

# **INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY AFFAIRS, AND PUBLIC PROTECTION**

## **Minutes of the 1st Meeting Of the 2018 Interim**

**August 13, 2018**

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

The 1st meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection was held on Monday, August 13, 2018, at 10:00 AM, in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Tim Moore, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Albert Robinson, Co-Chair; Representative Tim Moore, Co-Chair; Senators Julian M. Carroll, Perry B. Clark, C.B. Embry Jr., Ernie Harris, Jimmy Higdon, Dennis Parrett, Whitney Westerfield, Mike Wilson, and Max Wise; Representatives John Blanton, Tom Burch, Jeffery Donohue, Myron Dossett, Jim DuPlessis, Chris Fugate, Chris Harris, DJ Johnson, Ruth Ann Palumbo, Rob Rothenburger, Dean Schamore, and Walker Thomas.

Guests: Commander Lew Anderson; Steven Ray, Political and Program Director of Boys State, Dr. Peter Trzop, Executive Director of Boys State, Ryan Getler, Carl Olde Loohuis, Boys and Girls State; Rebecca Willis-Nichols, Becky Stinsky, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Heather French Henry, Deputy Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA); Brigadier General (Ret.) Steve Bullard; Captain Tim Olsen, Kentucky National Guard; Heath Dolen, Behavioral Health Administrator, Cabinet for Health and Family Services; Laura Begin, Executive Staff Advisor, Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

LRC Staff: Erica Warren, Jessica Zeh, Jonathan Philpot, and Elizabeth Hardy.

### **Distinguished Veteran**

Commander Lew Anderson and his father, Arthur Anderson, who served in the Vietnam War, were each recognized as a Distinguished Veteran. This was the first time two distinguished veterans were recognized in the same meeting. Commander Anderson summarized his time in the military, primarily on the ethos of a Navy Seal. Commander Anderson and his father led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Boys and Girls State Presentation**

Dr. Peter Trzop, Executive Director of Boys State, and Ryan Getler and Carl Olde Loohuis, Boys State Alumni, discussed the American Legion's Boys State and Girls State programs and their desire to see veteran policy reform. Dr. Pete Trzop discussed the redesign of the Boys State Program in the last 5 years. Changes have included increased staff, adding the Women's Auxiliary, new curriculum, and taking the program to a college level. Enrollment and funding have increased. There is also a new internship program.

Ryan Getler and Carl Loohuis discussed veteran policy reform, including changes to the Kentucky Constitution and laws. They said that veterans are struggling. The goal is to provide veterans with better lives. They had a PowerPoint presentation and distributed a 'White Paper' handout, which included proposed legislation by multiple Kentucky veterans and leaders.

In response to a question from Representative Rothenburger, Mr. Getler said there the American Legion has 144 posts in Kentucky, but five have closed in the last year because of the high property taxes owed. Representative Rothenburger then suggested that they look at other tax exemptions because the county property tax is a small part of the tax receipt.

Also discussed was a resolution honoring veteran service organizations and encouraging legislation that would provide tax relief for veterans. Chairman Moore emphasized that veteran service organizations have an important role in communities. Follow a motion by Representative Burch to adopt this resolution and a second by Senator Wise, the resolution was adopted by voice vote.

### **Suicide Prevention Program**

Rebecca Willis-Nichols, Suicide Prevention Coordinator, and Becky Stinsky, Suicide Prevention Social Worker, testified on behalf of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. They focused on preventing veteran suicide and offered a portion of a current training that they have been providing others.

The VA discourages the use of some terms regarding suicide and instead offered more positive sounding terminology. Instead of 'failed suicide attempt,' saying 'suicide survivor' or 'attempted suicide' has a more positive connotation. Kentucky is ranked 16<sup>th</sup> in the nation in its suicide rates. Nationwide, there are 764 suicide attempts each month among veterans receiving VA benefits. Common myths about suicide were discussed. For example, asking about suicide does not create suicidal thoughts but instead offers an opportunity to the individual to talk about feelings.

The presentation also mentioned the acronym S.A.V.E., which stands for Signs Asking Validating Encouraging Expediting: Signs of suicide, Asking about suicide, Validating feelings, Encouraging help, and Expediting getting help.

Resources include the veteran crisis hotline, crisis text, and online chat, and there are local resources. The Lexington location offers mental health support, telemental health services, REACHVET, and Primary Care Mental Health Integration (PCMHI).

Heather French Henry, Deputy Commissioner of the KDVA, discussed veteran suicide prevention and how the KDVA partners with multiple state, federal, and non-profit organizations. Many veterans are not enrolled in VA benefits. KDVA reaches out to those not enrolled. Partners include the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, the VA, and the Sheriffs Association. The partnership between the VA and KDVA is important. They ‘co-locate’ in rural areas, have increased mental health services through telecommunication, and provide gun locks for those who want them. A unique aspect of the partnership is the Hansen Veterans Center, where the VA has a Community Based Outpatient Clinic inside the veteran’s nursing home.

Captain Tim Olsen from Kentucky Army National Guard Behavioral Health discussed the impact of mental health facilities on soldiers and how internal staffing had been increased from one full-time employee to six full-time employees to help service members. Approximately 100 soldiers are treated for mental illness each month. The Air National Guard has also increased services.

Representative Blanton asked for an update on the Bowling Green nursing facility. Deputy Commissioner, Heather French Henry, said the application had been submitted to the federal VA, and the facility is on a priority waiting list.

### **Consideration of Referred Administrative Regulation**

The committee considered the referred administrative regulation 902 KAR 101:040, relating to safety at Kentucky youth camps. Representative Rothenburger asked about the language indicating that licenses were required in addition to permits. Laura Begin from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services clarified that the licensure requirements only apply to camps that also meet the definition of child care facilities. Senator Parrett moved to approve 902 KAR 010:040. The motion was seconded by Senator Clark, and the committee concurred by voice vote.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:03 PM.