



Testimony on *Senate Bill 843* before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
January 26, 2022

Wisconsin Economic Development Association

Good morning, Chairman Feyen and members of the committee. My name is Michael Welsh, and I am the Legislative Affairs Director for the Wisconsin Economic Development Association (WEDA). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of Senate Bill 843. This important legislation will help address Wisconsin's growing workforce shortage crisis by providing funding for a comprehensive talent attraction program that focuses on military veterans.

I would like to thank Chairman Feyen for holding a public hearing on this bill, as well as Sen. Wimberger and Rep. VanderMeer for introducing SB 843. WEDA certainly appreciates their efforts to address the state's labor crunch.

By way of background, WEDA is a statewide association representing over 425 public and private sector economic development professionals. We are dedicated to advancing economic prosperity in Wisconsin and providing our members with the necessary tools to encourage business expansion, promote private investment, and attract much-needed talent to the state.

As I am sure you have heard repeatedly from local businesses in your districts, one of the biggest – if not the biggest – challenge facing Wisconsin employers today is their inability to find enough workers to fill open jobs. In fact, the shortage has reached a crisis point for businesses in nearly every sector and is threatening Wisconsin's future economic growth. It has resulted in business closures, production stoppages, supply shortages, and longer wait times for consumers.

There are numerous reasons behind the state's worker shortage, including falling birthrates and an aging population, as well as lackluster in-migration rates and younger residents leaving the state for new opportunities. Other workforce obstacles include childcare, affordable housing, and transportation challenges. Unfortunately, there is no single piece of legislation or solution that will adequately address the crisis, but if signed into law, SB 843 will have an immediate impact in attracting new employees to Wisconsin.

This legislation will provide \$10 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) for the purpose of marketing Wisconsin as a great place to live and work for U.S. service members and their families who are transitioning to civilian life. Almost 200,000 service members leave the military each year, and these new veterans often have the skills, training, and leadership qualities needed to help address Wisconsin's talent gap and provide our businesses with an expanded employee pool.

WEDC's past talent attraction efforts have been successful and illustrates that this approach works. In fact, a survey conducted to determine the impact of WEDC's talent attraction campaign showed the perception of Wisconsin among out-of-state millennials significantly improved in numerous areas, including career opportunities, work-life balance, and raising a family. In addition, 52 percent of those surveyed indicated they would be likely to consider moving to Wisconsin for a job opportunity, which was a significant increase over previous surveys.

WEDA believes this same approach will work to encourage highly skilled, work-ready veterans to move to Wisconsin for career opportunities and a better quality of life. SB 843 will also revive the state's role in talent attraction marketing, which should be a key component in our overall efforts to attract the best and brightest minds to Wisconsin.

In closing, I would again request your support for SB 843 and ask that you pass it out of committee as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.