



2017 - 2018 Bills of Interest to Wisconsin Technical Colleges

November 7, 2016

Election season is not quite past, but Legislative Council Study Committees have already begun to review bill drafts for consideration during the 2017-18 legislative session.

Study Committee on Volunteer Firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician Shortages

The Study Committee on Volunteer Firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician Shortages, which includes Sheriff Jeff Rickaby from the NWTC district board, held its fourth meeting on October 18th. The committee invited System President Morna Foy and John Will, president of Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College, to comment on drafts that the committee is considering, including:

LRB-0235/P1. This bill would prohibit technical colleges that offer courses as part of a fire fighter or emergency medical services training program from requiring a minimum enrollment in these courses of more than six students.

The bill draft is found [here](#).

The purpose of this bill is to increase access to training in rural areas, by prohibiting colleges from canceling a course section due to low enrollment, if at least six students are registered. While well intentioned, the bill has the potential to decrease the amount of training offered, because the colleges are working with finite resources to serve the needs of a large array of industry sectors and types of employers. In addition, by statute, no tuition can be charged for fire fighter training, and funding received from the state from the “2% fund,” or fire dues, covers only around 20% of the cost to provide such training. If the colleges cannot consolidate course sections in order to balance their budgets when necessary, fewer sections are likely to be offered.

LRB-0236/P1. This bill would prohibit technical colleges that offer courses as part of a fire fighter or emergency medical services training program from giving registration priority to a resident of the technical college district (district resident) over a state resident living outside the technical college district (non-district resident) if the non-district resident registered for the course at least 15 days prior to the course start date and the district resident registered for the course less than 15 days prior to the course start date.

The bill draft is found [here](#).

This bill grew out of a concern that a non-district resident was bumped from a training course just prior to the start of classes, in order to provide a slot to a district resident. While technical colleges are funded locally and focus on meeting the training needs of employers and taxpayers within their local communities, this concern, raised by a legislator's constituent, has not previously been raised with System leadership. While the colleges are rightfully focused on serving their local taxpayers first, and that focus is reflected in standards and procedures throughout our operations, this was likely an exceedingly rare situation and we do not believe legislation is necessary. Rather, the colleges frequently see students register for courses across district lines, usually based on which campus is closer to the student's home. Typically, a college would not have a reason to track whether an individual student's home address is within the district or outside the district.

Draft Letter to WTCS

Finally, the study committee considered a draft letter addressed to the System and the district boards, regarding access to technical college training for volunteer firefighters and EMTs.

The draft letter is found [here](#).

The letter communicates a number of concerns and suggestions raised in testimony by volunteers in rural areas who have encountered barriers to accessing training. The letter suggests: (1) that the colleges maximize the fire and EMS training offered online, based on local demand and broadband availability; (2) in rural areas, maximizing the number of courses that can be offered onsite at local fire departments and EMS providers; and (3) the colleges improve coordination and communications with local fire departments and EMS providers about when training will be offered. In her testimony, President Foy thanked the committee for their suggestions, and offered a number of her own suggestions for ways in which technical colleges can be good partners in the effort to increase the number of volunteer fire fighters and EMTs. In particular, she noted the System's success in promoting Spotlight events to help promote and change perceptions around various industry sectors, the most well known being Manufacturing Month, held each October. However, other careers including agriculture, allied health, apprenticeship, and even entrepreneurship are also periodically spotlighted with events around the state. Volunteer fire and EMS could also be highlighted as critical community

needs, in partnership with local high schools, local municipalities, fire departments and EMS providers, and elected officials.

Study Committee on Reducing Recidivism and Removing Impediments to Ex-Offender Employment

The Study Committee on Reducing Recidivism and Removing Impediments to Ex-Offender Employment held its third meeting on October 19th, hearing invited testimony from Vicki Martin, president of Milwaukee Area Technical College. Dr. Martin's presentation highlighted Milwaukee's participation in the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program, a nationwide pilot authorized by the federal Education Department that makes postsecondary education and training available to incarcerated individuals.

The presentation can be found [here](#).

More than 8,000 ex-offenders are released into Wisconsin communities each year, usually on the condition that they find suitable employment, but often without the skills and education necessary to succeed in the workforce. This pilot and other programs around the state have demonstrated that technical colleges are another important partner--along with the Department of Corrections, Workforce Investment Boards, employers, community-based organizations and others--who should be at the table as part of any comprehensive strategy aimed at reducing recidivism rates. This committee is currently accepting proposed options for legislation, which will be considered at their next meeting, scheduled for November 30th.