

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Minutes of the First Meeting of the 2024 Interim

June 18, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The first meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Local Government was held on June 18, 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, Christian McDaniel, Michael J. Nemes, and Gex Williams; Representatives Adam Bowling, Josh Bray, George Brown Jr., Beverly Chester-Burton, Steven Doan, Ken Fleming, Deanna Frazier Gordon, Chris Freeland, Mark Hart, Mary Beth Imes, Matt Lockett, Michael Meredith, Rebecca Raymer, Sarah Stalker, Pamela Stevenson, and Walker Thomas.

Guests: Mayor Linda Gorton, Lexington-Fayette County; Chief Lawrence Weathers, Lexington Police Department; Assistant Chief Joey Harris, Lexington Fire Department; Chief Scott Colvin, Lexington-Fayette Community Corrections; Commissioner Ken Armstrong; Lexington Public Safety; Mayor Craig Greenberg, Louisville Metro Government; Chief Brian O'Neill, Louisville Fire Department; and Acting Chief Paul Humphrey, Louisville Police Department.

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

Discussion of Lexington-Fayette Urban-County and Louisville Metro Governments' operational successes, challenges, and compliance

Mayor Gorton began by thanking the legislature for its support of Lexington, especially last session with affordable housing and road projects.

Lexington, like many cities across the country, experienced a double whammy in 2020--the global pandemic and the protests of racial injustice. However, the impact on public safety hiring was unforeseen.

For many years, Lexington has committed more than half of its General Fund budget to public safety--this year it is about 56 percent. Lexington's training in police and fire is some of most intense and best in the country. Lexington's police officers and firefighters receive specialized

training in areas many police and fire departments in Kentucky do not have. As a result, the public safety crews are often asked for assistance by neighboring counties. Staffing shortages can make it more difficult to offer that assistance, since the first responsibility is to the citizens of Fayette County.

To address staffing shortages, Lexington has taken many steps to make its public safety jobs more attractive to citizens-including higher pay, improved benefits, bonuses, improved equipment, including new time-saving technologies. While Lexington's staffing is still far from perfect, it is making progress, and it is improving.

Members of Lexington's public safety offered some specifics about its initiatives for recruitment and retention: Police Chief Lawrence Weathers; Assistant Fire Chief Joey Harris; and Chief of Community Corrections, Scott Colvin, and Public Safety Commissioner Ken Armstrong, a former Lexington police officer.

Chief Weathers told the Committee that staffing is one of the biggest challenges the Lexington Police Department has encountered. The Lexington Police Department is not only competing with other public safety agencies, but also with private entities that offer competitive salaries with less public scrutiny and safer working conditions. Over the past several years, other public safety agencies have been recruiting its officers with 20-plus years of experience, taking away seasoned personnel. Staffing issues are not just about salaries, but on benefits like mental health resources, personal time off, and other non-financial incentives. Offering competitive benefits remains crucial for new hires and the retention of existing personnel.

Despite the challenges Lexington's police department has faced, it has adapted and found new ways to continue serving the community effectively and efficiently with assistance from the passage of SB 89, which enabled Lexington to rehire eleven retired officers to date. Bringing back personnel with their years of experience and knowledge has been very beneficial to the Department. Additionally, HB 380 allowed the expansion of the pool of applicants to hire candidates at the age of 20, if they become 21 years old by the time they receive their certification. This has allowed more applicants to be put into the academy and has expanded recruiting. HB 248 removed the restriction that an officer would have to wait a year if they resigned before being allowed to rejoin the department.

A clerk program has been created to help with the teleserve program allowing people to file reports over the phone. Clerks with the teleserve program answer almost 1,000 calls a month, which frees up patrol officers to respond to calls for service.

