

2020 REGULAR SESSION

HOUSE BUDGET REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT
of the
HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS AND REVENUE

1st Meeting

February 11, 2020

The House Budget Review Subcommittee on General Government of the House Standing Committee on Appropriations and Revenue held its first meeting of the 2020 Regular Session on February 11, 2020, at 12:00 PM, in Room 169 of the Capitol Annex. The Chair called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Members Present: Representative Jim Stewart III, Chair; Representatives Kevin D. Bratcher, Jim Gooch Jr., Mark Hart, Suzanne Miles, Jerry T. Miller, Patti Minter, and Wilson Stone.

Guests: Lt. Col. (Ret.) Keith Jackson, Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs (KDVA); CWO5 (Ret.) Dean Stoops, Deputy Commissioner, KDVA; Mark Bowman, Executive Director, Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers, KDVA; and, Josh Keats, Executive Director, Kentucky Office of Homeland Security (KOHS).

LRC Staff: Emma Mills, Nick Peak, Dillard Collier, and Spring Emerson.

Chair Stewart requested that the staff introduce themselves for the committee. He then called the Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs to come forward. He commented that the toughest Americans are service men and women, veterans, and combat soldiers, and he expressed his appreciation and respect.

Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs (KDVA)

Commissioner Jackson provided an overview of the agency and its budgetary issues.

In response to questions from Representative Miles regarding the availability of field officers and low occupancy in the Veterans Centers, Mr. Jackson said field personnel have been redistributed from five to three regional offices in order to become more efficient in their service to veterans. Mr. Stoops said the low number of occupants in the Veterans Centers is due to a lack of staffing, which results in a restricted number of veterans being served. There is a shortage in nursing staff on a national, state, and local level, due to nurses being paid so much more on the civilian side. To date, there are approximately 218 veterans on the waiting list.

In response to a question from Representative Stone regarding how veterans can apply before the construction of a new Veterans Center in Bowling Green, Mr. Stoops said applications would be accepted when construction is underway. Mr. Bowman added that

applications could be completed on the website within six months of the facility opening. Mr. Stoops said the rollout of the website for applications would be assessed as construction gets closer. Representative Stone expressed his concern for the number of veterans that are in need of the home.

In response to a question from Representative Miller regarding the generation of agency restricted funds, Mr. Stoops said the majority is through Medicaid, Medicare, VA per diem, residents private pay, and hospice private insurance. In response to a question from Representative Miller regarding the shortfall in General Fund, Mr. Stoops said once the agency gets 85 percent of beds filled, that would put them at revenue neutral status. More restricted funds would be received, and the agency could be self-sustaining. They are currently at an average of 64 percent occupancy, and estimate that it will take approximately four years to get to 85 percent.

Chair Stewart asked staff to hand out folders containing 2004 House Bill 696 as Amended, regarding the display of posters in the county clerks' offices as a way to raise restricted funds at no cost to the KDVA. Commissioner Jackson said he has asked his office to reach out and come up with opportunities to support veterans, and the use of the posters would be one such opportunity. Mr. Stoops said the KDVA participates in monthly phone calls with county clerks in an effort to extend outreach opportunities. He said a "HAVE" poster was created, which is an acronym for Help a Veteran Everyday which generated approximately \$509,000 in fiscal year 2018.

Chair Stewart thanked the KDVA for their appearance and extended an invitation to Commissioner Jackson to attend the subcommittee anytime it meets, even if his agency is not on the agenda.

Kentucky Office of Homeland Security (KOHS)

Josh Keats, Executive Director, KOHS, provided an overview of the agency and its budget. The Governor's recommendation fully funds the agency.

Representative Minter expressed her gratitude that funding is provided, due to the increasing importance of safety and security.

In response to a question from Representative Miles regarding school safety, Mr. Keats said he is a member of the Kentucky Schools Safety Board and they have a very active partnership. He added that there is a school safety tip line that is critical in creating a firm security net.

There being no further questions, the meeting was adjourned at 12:40 PM.