

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the 2024 Interim

September 24, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The fourth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Local Government was held on September 24, 2024, at 9:00 AM in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Randy Bridges, 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; Senators Cassie Chambers Armstrong, Greg Elkins, Amanda Mays Bledsoe, Christian McDaniel, Michael J. Nemes, Damon Thayer, Phillip Wheeler, and Gex Williams; Representatives Adam Bowling, Josh Bray, George Brown Jr., Beverly Chester-Burton, Steven Doan, Ken Fleming, Deanna Frazier Gordon, Mark Hart, Mary Beth Imes, Matt Lockett, Michael Meredith, Marianne Proctor, Rebecca Raymer, Sarah Stalker, Pamela Stevenson, and Walker Thomas.

Guests: Mike Bosse, Chip White, and Kevin Rader, Department of Criminal Justice Training; Kyle Carpenter, Kentucky Firefighters Association; Bruce Roberts, Kentucky Fire Commission; Michael Morgan, Kentucky Association of Fire Chiefs; Jeff Taylor, Kentucky Professional Fire Fighters; and Ryan Straw, Fraternal Order of Police.

LRC Staff: Mark Mitchell, Christopher Jacovitch, and Cheryl Walters.

Approval of Minutes from August 22, 2024 Meeting

Upon the motion of Senator Thayer, seconded by Representative Imes, the minutes from the August 22, 2024, meeting were approved.

Updates from the Department of Criminal Justice Training, Firefighter Organizations, and Fraternal Order of Police

Kevin Rader, Assistant Director of the Administrative Division, with the Department of Criminal Justice Training (DOCJT), gave a progress report on construction of the new training center in Madisonville.

In response to a question from Representative Thomas, Mr. Rader said the new training center is approximately four miles from the current facility.

In response to a question from Senator Mills, Mr. Rader replied that the training center will service outside the 200-mile radius.

In response to another question from Senator Mills, Mr. Mike Bosse, Deputy Commissioner of DOCJT, stated the department is making progress on the waitlist, from seven to five months.

Bruce Roberts, Interim Executive Director of the Kentucky Fire Commission, Michael Morgan, Executive Director of the Kentucky Association of Fire Chiefs, Jeff Taylor, Director of Legislative Affairs of the Kentucky Professional Fire Fighters, and Kyle Carpenter, President of the Kentucky Firefighters Association discussed challenges and legislative solutions.

Mr. Roberts indicated that the Kentucky Fire Commission's main goal is codifying incentive pay and grants for firefighters and volunteer fire departments included in the budget.

Mr. Morgan indicated that recruitment and retention are important to Fire Chiefs. He noted new OSHA requirements will likely impact volunteer departments and need to be examined. Changes to the Kentucky mutual aid system are also being evaluated.

Mr. Taylor said the Kentucky Professional Fire Fighters are focused on recruitment and retention as applicant numbers are down. He advocated for better retirement benefits and additional disease screening categories.

Mr. Carpenter highlighted that recruitment is an issue for the Kentucky Firefighters Association. He advocated pension spiking legislation be amended to reflect hours spent dealing with COVID; hazardous duty retirement be more prevalent among fire services; tax limits in KRS Chapter 75 be changed to reflect the changing nature of firefighting; incentive pay be increased; and for volunteer firefighters, a tax incentive.

Senator Wheeler commented that he filed a bill last session that included a tax incentive for volunteer firefighters. Most rural fire departments are voluntary. Several in his district have closed due to not having the personnel.

In response to a question from Representative Hart regarding funding for KRS Chapter 75 fire departments, Mr. Carpenter said his group would advocate for an increase of 20 cents per \$100.

In response to a question from Senator Mills, Mr. Taylor replied that the job has changed significantly in the last twenty years.

In response to questions from Representative Stevenson, Mr. Roberts said diagnostic testing and tracking of cancer is available and being implemented, as well as mental health services.

Ryan Straw, Governmental Affairs Chair with the Fraternal Order of Police, discussed challenges and legislative solutions. Changes to pensions and insurance would be beneficial for retention and recruitment.

Senator Thayer noted that previous pension systems were heading toward financial failure. Caution should be applied when considering changes to avoid destabilizing the pension systems.

Representative Meredith agreed with Senator Thayer, adding that more financial support for healthcare payments may be workable.

Representative Bridges announced that the next meeting of the Committee would be October 22nd.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:10 AM.