

Mr. Chairman and members, I ask for your support of AB 245 and thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.