

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY AFFAIRS, AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the 2023 Interim October 25, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The fifth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection was held on October 25, 2023, at 11:00 AM in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Walker Thomas, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Walker Thomas, Co-Chair; Senator Rick Girdler, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg, Matthew Deneen, Stephen Meredith, Gex Williams, and Mike Wilson; Representatives John Blanton, Steve Bratcher, Stephanie Dietz, Myron Dossett, Chris Freeland, Chris Fugate, Jim Gooch Jr., Mark Hart, DJ Johnson, Matthew Koch, Savannah Maddox, Candy Massaroni, Marianne Proctor, Rebecca Raymer, Sarah Stalker, Pamela Stevenson, Ashley Tackett Laferty, and Bill Wesley.

Guests: Sergeant Major Kenneth Wininger, Distinguished Veteran; Major General Haldane B. Lamberton, The Adjutant General; Major Timothy L. Olsen, Director of Psychological Health, Kentucky Army National Guard; Brigadier General (Ret.) Charles T. Jones, Executive Director, Kentucky Department of Military Affairs; Jeremy Slinker, Director, Kentucky Emergency Management; and Brigadier General (Ret.) Steven P. Bullard, Executive Director, Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs.

LRC Staff: Jessica Zeh, Mark Mitchell, and Logan Schaaf.

Approval of September Minutes

The minutes of the September 27, 2023, meeting were approved.

Distinguished Veteran

Sergeant Major Kenneth Wininger was honored by the committee as a distinguished veteran. He spoke about his military service and was presented with a VMAPP Challenge Coin.

Department of Military Affairs and Kentucky National Guard

Major General Haldane B. Lamberton, The Adjutant General, Kentucky National Guard; Major Timothy L. Olsen, Director of Psychological Health, Kentucky Army National

Guard; and Brigadier General (Ret.) Charles T. Jones, Executive Director, Kentucky Department of Military Affairs, provided updates on the activities of the Kentucky National Guard, recruiting, efforts to prevent suicide, and the Kentucky National Guard Youth Challenge Academies.

Responding to a question from Representative Massaroni, Major Olsen detailed the mental health considerations in military recruiting.

Responding to a question from Representative Proctor, Major Olsen discussed some of the barriers to adequate mental health services, including differing insurance coverages and long-term mental health concerns.

Responding to a question from Representative Stevenson, Major Olsen said that the Department of Defense is collecting data on suicide rates in military families. While clinical services are not offered to military family members as of now, Major Olsen said that the military is always looking for ways to improve in this area.

Responding to a question from Senator Deneen, Major Olsen, General Jones, and General Lamberton discussed the criteria for members of the National Guard to qualify for care from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Senator Deneen said that he hopes for reservists and National Guard members to have full access to VA centers in Kentucky.

General Lamberton discussed National Guard recruiting efforts. Challenges to recruiting include the perceptions of military service gleaned from movies and television, the reestablishment of in-person recruiting after the COVID-19 pandemic, and a relatively small applicant pool. He highlighted the efforts of the Kentucky Enlistment Enhancement Program. This program pays \$500 to members of the National Guard who refer someone else, and has increased the number of new recruits.

General Lamberton discussed the State Partnership Program, where state National Guards form relationships with the military forces of other countries.

Responding to a question from Representative Massaroni, General Lamberton discussed some of the reasons for the international involvement of state National Guards.

Responding to a question from Representative Bratcher, General Lamberton outlined the National Guard's emergency management duties.

Responding to a question from Representative Maddox, General Lamberton discussed the process for approval of partnerships between state National Guards and the military forces of other countries.

Brigadier General (Ret.) Charles Jones, Executive Director of the Kentucky Department of Military Affairs, discussed the Kentucky National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program, which supports students who are failing to progress in traditional school settings. He outlined the 2024 budget request for the ChalleNGe Program.

Responding to a question from Senator Williams, General Jones said that the ChalleNGe Program does not receive Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) funding.

Urban Search and Rescue

Jeremy Slinker, Director of Kentucky Emergency Management, provided an update on 23 RS HB 157, which created the Kentucky Urban Search and Rescue Program (USAR), under the Division of Emergency Management. Mr. Slinker outlined the activities of the USAR teams and detailed their proposed budget request. Elements of the USAR budget request include a statewide USAR team, a helicopter aquatic rescue team, and a rescue aid program. He also highlighted the capabilities of a USAR Type 1 Team.

Responding to questions from Representative Fugate, Mr. Slinker praised the efforts of the Department of Fish and Wildlife in the Eastern Kentucky flood search and rescue operations. He also discussed the communication procedures in disaster response.

Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs Legislation and Purple Star Schools

Brigadier General (Ret.) Steve Bullard, Executive Director of the Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs (KCMA), outlined the 2024 KCMA legislative agenda, including the reintroduction of omnibus House Bill 63, the Kentucky Purple Star Schools enabling legislation, and the Department of Defense military spouse occupational licensing reform.

Consideration of Referred Administrative Regulation

The Committee took no action on the referred Administrative Regulation, 106 KAR 004:020.

Adjournment

With no further business before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 1:00 PM. The next meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection will be Wednesday, November 8, 2023, at 11:00 AM, in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex.