

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

Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the 2025 Interim

July 30, 2025

Call to Order and Roll Call

The second meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection was held on July 30, 2025, at 11:00 AM in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Bobby McCool, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Bobby McCool, Co-Chair; Senator Matthew Deneen, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg, Jimmy Higdon, Matt Nunn, Aaron Reed, Craig Richardson, Brandon Smith, Lindsey Tichenor, Mike Wilson, and David Yates; and Representatives John Blanton, Steve Bratcher, Myron Dossett, Chris Freeland, Chris Fugate, DJ Johnson, Candy Massaroni, Adam Moore, Marianne Proctor, Scott Sharp, Ashley Tackett Laferty, Walker Thomas, and Bill Wesley.

Guests: Tony Hatton, Commissioner, Department for Environmental Protection, Energy and Environment Cabinet; Amanda LeFevre, Deputy Commissioner, Department for Environmental Protection, Energy and Environment Cabinet; Scott Young, Executive Director, Kentucky Rural Water Association; Timothy Thoma, Chairman, Martin County Water and Sanitation Districts; Madison Mooney, Board Member, Friends of the Tug Fork River, Community Care Coordinator, Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN); Nina McCoy, Board Member, Friends of the Tug Fork River, President, Martin County Concerned Citizens; Deborah Thompson, Impact Director and Co-Director of the Water Collaboratory Program, LiKEN; and Ella Helmuth, Staff Attorney, Appalachian Citizens Law Center.

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

Approval of June Minutes

The minutes of the June 25, 2025, meeting were approved.

Kentucky Division of Water

Tony Hatton, Commissioner, Department for Environmental Protection, Energy and Environment Cabinet; and Amanda LeFevre, Deputy Commissioner, Department for

Environmental Protection, Energy and Environment Cabinet, provided an overview of Kentucky's water systems, Division of Water programs, training, and challenges. They also discussed compliance with federal rules, future infrastructure needs, and regionalization efforts.

Responding to Chair McCool, Mr. Hatton discussed the ways in which the state can serve as a resource for local water systems, including in compliance and water treatment.

Responding to Representative Blanton, Mr. Hatton discussed the water system inspection process and processes for public water systems to address emergency situations, particularly those in which the system may not be able to provide suitable drinking water.

Senator Higdon thanked Mr. Hatton and Ms. LeFevre for their responsiveness and accessibility.

Responding to Senator Smith, Mr. Hatton discussed the response to the 2022 Eastern Kentucky floods, particularly relating to the cleanup of hazardous materials.

Responding to Representative Dossett, Mr. Hatton said legislation may be needed to facilitate further regionalization of water systems.

Responding to Representative Bratcher, Mr. Hatton said the state's authority to respond to water system issues only goes so far, and addressed how this can be a problem when a water system is in crisis.

Responding to Co-Chair Deneen, Mr. Hatton highlighted groups of midsized cities as potential candidates for water system regionalization.

Responding to Representative Johnson, Ms. LeFevre said the educational backgrounds of water operators varies widely, but each must pass a rigorous test, drawing on both work experience and knowledge, to become a certified water operator.

Senator Yates discussed the history of Louisville's water system and its improvement efforts over the last 20 years.

Kentucky Rural Water Association

Scott Young, Executive Director, Kentucky Rural Water Association (KRWA), provided an overview of the KRWA's mission, its compliance program, technical assistance, professional development, and the challenges facing various water systems, including: aging and inadequate infrastructure, regulatory compliance, funding and financial constraints, and the need for technical expertise.

Responding to Representative Moore, Mr. Young discussed the registered apprenticeship program and the opportunities it provides to veterans transitioning from Fort Knox and Fort Campbell to civilian life.

Responding to Senator Smith, Mr. Young noted the potential for an amnesty program for antiquated water systems, in which water systems could come forward for assistance without incurring fines for violations.

Responding to Representative Freeland, Mr. Young addressed concerns relating to the operation of water systems by state parks.

Martin County Water and Sanitation Districts

Timothy Thoma, Chairman, Martin County Water and Sanitation Districts, discussed the challenges facing the districts, including: lack of funding, inadequate revenue, poor infrastructure, and high monthly rates for customers. He also highlighted the districts' strategic improvement plan and emphasized potential legislative and financial solutions.

Representative Tackett Laferty thanked Mr. Thoma for discussing issues facing Eastern Kentucky water systems.

Friends of the Tug Fork River

Madison Mooney, Board Member, Friends of the Tug Fork River, Community Care Coordinator, Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN); Nina McCoy, Board Member, Friends of the Tug Fork River, President, Martin County Concerned Citizens; Deborah Thompson, Impact Director and Co-Director of the Water Collaboratory Program, LiKEN; and Ella Helmuth, Staff Attorney, Appalachian Citizens Law Center, discussed the history and mission of the Friends of the Tug Fork River organization, which works to clean up the Tug Fork, helps landowners manage and increase the value of their forests, connects Appalachians communities with supportive forest land-use agencies, and supports and grow forest and river related livelihoods.

Adjournment

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