

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

Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the 2024 Interim

June 19, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection held its first meeting of the 2024 Interim on Wednesday, June 19, 2024, 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, Gary Boswell, Matthew Deneen, Denise Harper Angel, Jimmy Higdon, Stephen Meredith, Whitney Westerfield, Gex Williams, and Mike Wilson; Representatives John Blanton, Steve Bratcher, Myron Dossett, Chris Freeland, Chris Fugate, Courtney Gilbert, Jim Gooch Jr., Daniel Grossberg, Mark Hart, DJ Johnson, Matthew Koch, Scott Lewis, Savannah Maddox, Candy Massaroni, Marianne Proctor, Rebecca Raymer, Scott Sharp, Sarah Stalker, Pamela Stevenson, Ashley Tackett Laferty, and Bill Wesley.

Guests: Command Sergeant Major Timothy F. Nein, 198th Military Police Battalion, Kentucky Army National Guard; Hannah Rivera, Vice President of External Affairs, Kentucky Community and Technical College System; Megan Stith, Vice President of Advancement, Elizabethtown Community and Technical College; Major Johnson, Chief Deputy, Boyd County Sheriff's Department; Tim Morrison, Safety Coordinator, Boyd County; Representative Lindsey Burke, House District 75; Wendy Johnson, Stakeholder; Former Sergeant Kyle Johnson, Kentucky National Guard; Matt Castor, Vice President of Government and Corporate Relations, USA Cares; Christy Treadway, Stakeholder; and Caleen Treadway, Stakeholder.

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

Recognition of Juneteenth

Representative Pamela Stevenson, House District 43, discussed the history of Juneteenth and noted many accomplishments of the newly freed citizens. In celebrating Juneteenth, she invited a moment of introspection at how people of today can exemplify the principles demonstrated by the individuals who at the time put disagreements aside and promoted the promise of America.

Recognition of Distinguished Soldier

Command Sergeant Major Timothy F. Nein, 198th Military Police Battalion, Kentucky Army National Guard, was introduced by Representative Scott Sharp. Command Sgt. Maj. Nein discussed his military career, including his squad's actions on March 20, 2005, in Operation Iraqi Freedom, during which he earned the Distinguished Service Cross. Representative Johnson thanked Command Sgt. Maj. Nein and said that his and his team's actions were in keeping with the finest traditions of the U.S. military. Representative Sharp presented Command Sgt. Maj. Nein with a VMAPP Challenge Coin.

Kentucky Community and Technical College System Veterans' Programs

Hannah Rivera, Vice President of External Affairs, Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS); and Megan Stith, Vice President of Advancement, Elizabethtown Community and Technical College (ECTC), discussed veteran outreach efforts by KCTCS. They highlighted the veteran tuition waiver program, efforts to increase veteran enrollment, the system-wide Credit for Prior Learning for military training and education, and accelerated pathways to licensed civilian occupations for veterans.

Ms. Stith explained ECTC's veteran services, including the Fort Knox Accelerated Pilot, the USA Cares collaboration, dual credit engagement, and military spouse support.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Thomas, Ms. Stith said that ECTC is actively involved at Fort Knox and offers in-person and virtual classes for soldiers stationed there.

Responding to a question from Senator Boswell, Ms. Rivera detailed the tuition waiver program for veterans and their families, and said that the federal government assists with the costs.

Senator Deneen praised Ms. Rivera and Ms. Stith and asked if there has been an increase in interest from veterans in obtaining certifications in electrician services, carpentry, and advanced manufacturing. Ms. Stith said that she has seen an increase in interest and anticipates that it will continue. Senator Deneen also thanked Representative Steve Bratcher for his active service in the National Guard.

Boyd County Sheriff's Office: Emergency Communication Capabilities, Challenges, and the Compass Program

Representative Scott Sharp, House District 100; Major Johnson, Chief Deputy, Boyd County Sheriff's Department; and Tim Morrison, Safety Coordinator, Boyd County, discussed the state of emergency communications in Boyd County. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, there was supposed to be an increased emphasis on and direction of funds towards law enforcement interoperability and communication.

