

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

Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 2023 Interim

August 22, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 3rd meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection was held on Tuesday, August 22, 2023, at 11:00 AM, in Room 154 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 Rick Girdler, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg, Matthew Deneen, Whitney Westerfield, Gex Williams, and Mike Wilson; Representatives John Blanton, Steve Bratcher, Stephanie Dietz, Myron Dossett, Chris Freeland, Chris Fugate, Jim Gooch Jr., Mark Hart, Matthew Koch, Scott Lewis, Savannah Maddox, Candy Massaroni, Marianne Proctor, Rebecca Raymer, Scott Sharp, Sarah Stalker, Ashley Tackett Laferty, and Bill Wesley.

Guests: Special Agent T.J. Hanna, Federal Bureau of Investigation; Ashli Watts, President and Chief Executive Officer, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce; Zach Morgan, Project Manager, Kentucky Chamber Foundation; Angela Parkerson, Tami Boblitt, and Ashley Greene, The Never Alone – Nick Rucker Foundation; Representative Nancy Tate, House District 27; and Monica Kelsey, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Safe Haven Baby Box Foundation.

LRC Staff: Jessica Zeh, Mark Mitchell, and Logan Schaaf.

Public Corruption and Other Threats

Special Agent T.J. Hanna, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), delivered a presentation on public corruption and other threats. Special Agent Hanna discussed scenarios in which the FBI could prosecute people for threats against public officials, and the balance between free speech and true threats. He played voice messages that sparked FBI investigations, each containing threats to public officials that rose to the level of a true threat.

Responding to questions from Senator Berg, Special Agent Hanna detailed the circumstances in which the FBI could make someone surrender their firearms or seek mental health evaluation. He also covered laws around speech targeting people based on

race, gender, and religion, and circumstances in which that speech could rise to the level of stalking.

Responding to a question from Representative Dietz, Special Agent Hanna detailed the laws around threatening posts on social media, and when a threatening post could rise to the level of FBI investigation.

Responding to a question from Representative Thomas, Special Agent Hanna covered the process FBI agents go through when changing locations or divisions within the agency.

Military Transition Workforce Initiative

Ashli Watts, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, and Zach Morgan, Project Manager for the Kentucky Chamber Foundation, presented on the Military Hiring Academy, a new project by the Chamber Foundation's Workforce Center.

Responding to a question from Representative Koch, Ms. Watts and Mr. Morgan emphasized that the Military Hiring Academy program is primarily aimed towards employers. They also highlighted the importance of making servicemembers aware of which businesses are participating in the program.

Responding to a question from Representative Hart, Mr. Morgan said that there will be a cost to employers for participation in the program, and that Chamber members will pay a discounted rate.

Responding to a question from Representative Stalker, Mr. Morgan emphasized the importance of ongoing dialogue between employers and veteran employees, particularly surrounding mental health.

The Never Alone – Nick Rucker Foundation

Representative Candy Massaroni, House District 50, Angela Parkerson, Tami Boblitt, and Ashley Green of the Never Alone – Nick Rucker Foundation, discussed the fentanyl crisis. Ms. Parkerson, Ms. Boblitt, and Ms. Green each lost children to fentanyl. They started the Never Alone – Nick Rucker Foundation to bring fentanyl awareness and prevention to Kentucky, to reduce the stigma around treatment, and to change laws that deal with the crisis.

Representative Fugate spoke about the dangers of the fentanyl crisis and discussed his work on drug prevention for the Kentucky State Police. He advocated for tougher penalties for drug dealers.

Representative Blanton discussed his work on legislation to charge drug traffickers with murder if their product causes someone to die.

Senator Deneen spoke about the importance of funding drug task force teams to work against the flow of drugs into Kentucky.

Senator Westerfield discussed the existing statutes relating to drug trafficking.

Safe Haven Baby Boxes

Representative Nancy Tate, House District 27, and Monica Kelsey, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Safe Haven Baby Box Foundation, provided an update on the Safe Haven Baby Boxes in Kentucky. Ms. Kelsey explained how the Baby Box system works and its importance as an alternative to abandonment. The boxes are located in fire stations and automatically call 911 if a baby is placed in it. Three babies have been surrendered in Kentucky since the program started.

Responding to a question from Representative Bratcher, Representative Tate said that no babies have yet been placed in the box outside of Hardin County.

With no further business before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 12:45 PM. The next meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection is scheduled for Wednesday, September 27, 2023, at 11:00 AM in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex.