

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

## **Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the 2020 Interim**

**October 28, 2020**

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

The 5th meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection was held on Wednesday, October 28, 2020, at 10:00 AM, in Room 171 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Walker Thomas, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Walker Thomas, Co-Chair; Senator C.B. Embry Jr., Co-Chair Designate; Senators Denise Harper Angel, Jimmy Higdon, Dennis Parrett, Wil Schroder, Brandon Smith, Whitney Westerfield, and Mike Wilson; Representatives John Blanton, Myron Dossett, Jim DuPlessis, Chris Fugate, Al Gentry, Mark Hart, Samara Heavrin, Kathy Hinkle, Matthew Koch, Scott Lewis, C. Ed Massey, Patti Minter, Dean Schamore, Attica Scott, Buddy Wheatley, and Lisa Willner.

Guests: Colonel Bobby H. Freeman, Distinguished Veteran; Dr. Cherie Dawson-Edwards, Ph.D., Associate Dean, A&S Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Associate Professor, Criminal Justice, Director of Social Change, Department of Criminal Justice, University of Louisville; Policy Strategist Keturah Herron, American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky; Police Social Worker Kelly Pompilio, Alexandria Police Department; Chief Joseph Monroe, President, University of Kentucky Police Department, and Pat Crowley, Legislative Affairs, Kentucky Association of Chiefs of Police.

LRC Staff: Jessica Zeh, Andrew Salman, and Kelsey Lockhart

### **Approval of September Minutes**

Senator Embry moved to approve the September meeting minutes. Representative Hart seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

### **Distinguished Veteran**

Colonel Bobby H. Freeman testified that he was commissioned by the ROTC Program at Murray State University while the army draft was active. He went to aviation school after two years and stated he is 85 and still flying. He served four tours, then worked in the American Embassy in Nepal. His last assignment was in Fort Campbell. His wife,

Clarissa, commonly known as “TC” did many things to support the military community and the main gate at Fort Campbell is named after her.

Responding to a question from Chair Thomas, Colonel Freeman stated that his wife was aware that Fort Campbell was going to dedicate their main gate after her, but she passed before it was built.

Representative Dossett thanked Colonel Freeman for his service to our nation and expressed his condolences that TC was no longer with us for them to thank her as well.

### **Public Safety**

Cherie Dawson-Edwards, Ph.D., Associate Dean of A&S Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice, Director of Social Change asserts that she came to this meeting as an educator and administrator who works with both students who believe in social change as well as students who want to be or are currently in law enforcement. This diversified student body provides her insight into the defunding of the police movement. She stated that she does not see her testimony as “for” or “against” anything but is here to educate and share the topics discussed in her criminal justice classes.

Dr. Dawson-Edwards said the language used in these concepts is critical to communication. The Minneapolis City Council pledged to abolish the police department and Dr. Dawson-Edwards reiterated that this language is not new or caused by the protests of this year; she has been teaching about criminal justice and prison abolition since 2003. She stated that they want to end policing as we know it: “we’re not abolishing help, we’re abolishing police.” Many communities feel as though policing harms rather than helps or protects and communities believe that empathy needs to be more important.

Dr. Dawson-Edwards implored the committee to ponder if police need to handle every situation that they currently do such as domestic violence, homelessness, prostitution, school security, drug dealers, drug possession, gang violence, theft, and every unexpected crisis. She stated that we expect our police officers to do too many things, which makes their main job of keeping the peace more difficult for them.

According to the editor from *Police Magazine*, there are many Americans who believe the institution of law enforcement itself is racist. Those who use this argument say that the first organized law enforcement in the American colonies were slave patrols who acted more like bounty hunters. Most historians, however, believe the first real professional law enforcement agency in the United States was the Boston Police Department. Sixty-two percent of proposals, to state and federal legislators, providing alternatives to policing are centered on funding and reinvestment.

People frequently relate police reform for systemic change to divesting and investing within the communities. Those who argue for police reform, question if the

proposed reforms: allocate more money to the police; advocate for more police and policing; focus on technology; focus on dialogues with individual officers; or are funded with tax dollars.

Responding to a question from Representative Scott, Dr. Dawson-Edwards states that communities that have already started building community safety alternatives began with mental health, because it is an area that police often feel ill-equipped to deal with. She went on to say that there are many mental health experts that know how to handle mental health crises and do not have guns and weaponry that police officers possess. The CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) Program in Oregon is an example of a community safety alternative that utilizes mental health professionals and crisis workers to intervene in non-violent situations. She argued that there are many grassroots groups that may not have the resources to scale their work to the size of their communities and wants the committee to rethink allocating resources to these public safety alternatives.

Responding to a question from Representative Blanton, Dr. Dawson-Edwards asserts that she has no experience as a police officer, but has experience with probation and victim services. She also stated that she does not know how Kentucky's budget is allocated for law enforcement. Representative Blanton stated that Kentucky sits in the bottom five in the country in regards to law enforcement spending and that Kentucky should spend more to support our law enforcement rather than defunding the police.

Representative Wheatley commented that while he does not agree with divesting funds from law enforcement, he would be open to any additional funding going towards social work and mental health programs. He added that while many people are averse to innovation and change, people are adaptable. Naming the movement "Defunding the Police" was not a good start for open communication.

Responding to a question from Representative Wheatley, Dr. Dawson-Edwards stated that she has been responsible for curriculum at the University of Louisville and the Southern Police Institute. She added that she is not anti-police and fully supports education and training.

Representative Hart commented that we need to defend the Kentucky National Guard, as their attention to duty, professionalism, and dedication should be applauded.

Representative Dossett stated that law enforcement needs to be respected for sacrifices made. He supports funding all law enforcement agencies further than they currently are, and thanks them for helping in the worst situations.

Keturah Herron, Policy Strategist for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Kentucky stated that this topic is incredibly important and timely and she would be

remiss if she did not bring up how the incident involving Breonna Taylor has been the driving force behind the work that she has done this year. She stated that the incident in Philadelphia with Walter Wallace Jr. was the very reason she was testifying. She stated that Mr. Wallace was experiencing severe mental distress when the police responded to the scene, he had a knife and he was met with deadly force. Mental illnesses have to be treated differently in order to better our society and lessen the civil unrest in our country.

Public safety is a state or local government issue which often has a broad portfolio of responsibilities, which may include police and fire departments, ambulances and medical services, the Office of Emergency Management, and even the protection of property and businesses. The five pillars of public safety are education and community, housing and physical environment, physical and mental health, stability and personal safety, and economic and food security. Together, if met, these pillars lead to decreased crime, violence, substance abuse, homelessness, and high school dropout rates. Continuously not meeting the requirements for all five of these pillars can be detrimental to how a community thrives and as a result we have created communities where people are forced to compete against each other for scarce essential resources.

The first thing that needs to be done is to increase community-led initiatives. There needs to be police free schools that are full of trained counselors and restorative justice programs. There should also be access to trauma-informed responders for domestic violence and mental health calls for when someone clearly needs help, but not from police. An increase in minimum wage, substance abuse resources in communities, and an end to qualified immunity for police officers. These changes will increase trust and stability in troubled communities. There should be a non-carceral response to behaviors caused by poverty, mental health, or substance use and support initiatives that provide training and transitional job opportunities for those impacted by policy change.

Responding to a question from Representative Scott, Ms. Herron states that when looking at Kentucky as a whole, we need to be responsible and address these issues in all communities.

Responding to a question from Representative Fugate, Ms. Herron stated that she has no experience as a police officer, but previously aspired to be in law enforcement. Regarding the incident with Mr. Wallace, she stated the responding officers knew before arriving that the person they were responding to had a knife and was diagnosed with multiple mental illnesses. She stated the officers should have put more focus on utilizing the family present at the scene to help deescalate the situation and they should have chosen a less lethal option rather than a gun. Representative Fugate asserted that police are ranked 75<sup>th</sup> in Kentucky in pay and if any changes happen to the police budget it needs to be increased and reflect that Kentucky appreciates that these officers risk their lives for our safety.

Responding to Representative Koch, Ms. Herron asserted that she is aware that policing is hard and dangerous work. She asked the committee to go into their communities and ask police officers what types of calls they feel as though they should not be responding to. Ms. Herron says that it is up to legislators to find alternative solutions for these calls.

President Joseph Monroe, Chief of the University of Kentucky Police Department, stated there are four things law enforcement must have to be successful: trust, transparency, accountability, and legitimacy. He stated that law enforcement across Kentucky can do better but they need help. Financial help from the state legislature and intentional allocation of funds are critical. The hiring process needs to be strengthened so that only the best candidates are hired.

Police departments would also request additional funding dedicated towards increasing and enhancing training in Kentucky would help renew the trust from citizens. This training would be verbal de-escalation, crisis intervention training (CIT), technology to provide simulated training situations, and online training. Funding needs to be allocated to supporting police officers' mental health and explore the use of social workers in order to reduce the frequency force is used; not to take away from the officers but to assist.

Kentucky is reaching a tipping point as there are many police officers nearing retirement. Covid-19 has also decreased the number of officers that are able to be in the Department of Criminal Justice training academy. Body-worn cameras are an effective tool for ensuring law enforcement transparency and accountability and helps build trust with communities.

Responding to a question from Representative Blanton, President Monroe states that the significant reduction of applications for law enforcement can be rectified if focus is put on this being a profession which is supported by the public and the legislature.

Kelly Pompilio, Police Social Worker (PSW) of the Alexandria Police Department defined the roles and responsibilities of a PSW as highly specialized in the field of social work and they act as liaisons between the public service departments and the citizens of their city. PSW work directly with victims and families to assist with crisis intervention and creating individualized safety plans. Ms. Pompilio is the first PSW in Kentucky, beginning this position in 2016 after being with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services for 12 years where she worked very closely with law enforcement.

PSW work with the indigent population, those who experience traumatic events, deaths, physical mental and developmental issues, substance abuse, domestic cases, and victims of crimes. PSW reduce recidivism and recurring calls as they have more time than police officers typically do to holistically help individuals. PSW enhance victim cooperation, especially in rape and domestic violence instances, as they use a multi-disciplined approach and support the victim through the entire process.

Fire and ambulance services typically provide assistance to senior citizens who frequently fall or need lift assistance but PSW help them find a safe place to live and increase their independence. PSW assist the code enforcement division by identifying the people that have been cited violations but do not have the resources to fix them. PSW assist with recurring yard conditions, noise complaints, and neighbor disputes.

PSW work as advocates for their clients by assessing their needs and provide intervention and referrals. They are liaisons to the community and increase satisfaction among community members which leads to a sharp reduction in repeat service calls. They are often the lead in events like “Coffee with a Cop” and are available to be someone that the community can talk to. They use every opportunity to educate through social media and provide presentations to seniors in regards to scams and what to be aware of.

Ms. Pompilio stated that most of her clients are referred to her by police officers and EMS workers but people are beginning to come ask for a PSW instead of a police officer if they are not reporting a crime. Typically PSW act as a follow-up after a police officer has been involved, as people are more inclined to talk with a PSW than a police officer or with social services.

There are many challenges the PSW are currently facing but the most pressing is the lack of communication between the PSW and police officer software systems. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) is a large barrier with this communication as well. There is not much awareness of the PSW program and many within the community still struggle to understand of the role of PSW. The Alexandria PSW program is not grant funded, but are employed by the city. PSW’s are not first responders, instead they often follow-up with citizens when needed and are in no way are they meant to replace the police.

Representative Willner commented that she really appreciated this presentation, as it shed light onto how law enforcement can work with social workers to best address the needs of their communities.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:02 PM.