

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

## Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the 2024 Interim

October 23, 2024

### Call to Order and Roll Call

The Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection held its fifth meeting of the 2024 Interim on October 23, 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; Senators Karen Berg, Matthew Deneen, Stephen Meredith, Gex Williams, and Mike Wilson; Representatives Steve Bratcher, Stephanie Dietz, Myron Dossett, Chris Freeland, Courtney Gilbert, Jim Gooch Jr., Mark Hart, DJ Johnson, Scott Lewis, Savannah Maddox, Candy Massaroni, Marianne Proctor, Rebecca Raymer, Scott Sharp, Sarah Stalker, Ashley Tackett Laferty, and Bill Wesley.

Guests: Dale Elliott, Post Commander, VFW Post 12229; Sergeant First Class Robert Foushee, Distinguished Soldier; Logan Ruebens, Legislative Assistant; Molly Elam, Flight Nurse, Air Evac Lifeteam 133 - Grant County, KY (AEL 133); Chris Bronner, Pilot, AEL 133; Neal Banta, Pilot, AEL 133; Chris Barbour, Program Director, AEL 133; Brigadier General Brian F. Wertzler, Deputy Adjutant General, Army, Kentucky National Guard; Brigadier General David J. Mounkes, Assistant Adjutant General, Kentucky Air National Guard; Brigadier General (Ret.) Charles T. Jones, Executive Director, Department of Military Affairs; Sherry A. Ems, Director, Military and Veteran Services, Onward Ops, Easterseals Redwood; Joe Geraci, Volunteer, Operation Ops, Easterseals Redwood; Major Todd Kidd, Division of Electronic Services, Kentucky State Police (KSP); Brandon Marshall, Statewide Interoperability Coordinator, KSP; Command Sergeant Major (Ret.) Robert Casher, U.S. Army, Chairman, Joint Executive Council of Veterans Organizations (JECVO); and Daryl Casey, Legislative Committee Chairman, JECVO.

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

### Approval of September Minutes

On a motion by Senator Williams, seconded by Representative Massaroni, the minutes of the September 25, 2024, meeting were approved by voice vote.

### **Tribute to Senator Johnnie Turner**

Senator Deneen paid tribute to Senator Johnnie Turner, followed by a moment of silence in his honor.

### **Distinguished Soldier**

Sergeant First Class (SFC) Robert Foushee was introduced by Representative Dietz. SFC Foushee was honored for his service and his outstanding efforts as the Recruiting and Retention Non-Commissioned Officer in Louisville.

### **Tribute to EMS Personnel**

Representative Hart and Logan Ruebens, Legislative Assistant, paid tribute to the three air ambulance crew members who were killed in a helicopter crash on October 7th in Owenton: Gale "Butch" Alleman, Bethany Aicken, and James Welsh. The committee honored Molly Elam, Flight Nurse; Chris Bronner, Pilot; Neal Banta, Pilot; and Chris Barbour, Program Director, all of the Air Evac Lifeteam 133 - Grant County, KY, for their service.

### **Department of Military Affairs and Kentucky National Guard Update**

Brigadier General Brian F. Wertzler, Deputy Adjutant General, Kentucky Army National Guard; Brigadier General David J. Mounkes, Assistant Adjutant General, Kentucky Air National Guard; and Brigadier General (Ret.) Charles T. Jones, Executive Director, Department of Military Affairs, provided an overview of the operations of the National Guard, including natural disaster responses, recruiting and retention, and state partnerships.

Responding to questions from Representative Massaroni, General Mounkes and General Wertzler were not aware of lowered standards on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. General Wertzler estimated that five to seven percent of the Kentucky National Guard is deployed overseas.

Responding to questions from Representative Bratcher, General Mounkes discussed the rules relating to National Guard tuition assistance, and General Jones discussed mental health services for National Guard service members and veterans.

Responding to a question from Representative Johnson, General Wertzler said that in counterdrug operations, the National Guard is a support agency to state and local law enforcement and it is difficult to assign a single cause for the increase in drug seizures from 2023 to 2024.

Representatives Wesley and Gilbert praised the National Guard for its response to recent natural disasters, including floods in Eastern Kentucky and North Carolina.

Senator Wilson presented a citation honoring the Kentucky National Guard and recognizing its recent honors and awards.

### **Onward Ops: Military Transition Support**

Sherry A. Ems, Director of Military and Veteran Services, Onward Ops, Easterseals Redwood; and Joe Geraci, Volunteer, Operation Ops, Easterseals Redwood, presented on the Onward Ops organization, which provides support to veterans transitioning to civilian life.

Responding to a question from Representative Bratcher, Ms. Ems said Onward Ops partners with both the Veterans Accelerated Licensure Occupational Recruitment program and USA Cares.

Representative Johnson requested information from Onward Ops on how to volunteer or further support the organization.

### **Kentucky State Police**

Major Todd Kidd, Division of Electronic Services, Kentucky State Police (KSP), and Brandon Marshall, Statewide Interoperability Coordinator, KSP, returned to discuss questions that arose during their September presentation, relating to the acquisition of suitable sites and construction of communication towers.

Mr. Marshall outlined the three phases of KSP's plan to build a statewide emergency communications infrastructure. Challenges faced by KSP have included the location and acquisition of sites and the need to upgrade antiquated communication technology.

Responding to questions from Representative Sharp, Mr. Marshall said he will eventually have a completion date estimate. However, as not all sites for phases two and three have been acquired, a estimate at this time would only be speculation. Mr. Marshall would like to see the completion of testing and the adding of local users to the completed infrastructure before the end of 2024.

### **Joint Executive Council of Veterans Organizations (JECVO) 2025 Legislative Priorities**

Command Sergeant Major (Ret.) Robert Casher, U.S. Army, Chairman of the Joint Executive Council of Veterans Organizations (JECVO); and Daryl Casey, Legislative Committee Chairman, JECVO, discussed JECVO's recent operations and its legislative priorities for the 2025 Regular Session, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder treatment, House Bill 86 from the 2024 Regular Session (relating to interment in state veterans' cemeteries), House Bill 409 from the 2024 Regular Session (relating to military-connected educational benefits), and the Governor's Advisory Board for Veterans Affairs proposal to reduce to property taxes for veterans.

Senator Deneen welcomed both presenters and praised their work.

**Adjournment**

With no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 12:35 PM.