

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

Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 2019 Interim

November 22, 2019

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 3rd meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection was held on Friday, November 22, 2019, at 1:00 PM, in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Albert Robinson, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Albert Robinson, Co-Chair; Representative Walker Thomas, Co-Chair; Senators Julian M. Carroll, C.B. Embry Jr., Denise Harper Angel, Ernie Harris, Jimmy Higdon, Dennis Parrett, Wil Schroder, Brandon Smith, Whitney Westerfield, Mike Wilson; Representatives John Blanton, Myron Dossett, Jim DuPlessis, Mark Hart, Matthew Koch, Scott Lewis, Rob Rothenburger, Dean Schamore, Attica Scott, Susan Westrom, Buddy Wheatley, Lisa Willner, and Les Yates.

Guests: Brigadier General Steve Bullard, Executive Director, Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs, Zach Morgan, Executive Assistant, Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs; John Holiday, Executive Director, Kentucky Office of Homeland Security, Mike Sunseri, Deputy Executive Director, Kentucky Office of Homeland Security; General Benjamin Adams, Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs, Dean Stoops, Deputy Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs; Lyle Hanna, Chairman, Kentucky Habitat for Humanity Board of Directors, Heath Duncan, Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity of Hopkins Co, Greg Dike, Executive Director, Cave Run Area Habitat for Humanity.

LRC Staff: Jessica Zeh, Jonathan Philpot, and Elizabeth Hardy

After the pledge of allegiance and roll call was taken, Co-chair Robinson introduced the new Co-chair, Representative Thomas, before promptly handing the meeting over to Co-chair Thomas.

Approval of October Minutes

Senator Westerfield moved to approve the October minutes. The motion was seconded by Senator Wilson and the minutes were approved.

Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs

Executive Director of Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs (KCMA), Brigadier General (R.) Steve Bullard discussed KCMA's goals. The first goal is to protect and grow military installations and activities and advocate for future missions including acquiring C-130Js for the Kentucky Air National Guard. There is regular contact between KCMA and the Kentucky Congressional Delegation.

KCMA's second goal is to expand the economic impact of Kentucky defense-related industry. Since fiscal year 2008, the impact has increased by 42.7 percent to \$17 billion, while the average state has dropped approximately 5.4 percent over the same time period. There is also potential for another \$2 billion of growth over the next two years.

KCMA's third goal is to create and implement a model for transitioning service members, veterans, and spouses. To support and train veterans, they aim to form partnerships with several entities including Kentucky Workforce Matters Task Force, Kentucky Works Collective, and several others. A grant of \$1.5 million was also earned to help veterans pay for childcare, fees, and equipment necessary.

Establishing Kentucky as the most military friendly state and growing the veterans population is the fourth goal of KCMA. To achieve this, active cooperation with the Kentucky General Assembly is vital. Since 2000, 18 Senate bills and 99 House bills have been passed on issues such as education, licensing, economic development, taxes, and family support. These bills have taken Kentucky from ranking in the 20s to ranking in the top five of military friendly states. KCMA will continue to work on other initiatives such as easing license restrictions, tax exemptions, and supporting the Bluegrass Station to entice and maintain veterans in Kentucky.

The final goal is to communicate strategically and gain advocacy by commission membership and support through military installations, state and federal agencies, defense industry, Chamber of Commerce, and Association of Defense Communities. Teamwork between the legislature, Kentucky Department of Veterans and Military Affairs, and the Joint Executive Council of Veterans Organizations is also important.

In response to Representative DuPlessis' question, General Bullard explained that if acquired, the new C-130Js will be located in Louisville at the Air National Guard base.

In response to Representative Dossett's question, General Bullard explained there is someone in charge of transitioning programs at Fort Campbell, and they are advocating strongly for those programs.

Co-chair Robinson stated that he supports any military legislation that comes through committee and added that some of legislation needs to be filed early so that it has a chance to go through the legislative process.

Kentucky Office of Homeland Security

John Holiday, Executive Director of the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security (KOHS) stated that Kentucky is safer than it was in 2015, but stressed that work will always need to be done for evolving threats and problems. Since he was appointed as executive director, each employee has a specific and important role as well as job tasks that are vital to the KOHS mission. Politics are no longer involved in the office so over 99 percent of state counties received resources from the KOHS, the other 1 percent did not apply for them. Accomplishments that have been made over the years include developing one of the best cyber security working groups in the country. The School Safe Initiative was also designed and enforced in the state. However, he explained that there is more that needs to be done to protect students.