Major Johnson and Mr. Morrison detailed the communication challenges they face as a result of old equipment and faulty infrastructure. Representative Sharp emphasized the need to address these communication problems. They discussed the Compass Program, an effort to assist law enforcement in building both physical and mental health.

Responding to a question from Senator Berg, Mr. Morrison and Representative Sharp discussed the potential effects on law enforcement communication of increased funding from the federal government for internet connectivity.

Senator Higdon encouraged the presenters to contact Josh Keats, Executive Director of the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security, as several other counties have had these same communication problems, and there may be grants available to address these issues.

Representative Bratcher thanked the presenters for their service and expressed hope that some of the state's urban search and rescue funds could address law enforcement communication issues.

Responding to questions from Senator Boswell, Mr. Morrison discussed the factors that have led to Boyd County's communication and equipment troubles.

Responding to a question from Senator Williams, Mr. Morrison said that finding suitable locations for cell towers is not an issue.

Responding to questions from Representative Fugate, Mr. Morrison said that the estimated cost, according to Motorola, for cell towers, 30 new radios for officers, and new radios and repeaters in emergency vehicles is approximately \$3 million. Mr. Morrison also said that he has discussed leasing service from existing cell towers.

First Responder Workman's Compensation Eligibility for Psychological Injuries

Representative Lindsey Burke, House District 75; Wendy Johnson, Stakeholder; Former Sergeant Kyle Johnson, Kentucky National Guard; Matt Castor, Vice President of Government and Corporate Relations, USA Cares; Christy Treadway, Stakeholder; and Caleen Treadway, Stakeholder, discussed workman's compensation eligibility for first responders. Under current Kentucky law, only employees which includes first responders with physical injuries are eligible for workman's compensation. The presenters expressed their wish to see this eligibility extended to psychological injuries and discussed the contents of HB 363 from the 2024 session.

Wendy Johnson, wife of Former Sergeant Kyle Johnson of the Kentucky National Guard, described her husband's struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following his

National Guard service during the 2020 civil unrest in Louisville. She detailed her husband's treatment history and their difficulties obtaining workman's compensation.

Representative Burke noted that if a member of the National Guard is on a federal assignment, psychological injuries may be covered in cases where they would not be if they had been on a state assignment.

Mr. Castor discussed USA Cares' applicant statistics and noted that in 2022, 17 percent were struggling with PTSD and 11 percent were homeless. Both saw large increases in 2023, to 37 percent of applicants struggling with PTSD and 30 percent struggling with homelessness. He also said that a recent study in Louisville showed that providing services to homeless people before they might be arrested was roughly half the cost of incarcerating them.

Christy and Caleen Treadway, wife and daughter of first responder Bobby Treadway, described their family's struggles since 2015, when Mr. Treadway experienced a psychological injury after responding to the scene of a car accident. Mr. Treadway began experiencing dozens of PTSD related seizures, and Ms. Treadway has spent years trying to help him obtain medical care and workman's compensation but has regularly encountered difficulties because of the psychological nature of Mr. Treadway's injuries.

Representative Wesley thanked the Johnson and Treadway families and spoke about the additional requirements of National Guard members, who serve their states in addition to the federal government. He said that National Guard members who were never deployed overseas are not considered veterans, but they should be and should be eligible for the same benefits.

Responding to a question from Representative Hart, Representative Burke said that Kentucky is an outlier in its lack of provision of care for National Guard members on state deployment.

Representative Grossberg echoed Representative Wesley's comments and noted that 23 states have PTSD care for first responders. He expressed the wish to see benefits extended to dispatchers, who often deal with extremely traumatic situations and experience PTSD as a result.

Representative Tackett Laferty discussed incidents in her community that required a large first responder presence, and said that those first responders who were not injured but dealt with traumatic situations should be eligible for compensation.

Senator Deneen thanked the presenters, thanked USA Cares for their assistance to the first

responder families, and emphasized the importance of General Assembly funding for USA Cares.

Representative Stalker thanked the presenters and encouraged legislators to support 24RS HB 363 when it is refiled in the 2025 Regular Session.

Adjournment

With no further business before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 1:00 PM.