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Date: January 27, 2016

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**Bill to Cut Veterans Services Being Rushed Through Legislature
Lassa, Hesselbein oppose effort to cut county veterans service officers**

MADISON – A bill that would allow counties to eliminate their County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs), being rushed through the legislature in the final days of the current session, would cause serious harm to the state’s veterans, according to Senator Julie Lassa (D-Stevens Point) and Representative Dianne Hesselbein (D- Middleton).

“CVSOs are the first line of support for our veterans when they need help,” Sen. Lassa said. “They guide veterans through the many federal and state programs available to them, and advocate for veterans with the Veterans Administration and the state Department of Veterans Affairs. Fewer CVSOs means less help for veterans, and that’s a terrible idea.”

Current law requires each county to have a Veterans Service Officer who is a veteran. The proposal circulated for cosponsorship by Senator Van Wanggard (R-Racine) and Representative Ken Skowronski (R-Franklin) would make having a CVSO optional for counties and eliminate the authority of CVSOs to perform various services for veterans.

“This is the worst possible time to scale back on services to veterans and their families,” said Rep. Hesselbein, the ranking Democrat on the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs. “Two Wisconsin counties, Buffalo and Pepin, on Tuesday cancelled a CVSO job-sharing experiment they had tried for a year. The demand for help was just too large. We need to guarantee service officers for all 72 counties.”

The Republicans’ proposal also would allow non-veteran county employees to perform the duties of a CVSO, and would transfer most of the powers of the Board of Veterans Affairs to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“It appears the chief intention of this bill is to consolidate power in the hands of the DVA,” Sen. Lassa said. “Nationwide, the CVSO model has proven to be the best structure for providing assistance to our veterans, their dependents and their survivors. With all the difficulties that have surfaced with veterans programs in our state recently, the last thing we want to do is take away the one independent advocate for our veterans, the county CVSO.”