

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

Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the 2023 Interim November 8, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The sixth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection was held on November 8, 2023, at 11:00 AM in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Rick Girdler, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Rick Girdler, Co-Chair; Representative Walker Thomas, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg, Gary Boswell, Matthew Deneen, Denise Harper Angel, Stephen Meredith, Brandon Smith, Gex Williams, and Mike Wilson; Representatives John Blanton, Steve Bratcher, Stephanie Dietz, Myron Dossett, Chris Fugate, Jim Gooch Jr., Mark Hart, DJ Johnson, Savannah Maddox, Candy Massaroni, Marianne Proctor, Rebecca Raymer, Scott Sharp, Sarah Stalker, Ashley Tackett Laferty, and Bill Wesley.

Guests: Molly Bode, Executive Director, Kentucky Veterans Accelerated Licensure Occupational Recruitment (VALOR); Terry Samuel, President, Kentucky Science and Technology Corporation; Kyle Hoylman, Chair, Board of Radon Safety; Julie Schmidt, Senior Director of External Affairs, Kentucky Educational Television (KET); Tim Bischoff, Chief Technology Officer, KET; Stacy Brantley; Kyle Brundage; Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Whitney Allen, Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA); Juan Renaud, Deputy Commissioner, KDVA; and Mark Bowman, Executive Director, Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers, KDVA.

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

Approval of October Minutes

On a motion by Senator Boswell, seconded by Senator Deneen, the October 25, 2023, meeting minutes were approved.

Kentucky Veterans Accelerated Licensure Occupational Recruitment (VALOR) Program

Molly Bode, Executive Director for Kentucky Veterans Accelerated Licensure Occupational Recruitment (VALOR), and Terry Samuel, President of the Kentucky Science and Technology Corporation, delivered a presentation on the VALOR program.

They discussed the goals and challenges of the program, their workforce partnerships, visits to military bases, results to date, future plans, and their 2024 budget request.

Representative Johnson praised the VALOR program and spoke about occupational licensure compact initiatives. Responding to a question from Representative Johnson, Ms. Bode said that VALOR will assist any veteran looking for employment, regardless of their separation date.

Senator Boswell praised VALOR's efforts to translate skills and training, that veterans receive in the military to the workforce. Mr. Samuel praised the quality and consistency of military training.

Responding to a question from Representative Sharp, Ms. Bode and Mr. Samuel discussed third party entities, which programs like VALOR often are required to pay in order to visit military bases.

Responding to a question from Senator Harper Angel, Mr. Samuel covered the details of KY VALOR's 2024 budget request. Ms. Bode covered the cost per job estimates for VALOR.

Responding to a question from Representative Stalker, Ms. Bode said that VALOR is eager to partner with nonprofit organizations.

Responding to a question from Senator Williams, Ms. Bode said that exempting veterans' retirement income from taxation would help convince veterans to stay in Kentucky.

Responding to a question from Representative Dossett, Ms. Bode and Mr. Samuel compared veteran retirement in Tennessee to Kentucky.

Board of Radon Safety

Kyle Hoylman, Chair of the Board of Radon Safety, provided an update on radon and lung cancer, and discussed the history and current activities of the Board of Radon Safety.

Responding to a question from Senator Berg, Mr. Hoylman said that the Board of Radon Safety plans to work on both regulation and education.

Responding to questions from Senator Boswell, Mr. Hoylman discussed studies that calculated the risk of developing lung cancer after long term radon exposure, and discussed the effects of radon mitigation on real estate values.

Responding to a question from Representative Bratcher, Mr. Hoylman said that Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funds have not been directed to the Board of Radon Safety.

Responding to a question from Representative Sharp, Mr. Hoylman said that he has not been provided with a target date for the direction of EPA funds to the Board of Radon Safety.

Kentucky Educational Television Public Alert System

Julie Schmidt, Senior Director of External Affairs for Kentucky Educational Television (KET), and Tim Bischoff, Chief Technology Officer for KET, provided an overview of the activities of KET and its local emergency alert system.

Responding to a question from Senator Williams, Mr. Bischoff discussed the application of Internet Protocol technology to broadcasting.

Responding to a question from Representative Maddox, Mr. Bischoff discussed the use of geolocation technology for KET programs on streaming platforms.

Responding to a question from Senator Berg, Mr. Bischoff and Ms. Schmidt discussed backup plans for KET broadcasting during emergencies.

Responding to a question from Representative Sharp, Mr. Bischoff discussed KET's microwave distribution network of transmission.

Responding to a question from Senator Williams, Mr. Bischoff said that KET does not have immediate plans to use low orbit satellites for transmission.

Veterans Affairs Benefits

Stacy Brantley and Kyle Brundage, the daughter and grandson of Sergeant Major (Ret.) Frank Brantley, spoke about the challenges they faced in trying to get Sgt. Maj. Brantley into a Kentucky Veterans Center before his death in October. Representative Steve Bratcher, House District 25, discussed his and Senator Deneen's investigation into vacancies at Veterans Centers.

Responding to questions from Representative Hart, Representative Bratcher discussed the staffing issues at Veterans Centers and efforts to address the shortages.

Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Whitney Allen, Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA), Juan Renaud, Deputy Commissioner of KDVA, and Mark Bowman, Executive Director of the Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers within KDVA, discussed staffing and labor issues at veterans centers.

Responding to a question from Representative Hart, Mr. Bowman said that he would provide the members of the committee with data on staffing.

Senator Deneen expressed disappointment at the staffing shortages, vacancies, and communication between the KDVA and the legislature. He asked if Commissioner Allen had ever instructed staff members not to communicate with legislators. Commissioner Allen said that he had not. Senator Deneen said that he hopes for better communication between KDVA and the Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection Committee, and for expanded access to care for veterans.

Representative Bratcher also expressed disappointment at the staffing issues and vacancies at veterans centers, and said that the legislature is ready to support KDVA in solving these problems.

Responding to a question from Representative Johnson, Mr. Bowman explained the waiting list procedures for admission to veterans centers.

Responding to a question from Representative Tackett Laferty, Mr. Bowman discussed recruitment and retention of nurses at veterans centers.

Responding to a question from Senator Berg, Mr. Bowman said that KDVA would provide a target number for a budget that would help them increase staff and reach 100 percent occupancy.

Responding to a question from Representative Bratcher, Mr. Bowman said that KDVA Veterans Centers have not received funding to reach 100 percent occupancy.

Responding to a question from Representative Stalker, Mr. Bowman said that he would provide the members of the committee with data on nursing staff pay increases.

Representative Raymer discussed challenges that nurses face.

Adjournment

With no further business before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 1:20 PM.