

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the 2023 Interim

June 20, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The first meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Local Government was held on June 20, 2023, at 9:00 AM in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Robby Mills, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Robby Mills, Co-Chair; Representative Randy Bridges, Co-Chair; Senator Karen Berg, Senator Greg Elkins, Senator Denise Harper Angel, Senator Christian McDaniel, Senator Michael J. Nemes, Senator Damon Thayer, Senator Phillip Wheeler, Senator Gex Williams, Representative Adam Bowling, Representative Josh Bray, Representative George Brown Jr., Representative Beverly Chester-Burton, Representative Steven Doan, Representative Deanna Frazier Gordon, Representative Chris Freeland, Representative Mary Beth Imes, Representative Matt Lockett, Representative Michael Meredith, Representative Marianne Proctor, Representative Rebecca Raymer, Representative Brandon Reed, Representative Sarah Stalker, and Representative Walker Thomas.

Guests: Representative John Hodgson, 36th House District; Bruce Roberts, Deputy Executive Director, Ricky King, Board Chair, and Brenda Goddard, Finance Officer, Kentucky Fire Commission; and Pam Duncan, General Counsel, and Hannah Rivera, Chief of Staff, Board & Government Liaison, Kentucky Community & Technical College System.

LRC Staff: Mark Mitchell, Joe Pinczewski-Lee, Christopher Jacovitch, and Cheryl Walters.

Discussion of the Duties, Organization, and Fiscal Resources and Expenditures of the Kentucky Fire Commission

Mr. Bruce Roberts, Deputy Executive Director of the Kentucky Fire Commission, said that the Kentucky Fire Commission opened its new office in Bourbon County in November, 2020, under the direction of its new director, Larry Potter. Mr. Roberts noted the history of the Kentucky Fire Commission which began in the 1970s after the Kentucky General Assembly passed legislation creating it as the Commonwealth of Kentucky Commission on Fire Protection Personnel Standards and Education. Its purpose was to train and provide incentives to professional firefighters, among other charges, and was funded by the insurance premium surcharge. The General Assembly renamed the Commission to the Fire Commission in 2000, and placed it administratively under the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS).

The Fire Commission represents 51 paid departments; 617 volunteer departments; 100 combination departments; 4,114 professional firefighters; and 13,632 volunteer firefighters. The types of fire departments include those formed under KRS Chapter 95, which are city fire departments; KRS Chapter 67, which are county fire departments; KRS Chapter 75, which are taxing districts; and KRS Chapter 273, which are nonprofit volunteer fire departments.

The Fire Commission itself consists of 14 members with three nonvoting members and an ex-

officio member. It consists of 23 offices in Paris, and has 60 full-time employees, as well as 450 part-time instructors and personnel spread over 15 districts statewide. The commission also operates the Fire Academy of Kentucky.

The Fire Commission's budget for the year is \$53 million. It receives money from the insurance premium surcharge and state general fund budget allocations. With that money, the largest expenditure categories include incentives and pension; state aid; the Fire Academy of Kentucky; mobile facilities; training initiatives; and workers compensation.

The Fire Commission runs several programs including state aid for volunteer fire departments; the junior firefighter program, which is a recruitment program; and the health and wellness program which provides cleaning services for turnout gear and fitness equipment, as well as other purchases.

Grants comprise a significant portion of the Fire Commission's mission. Since 2013, the Fire Commission has provided over \$14 million in equipment grants to fire departments, and since 1984, the Fire Commission has provided \$15 million in training facility grants.

Anyone interested in becoming a fulltime career firefighter must take the candidate physical ability test (CPAT). In FY 2023, the Fire Commission administered 1,157 tests, with 64 percent of those taking the test passing. The CPAT is a national standard.

There are 15 state fire rescue training district offices in Kentucky, spread over two regions that provide training for each fire department within their area. While 20 hours of training are required, the commission is providing 21 hours. Fire departments contact their local training coordinator, and the commission provides the training at the fire department.

The Fire Commission maintains a vehicle fleet for training that includes prop trailers and trucks. The trailers are mobile and designed to bring the training opportunities to local fire departments.

In FY 2022, the Fire Commission's State Fire Rescue Training program conducted 6,520 classes for 86,544 students. It provided training for 85 percent of the fire departments in the Commonwealth.

The Fire Academy of Kentucky is a new initiative provided by the commission located in Greenville. The academy is designed to be like the police academy in Richmond. It is a voluntary program for fire departments to send their recruits to for standardized training instead of the fire department conducting their training. This is provided by the fire commission for free. It has graduated two classes and is anticipating the third class this fall.

The Fire Commission will soon be recognized as the 17th college of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System.

Ms. Hanna Rivera, Chief of Staff, Board and Government Liaison with KCTCS noted the similar educational missions of the commission and KCTCS. She noted the different administrative architectures of the two groups. The commission uses KCTCS's legal and human resources departments. She further noted potential General Assembly policy considerations directed toward KCTCS and potentially the commission, and affirmed KCTCS's dedication at completing its mission.

In response to a question from Representative Meredith, Ms. Brenda Goddard, Director of Finance for the Fire Commission, said that there is a separate line item for the Fire Academy set at \$700,000. Actual costs for the first two classes were around \$200,000 per class. At present, absent possible expansions in the future, there should be no issue with financial impacts to the other budget items for which the commission is responsible.

Representative Meredith expressed his hope that career path training would not be adversely affected by the emphasis on recruit training.

Mr. Roberts said the Commission was dedicated to training career and volunteer firefighters.

Ms. Pam Duncan, General Counsel, KCTCS said that the 17th college concept is designed to assist with career path training issues. Human resources capabilities with KCTCS would promote flexibility in hiring individuals to fill vacancies in career training.

In response to a question from Representative Hodgson, Mr. Roberts said that the best way for Chapter 75 fire districts to communicate with the public regarding decisions that can have a financial impact on taxpayers, is for the district to send out a notice with the tax bill apprising the taxpayers of the district's efforts. If the district has a website, then information could be placed on it for informational purposes.

In response to a question from Representative Thomas, Mr. Roberts said that representatives of the commission have already reached out to representatives of the upcoming Urban Search and Rescue program offering their training services.

In response to a question from Senator Wheeler, Mr. Roberts said that recruitment and retention is a national concern among fire departments. People do not have time to volunteer their services anymore. The Junior Firefighter Program will hopefully assist in career recruitment. The commission is making additional efforts toward recruiting.

Mr. Ricky King, Chair of the Fire Commission, added that his county is communicating with high school students offering educational opportunities in conjunction with KCTCS, if they agree to work for the fire department.

Ms. Rivera noted that the Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship funded by the General Assembly provides 60 hours for a KCTCS associates degree for the top five high pay and high demand sectors set by the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board. Adding firefighting to the sectors is a possibility.

In response to a question from Co-Chair Bridges, Mr. Roberts said that many of the individuals taking and passing the CPAT are recruits for a fire department. Others take it prospectively in anticipation of being hired either in Kentucky or in another state. Many career firefighters stay with the career for a few years. Service contracts providing for an agreed to number of years of employment are not uncommon.

In response to a question from Senator Berg, Mr. Roberts said that salaries are variable depending on the locality and the certifications the individual possesses. A firefighter can start from \$25,000 a year. A firefighter EMT could start at \$75,000 to \$80,000. In Eastern Kentucky a

firefighter could start at \$21,000 or more a year and in Jefferson County, a firefighter could start at \$65,000 or more a year.

In response to another question from Senator Berg, Mr. Roberts said that females do seek CPAT certification and a good rate achieves certification, but that hiring is up to the department itself. Two females have participated successfully in the Fire Academy so far.

Representatives from the Fire Commission shared a video presentation relating to the Fire Academy to the members.

In response to a question from Representative Stalker, Mr. Roberts said that the minimum age to participate in the Junior Firefighter Program is 15, but to be a volunteer firefighter, state statutes require a minimum age of 18. To be a volunteer firefighter an individual must have 115 hours of training within a two-year period, with 20 hours of training yearly after that. Many Junior Firefighter participants already have enough hours to become a certified firefighter upon high school graduation. Career firefighters must have 300 hours in their first year and 100 hours of yearly training afterwards. There are schools in Jefferson County that provide work-study opportunities for fire service. Mr. King noted that his county also provided those opportunities.

Senator Mills announced the next meeting of the committee would be on July 24th.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:20 a.m.