A real-time intelligence center has been established to integrate the use of the Fusus platform, traffic cameras, and the Flock Safety license plate readers. The 60-day retention schedule, versus a 30-day schedule, allows investigators more time to follow up and access resources longer. The use of technology assets, has assisted the department in arresting homicide suspects, finding missing persons, furthering investigations, and more. Lexington's police department continues to expand and utilize new technologies to serve the community and help its officers, while navigating the limited financial resources available.

To help with recruitment and retention, the department has been working with a marketing consultant to create more modern advertising designed to attract and increase applicants. Additionally, a wellness unit was created to help all the department's employees which includes physical health and offering programs for mental health, personal relationships, and financial wellness. The department hired a full-time mental health professional to assist officers and civilian employees.

The communications strategy has also improved to better connect with the community and its media partners. This includes using social media more to inform and engage with the community. "Your LexPD" gives the community more information about the different units within the department and how they help serve the Lexington Community. Public service announcements spread awareness about issues impacting Lexington and how people can safeguard themselves from crime.

With the department's response, and the legislature's support, these issues have made an impact. In 2023, there was the first increase in personnel since 2017. Lexington has seen a decrease in violent crime which has involved help from the entire community.

In response to a question from Representative Lockett, Chief Weathers replied that recruits are different, generationally. Contemporary policing is different than it was in past times.

In response to a question from Representative Stalker, Chief Weathers stated that recruit classes, in general, are increasing in size.

Assistant Chief Joey Harris began with an overview of the Lexington Fire Department's recruiting data which has seen a decline of applicants over the past several years, resulting in a 27 percent reduction in the number of applicants between 2019 and 2023.

The department has increased its social media presence. Two new software platforms were implemented that allow the department to actively manage the application process, provide updated information, and promote engagement from the applicants. As a result, the department has yielded a 25 percent applicant increase in 2024.

The department has not experienced a significant challenge in its ability to retain personnel; however, it has identified areas common to attrition deficiencies in its organization. Low levels in staffing, and consistent increases in call volume affect retention rates. It is common for both issues to attribute to workplace burnout and consideration for another career path. The staffing challenges were recently improved through the acceptance and commitment by the mayor and city council of a federal Staffing for A Safer Emergency Response, (S.A.F.E.R.) Grant. This allowed an increase in the Department's authorized strength by 21 personnel or four percent.

There has been a 19 percent increase in the call volume over the last four years resulting in approximately 69,000 runs a year. Based on the year-to-date call volume, the department expects the same amount or greater number of runs this year.

Through partnerships at the federal, state, and local levels, including local hospitals, the establishment of a paramedicine program was made possible. This team provides the necessary

resources and support for individuals who have experienced a non-fatal overdose, individuals who frequently require 911 services, and those who have been referred to the team, based on a comprehensive online assessment of their needs and environment. That initiative is a response to address the call volume challenge and to increase a focused effort with the appropriate training and resources necessary for behavioral health responses.

In January 2024, the Kentucky Community Crisis CoResponse grant was awarded. This initiative has been made available through a federal grant prioritized by the Kentucky Department for Medicaid Services. In the planning phase, the intent is to add a behavioral health resource civilian and an officer from the Lexington Police Department to the team to enhance the fire department's focused effort to behavioral health calls in its community.

A peer support coordinator and peer support team was established in 2020. The team is activated regularly to provide appropriate behavioral pathways for the membership and for other public safety divisions for critical incidents. Team members have been deployed outside of Fayette County to assist organizations during catastrophic events, such as the tornadoes in Western Kentucky. Mayor Gorton and city council members have approved the hiring of a wellness coordinator position in the new budget. This person will maintain a continuity of care started through a partnership with the University of Kentucky, and will assist in reducing injuries through a preventative injury program.

In response to a question from Senator Mills, Assistant Chief Harris said 622 firefighters have been authorized for training.

Chief Scott Colvin, told the Committee that during 2022, corrections recruiting nationwide had devolved, beyond critical, to a level never seen before in his 35 years. Corrections systems had failed. Multiple states deployed their national guards to prevent the operational collapse of their corrections facilities.

