

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

## **Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the 2024 Interim**

**November 18, 2024**

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

The Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection held its sixth meeting of the 2024 Interim on November 18, 2024, at 11:00 AM in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Rick Girdler, Co-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, Jimmy Higdon, Stephen Meredith, Brandon Smith, Whitney Westerfield, Gex Williams, and Mike Wilson; Representatives John Blanton, Stephanie Dietz, Myron Dossett, Chris Fugate, Courtney Gilbert, Jim Gooch Jr., 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: Staff Sergeant (Ret.) Randy Weatherford; Major General (Ret.) John Tindall; Trace Chesser, Chief Executive Officer, USA Cares; Matt Castor, Vice President of Government and Corporate Relations, USA Cares; Carsen Parker, Government Relations Manager, USA Cares; Amy Callahan, Vice President of Finance and Programs, USA Cares; Timothy Johnson, Veteran; Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Whitney P. Allen, Jr., Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA); Juan Renaud, Deputy Commissioner, KDVA; Dr. Silas Session, Executive Director of the Office of Veteran Services, KDVA; Robert Casher, Chairman, Joint Executive Council of Veterans Organizations (JECVO); Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Robin Higgins, Chair, Governor's Advisory Board for Veterans Affairs; Carl Johnson, Vice Chair, JECVO; Daryl Casey, Legislative Committee Chairman, JECVO; Carl Kaelin, State Chief of Staff, Veterans of Foreign Wars; Bruce Ashley, State Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars; Jane Casher, Disabled American Veterans; Brigadier General (Ret.) Steven P. Bullard, Executive Director, Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs (KCMA); and Dr. Dallas Kratzer, Senior Associate of the KCMA.

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

### **Approval of October Minutes**

On a motion and a second, the minutes of the October 23, 2024, meeting were approved by voice vote.

### **Distinguished Veterans**

Chair Girdler honored Staff Sergeant (Ret.) Randy Weatherford. Senator Deneen presented legislative citations honoring Major General (Ret.) John Tindall and Trace Chesser of USA Cares.

### **USA Cares**

Trace Chesser, Chief Executive Officer, USA Cares; Matt Castor, Vice President of Government and Corporate Relations, USA Cares; Carsen Parker, Government Relations Manager, USA Cares; Amy Callahan, Vice President of Finance and Programs, USA Cares; and Timothy Johnson, veteran, provided an update on USA Cares' use of funds appropriated by the General Assembly during the 2024 Regular Session. These funds have helped USA Cares provide house, car, food, and utility payments to veterans. Mr. Johnson discussed how USA Cares helped him navigate difficult financial circumstances.

Responding to Representative Dossett, Mr. Castor said veterans outside of Kentucky can contact USA Cares for assistance.

Responding to Representative Gilbert, Ms. Callahan discussed the homeless veteran reintegration program and Mr. Castor explained USA Cares' casework process.

Responding to Senator Smith, Mr. Castor said USA Cares works all over the state.

### **Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs**

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Whitney P. Allen, Jr., Commissioner; Juan Renaud, Deputy Commissioner; and Silas Session, Executive Director of the Office of Veteran Services, all with the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA), highlighted recent KDVA achievements and events, discussed nursing staff trends at state veterans hospitals, and welcomed guests from veteran service organizations, including: Robert Casher, Chairman of the Joint Executive Council of Veterans Organizations (JECVO); Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Robin Higgins, Chair of the Governor's Advisory Board for Veterans Affairs; Carl Johnson, Vice Chair of JECVO; Daryl Casey, Legislative Committee Chairman, JECVO; Carl Kaelin, State Chief of Staff, Veterans of Foreign Wars; Bruce Ashley, State Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars; and Jane Casher, Disabled American Veterans.

Responding to Representative Blanton, Commissioner Allen discussed plans for the opening of future veteran nursing homes, particularly in eastern Kentucky.

Representative Wesley thanked Commissioner Allen and the KDVA staff for their

presentation and their work.

Responding to Senator Higdon, Commissioner Allen said state veteran nursing homes are at roughly 50 percent capacity, and that the number is rising. The General Assembly can help keep nurse pay competitive at state veteran centers.

Responding to Senator Deneen, Commissioner Allen said he anticipates the repair of the air conditioning unit at the Radcliff Veterans Center to be ready by the end of this year.

Responding to Senator Boswell, Commissioner Allen discussed the nursing school loan repayment program and the state of veteran disability claims and benefits.

Responding to Senator Berg, Commissioner Allen said he would review the Robley Rex VA Medical Center's old facility in Louisville to see how it would be used after the new facility is built.

### **Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs**

Brigadier General (Ret.) Steven P. Bullard, Executive Director of the Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs (KCMA), and Dr. Dallas Kratzer, Senior Associate of the KCMA, provided an update on the state of the military in Kentucky, including partnerships with the Office of Defense Community Cooperation, legislative achievements, partnerships with the Defense State Liaison Office, and Department of Defense priority occupational licensing compacts.

Responding to Representative Johnson, General Bullard discussed the taxation of military retirement pensions. He said it is the first thing military retirees consider when deciding where to settle. Senator Higdon said he hopes to see the elimination of the military retirement income tax. Dr. Kratzer said other states without a military retirement income tax have an advantage over Kentucky.

Senator Deneen encouraged the committee members to consider the Texas model of property tax exemptions for veterans.

Representative Wesley echoed Senator Deneen's comments on veteran property tax exemptions.

### **Consideration of Referred Administrative Regulation**

The committee took no action on the referred Administrative Regulation, 017 KAR 004:030.

### **Adjournment**

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