Mike Sunseri, Deputy Executive Director of the KOHS and administrator of the 911 Services Board talked about what is best for the 911 system as a whole and why the system follows the law. For example, KRS requires all 911 Board's administrative funds to be audited twice a year. When KOHS took over in 2017, it was discovered the board was 4 years behind on audits. This was remedied by performing a 4 year audit, which revealed that in 2015 more than \$250,000 had been wrongly diverted from a fund committed to 911 call centers. The money was quickly replaced.

He was also excited to report that the 911 Services Board earned a \$2.3 million Next Generation 911 federal grant. Next Generation 911 is an IP based interoperable network that will allow people to call, text, send pictures and video to the call centers versus the copper based technology counties currently have.

Co-chair Robinson commented on what a great job he think John Holiday has done and hopes that he will continue to be director for many years.

Representative Dossett offered his thanks to John Holiday for his impact he has on local communities including Christian county.

In response to Senator Harris' question, KOHS do not have a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility but instead have a Secure Working Environment since confidentiality only goes as high as secrets within the office.

Senator Higdon thanked Director Holiday for his administration of grants.

Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs

General (R.) Ben Adams, Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA), spoke about budget requests. There is high turnover of nursing staff, because the current salary is not competitive. The department also wishes to hire 20 additional field benefits representatives, because they could bring in at least 6,600 more veterans. Funding veteran programs such as Homeless Veterans Program, Veterans Service

Organizations Burial Honor Guard Program, and Indigent Veteran Burial Program are also necessary. Additionally, they would also like to provide field representatives with vehicles and increase Veterans Center salaries.

General Adams discussed KDVA's legislative priorities. He believes that tax exemptions of military retired pay and survivor benefits from state income tax will attract people from other states along with exempting Veteran Service Organizations' property tax. Additionally, they want clarification on eligibility for special military license plates and military license plates for spouses. The department wants to amend KRS 132.810 to broaden the homestead exemption to include widowed spouses of disabled veterans and KRS 40.317 which would remove the requirement for the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs to have no less than five Veteran Benefits Regional Administrators as well as amend the definition of veteran-owned business.

In response to Representative Schamore's question, General Adams clarified that it is the state who certifies a Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business and said it is required to show proof of twelve months' worth of income which makes it harder for veterans to receive certification. Deputy Commissioner Dean Stoops added that dual certification on a federal and state level is required.

Representative Blanton commented that a law has been passed recently regarding occupational licensing after leaving the military but suggested finding a way to get the message to veterans. General Adams agreed and said that he is going to work with KCMA to achieve that.

In response to Senator Higdon's question, General Adams said he believes there is more positive than negative comments about passing legislation to designate the Honor and Remember flag as the state's emblem.

Senator Parrett commented that he supports funding of the Homeless Veterans Program and the Indigent Veteran Burial Program.

Responding to Representative Rothenburger, General Adams explained that a nurse call center would allow nurses and other staff to talk within the building as well as allowing staff to react to emergencies more efficiently.

Co-chair Robinson thanked General Adams for his dedication to veterans including before he became commissioner of the KDVA.

Kentucky Habitat for Humanity Inc. State Office

Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity of Hopkins County, Heath Duncan, expressed there are many veterans that still need affordable housing in the Commonwealth. He reported that in his district they have recently finished three veteran projects in Hancock County, Madisonville, and Morton's Gap which provided disabled veterans with housing.

Soon, his sector will merge with Christian county as well as moving into Webster County so there will be a 3-county affiliate and hope to reach out to more veterans.

Greg Dike, Executive Director of Cave Run Area Habitat for Humanity, first mentioned that southeastern Kentucky is impoverished and rural in many areas, which contributes to many veterans who are often neglected. Because of this, a new program was started called The Appalachian Veterans Project. This organization is managed by veterans and has made a difference with being able to reach out to more people.

Lyle Hanna, Chairman of Kentucky Habitat for Humanity Board of Directors, closed by saying they are always working with Federal Home Loan Bank, the Home Depot Foundation, and other organizations like that to further help the struggling veterans in Kentucky. They will continue to try to bring in money and attention to this issue.

National Guard Association of Kentucky: Patrick Henry Award

Co-chair Robinson and Senator Embry were both rewarded with the Patrick Henry Award for the dedication to veterans in the commonwealth.

The meeting adjourned at 2:57 PM.