At the end of 2022, the division had 127 vacancies comprising 46 percent of the officer positions. Through the efforts and support of all stakeholders, both officers and elected officials, the Community Corrections now has just 30 officer vacancies to fill in order to achieve full division staffing for this position. The Division of Corrections is 89 percent staffed and this is an encouraging number.

The new generation officer must be highlighted, which is one deeply involved in social work, trained in mental health interventions, and motivated to put someone on a path to reentry. Chief Colvin noted that when he took over the jail, officers were required to work two, sometimes three 16 hour shifts a week. Fatigue and burnout were high, and morale was low.

In January of 2023, with the resources and support provided by Mayor Gorton and the city council, the Division of Corrections increased efforts to recruit officers. These efforts included advertising on city buses; making local television commercials; increasing the division's presence at job fairs; communicating with Ft. Campbell and Ft. Knox advising them of the Division's interest in separating veterans; co-sponsoring the Lexington Veterans 5K Run; establishing relationships with the faith-based community to ask for their assistance in attracting

candidates; and increasing community involvement. Even with these efforts, recruiting numbers remained challenging.

However, In February of 2023, the City of Lexington signed an agreement with the Fraternal Order of Police that increased the starting salary for a corrections recruit to \$50,000 plus a \$3,000 sign on bonus. The salary increase had a positive and immediate impact on both recruiting and retention. Interest and moral increased.

In analyzing the division's recruiting data, the applicants came primarily through social media and employee referrals. This is where the division placed its focus. In one year, staffing has increased by 90 officers. In the first six months of 2024, 81 percent of the 66 new recruits this year have stayed on.

Retention is recruiting. Officers were given access to the executive commanders of the division to voice concerns, offer feedback, and ask questions. The opportunity was there to get to know the staff on a personal level and to talk one on one. The division rewarded officers in big ways and small, formally and in person. No one ever becomes tired of being appreciated.

Roll call is taken daily. Officers are briefed on what the administration is working on to gain their support for initiatives, to accurately describe the state of operations, and to remind the staff of the higher purpose of the division's work which is to connect people to services and programs that place them on a path for reentry through its new Second Chance Academy, the Hope Center, or other available programs. The division is connecting people back to their families with options they may never had before. This is something to take pride in.

In Lexington, programs to achieve a national certification from the American Jail Association have been established for sworn staff. The division is currently the third in the U.S. for number of current certified jail officers. Additionally, four commanders of the division attend the American Jail Association National Command Jail Leadership Academy each year. A corrections operations certificate program has been developed for division officers with Kentucky State University. The 15-hour certificate will be offered in the fall semester. These programs have been envisioned, designed, and developed on their own. They are not mandated, and no assistance is received from the state.

In response to a question from Representative Hart, Assistant Chief Harris stated that the department has expanded its paramedic class and has partnered with the University of Kentucky.

In response to a question from Representative Fleming, Mayor Gorton replied that Lexington has hired people in the mental health field who coordinate with the police department. Chief Weathers added that the police department works with the fire department in providing mental health support. A chaplain goes to the emergency scene and there is also an employee assistance program.

Senator Mays Bledsoe commented that the City of Lexington is transparent and an authentic community.

Mayor Craig Greenberg, Louisville Metro, began by thanking the General Assembly for their investment in Louisville. Due to the historic funding, Louisville has a new economic development plan, which is important for all of Kentucky. The region's overall economic health affects not only Louisville's residents, but also the entire state. Approximately 36 percent of Kentucky's population lives within a one-hour drive of the city. More than one-third of the state's gross domestic product is generated within the Louisville region, including one-third of statewide tourism dollars, and over 16,000 students graduate from Louisville area higher institutions every year.

Louisville is hosting many spectacular events, such as the Kentucky Derby Festival, the Professional Golfer's Association of America Championship, the Gazebo Festival, and others.

Louisville Metro's economic development plan includes four pillars: investing in quality of place; investing in people; improving entrepreneurial development and access to capital; and telling Louisville's story.

