

# **INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

## **Minutes of the Second Meeting of the 2024 Interim**

**July 29, 2024**

### **Call to Order and Roll Call**

The second meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Local Government was held on July 29, 2024, 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: Representative Randy Bridges Co-Chair; Senator Robby Mills Co-Chair; Senators Cassie Chambers Armstrong, Greg Elkins, Amanda Mays Bledsoe, Michael J. Nemes, Damon Thayer, and Gex Williams; Representatives Adam Bowling, Josh Bray, Beverly Chester-Burton, Steven Doan, Deanna Frazier Gordon, Chris Freeland, Mark Hart, Mary Beth Imes, Matt Lockett, Michael Meredith, Marianne Proctor, Rebecca Raymer, Sarah Stalker, and Walker Thomas.

Guests: Jim Henderson and Shellie Hampton, Kentucky Association of Counties; Rick Stiltner, Menifee County Judge/Executive and Harry Clark, Rowan County Judge/Executive, Kentucky County Judge/Executives Association; Josh Lindblom, Hardin County Jailer, Kentucky Jailers Association; Jenny Oldham, Hardin County Attorney, Kentucky County Attorneys Association; James "Jimmy" Cornelison, Madison County Coroner, Farris Marcum, Lincoln County Coroner, and Gary Ginn, Fayette County Coroner, Kentucky Coroner's Association; Jerry Wagner, Kentucky Sheriffs' Association; Colonel Pat Morgan, Kenton County Sheriff's Office; Bryan Taylor, Retired Police Chief, Lawrenceburg Police Department; Brett Hightower, Warren County Sheriff, Kentucky Sheriffs' Association; Tabatha Clemons, Grant County Clerk, Kentucky County Clerks Association.

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

### **Approval of Minutes from June 18, 2024 Meeting**

Upon the motion of Representative Bridges, seconded by Representative Hart, the minutes from the June 18, 2024 meeting were approved.

## **Discussion of County Jails**

Jim Henderson, Executive Director of the Kentucky Association of Counties discussed the fiscal impact of county jails on county finances, characterized the distribution of types of inmates in jail custody, funding for jails, jail expenses,

Menifee County Judge/Executive, Rick Stiltner and Rowan County Judge Executive Harry Clark provided insights into their counties' handling of prisoners, prisoner demographics, and jail costs from the perspectives of a county containing a large jail and a county containing a jail that was closed.

In response to a question from Senator Thayer, Judge Clark said that the decision to build a jail was less costly than transporting prisoners to a nearby jail.

In response to a question from Senator Chambers Armstrong, Judge Clark said that the decision to build or not build the jail started with a study conducted on their behalf by the Department of Corrections who took into account other counties and even made bed number recommendations.

Senator Elkins noted that as a result of state and other mandates, most jail expenses are fixed and out of the control of counties. Counties are responsible for costs until the inmates are sent to the penitentiary after conviction.

In response to a question from Senator Elkins, Mr. Stiltner said that the court system alone determines the time inmates spend in jails prior to the disposition of their cases.

Senator Mays Bledsoe said that Fayette County stopped housing state prisoners because of the cost to the county. Fayette County's contract for health care services saves on various expenses. Regional contracts for health care may be a solution for reducing healthcare expenses.

Hardin County Jailer Josh Lindblom discussed jail fiscal pressures, including inflation's effects on jail supplies and transportation costs, and employee pay.

Hardin County Attorney Jenny Oldham discussed the county attorney's role in administering justice which can have effects on jail expenses.

In response to a question from Representative Bray, Mr. Lindblom said the reduction in state prisoners being sent to his jail has resulted in a reduction of \$895,000 in revenue. Fewer inmates means that some programs are not conducted.

In response to a question from Representative Stalker, Ms. Oldham said that the data regarding release of prisoners due to medical costs is not presently tracked, but that information could be tracked and would be beneficial.

### **Discussion of Challenges and Successes in the Offices of Sheriffs, Coroners and County Clerks**

James "Jimmy" Cornelison, Madison County Coroner, Farris Marcum, Lincoln County Coroner, and Gary Ginn, Fayette County Coroner, discussed the Kentucky Coroner's Association's efforts at improving coroner salaries, the pressures of the office, and raising the status of the office to be that of a career.

In response to questions from Representative Frazier Gordon, Mr. Ginn stated that cumulatively \$9 to \$10 million would be required, to bring the office of the coroner in line with officers serving under KRS 65.5275. Mr. Cornelison said that the time commitments of the office vary based upon the coroner's county's unique character. Mr. Ginn noted that KRS 65.5275 employs a matrix based in part on county size to determine salary.

In response to a question from Representative Stalker, Mr. Ginn noted that his office works closely with Fayette County's police and fire departments and can use mental health care programs hosted by them, as well as using health insurance to access mental health care.

In response to a question from Representative Bridges, Mr. Cornelison stated that fiscal courts may pay the coroner's up to the constitution maximums. The fiscal courts determine the salaries. The State Medical Examiner's office does not contribute financially to the office of the coroner.

Jerry Wagner, Kentucky Sheriffs' Association; Colonel Pat Morgan, Kenton County Sheriff's Office, and Brett Hightower, Warren County Sheriff, discussed the use of mental health professionals in conjunction with calls for law enforcement assistance for persons in mental crises and the need to improve the availability of qualified mental health providers.

Bryan Taylor, Retired Police Chief, Lawrenceburg Police Department, discussed amendments to KRS 64.090 dealing with sheriffs' fees for sharing information for national security clearances when those clearances are required for employment.

Grant County Clerk Tabatha Clemons updated the committee on the county clerks' responsibilities and challenges regarding elections law changes, the land records modernization task force's mandates to the county clerks, the funding for that effort, the clerks' meeting of timelines for implementation of the task force's goals, and vehicle registration under the new Kentucky Automated Vehicle Information System (KAVIS).

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:50 a.m.