The mayor encouraged collaboration with Louisville and Kentucky's other local governments.

Acting Chief Paul Humphrey, Louisville Police Department, said that the department's focus is keeping people safe, and on officer and employee wellness through using the Summit Wellness Center. The department is contracting with mental wellness services and they have already served over sixty officers.

In 2021, an officer's entry pay was \$45,000. By 2026, the department is anticipating entry pay will be \$66,000. Officers need to be paid competitively to attract and retain them. Improvements are being made to department facilities to provide better working spaces for officers and employees.

Violent crime and gun crime in Louisville is not at an acceptable level. The department is willing to work with the legislature following the passage of HB 5, or the Safer Kentucky Act, which calls for harsher punishments for crimes across the state. There is a mental health crises that needs to be addressed for everyone's safety.

Chief Brian O'Neill, Louisville Fire Department, stated that the fire department does so much more than just fight fires. The Louisville Fire Department protects the urban service district, which includes the Entertainment District, Central Business District, Whiskey Row, Yum Center, Churchill Downs, University of Louisville, Museum Row, and the Waterfront. It hosts an overnight population of 250,000 and a daytime population of approximately 330,000. The area hosts special events like the Derby serving 150,000 persons, sports events at Cardinal Stadium serving 40,000 to 50,000 persons, and Thunder over Louisville serving a half million plus persons. The area contains 45 miles of Interstate; extends through the Ohio River to the Indiana Shore which sees 280 million tons of cargo annually; and contains the bridges crossing the Ohio River for a total of 210,000 crossings per day.

The Louisville Fire Department is the third oldest fulltime professional fire department in the United States. The department has just under 500 employees who are involved in fire suppression, fire prevention, arson, automotive service, and comprise administrative staff. The

department responds to 150 incidents each day for over 50,000 incidents per year. Sixty percent of those incidents are medical, and 60 percent of the department's time is spent on fire and technical calls. A company will be on-scene from the time of the 911 call in four minutes.

There are over 800 structure fires per year, which results in \$18 million annually in fire loss. However \$367 million in property is saved. So, for every dollar invested in the Louisville Fire Department, there is \$3.55 in property protected.

The Louisville Fire Department is an internationally accredited department and has a Class 1 Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating--something that only 122 departments possess.

Louisville's Fire Departments are contending with aging Infrastructure. There are 11 stations that are over 50 years old, and seven that are over 100. The department is several years behind on apparatus replacement. A particular engine made 1,500 runs a year when it was new 22 years ago, and it now makes 3,500 per year.

In response to a question from Representative Bray, Mayor Greenberg stated that the City of Louisville has a strong relationship with the PGA and works closely with them to make the tournament and other events at Valhalla successful.

Senator Chambers Armstrong commented that she was impressed with the fire service's response time.

In response to a question from Senator Chambers Armstrong, Acting Chief Humphrey replied that the Deflection Program was created in 2019 which redirects a mental health crisis encounter away from the police department to professionals to handle it. The department will continue to expand the program and will need more support.

In response to a question from Representative Fleming, Acting Chief Humphrey said that regarding every new law that is passed, department tries to ensure that it maximizes the effectiveness of the law through engagement with all applicable resources.

Mayor Greenberg noted Louisville Metro's partnership with the Kentucky Attorney General to increase prosecutions of violent crime offenders.

In response to a question from Representative Chester-Burton, Chief O'Neill replied that the Louisville Department works closely with all local fire departments.

In response to a question from Senator Mays Bledsoe, Mayor Greenburg stated that 40 percent of the budget goes to fire, police, EMS, and all emergency agencies. Acting Chief Humphrey said that the authorized strength of the police force is 1,328 with the present number of employees being 1,045.

In response to a question from Senator Mills, Mayor Greenburg said Louisville is thriving, is excited to host legislators from all the states, and stands ready to help with the NCSL Conference.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.