

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

Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the 2026 Interim

June 17, 2026

Call to Order and Roll Call

The first meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection was held on Wednesday, June 17, 2026, at 11:00 AM ET/10:00 AM CT, in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Matthew Deneen, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Matthew Deneen, Co-Chair; Representative Bobby McCool, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg, Gary Boswell, Gary Clemons, Jimmy Higdon, Matt Nunn, Aaron Reed, Craig Richardson, and Mike Wilson; and Representatives Chad Aull, John Blanton, Steve Bratcher, Adrielle Camuel, Myron Dossett, Chris Freeland, Chris Fugate, Jim Gooch Jr., Mark Hart, DJ Johnson, Savannah Maddox, Candy Massaroni, Adam Moore, Marianne Proctor, T.J. Roberts, Scott Sharp, Ashley Tackett Laferty, Walker Thomas, and Bill Wesley.

Guests: Shane Stevens, Analyst, Legislative Oversight and Investigations Committee (LOIC), Legislative Research Commission (LRC); Holly Tracy, Analyst, LOIC, LRC; Juan Renaud, Deputy Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA); LaDonna Scott, Deputy Executive Director, Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers, KDVA; and Lily Patteson, Executive Director/General Counsel, Office of Veteran Legal Services, KDVA.

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

Legislative Oversight Staff Presentation of *Kentucky Veterans' Centers: Capacity, Cost, and Access to Care*

Shane Stevens, Analyst, LOIC, LRC, and Holly Tracy, Analyst, LOIC, LRC, presented a summary of LRC Research Report 502: *Kentucky Veterans' Centers*. They highlighted findings and recommendations related to quality of care, occupancy rates, waitlist management, and communication with applicants and policy-makers.

Responding to Representative Roberts, Mr. Stevens discussed the circumstances under which an application for admission to a veterans' center could be deferred. KDVA should conduct a feasibility study before deciding where to build the next veterans' center.

Representative Roberts suggested a change to the application appeal process, where a veteran who receives no response to their application within 90 days of submission would be entitled to an appeal.

Responding to Representative Massaroni, Mr. Stevens said it is more challenging for veterans' centers to care for veterans with behavioral health challenges.

Responding to Representative Aull, Mr. Stevens said behavioral health issues pose the most difficult challenge for veterans' centers, and a new, specialized facility could be necessary to fully care for these veterans.

Senator Berg highlighted multiple findings of the LOIC report, particularly relating to behavioral health issues and veterans' center capacities. Mr. Stevens said LOIC staff would prepare a document with responses to each of Senator Berg's questions and send it to the committee.

Responding to Co-Chair McCool, Mr. Stevens discussed LOIC's collection of data on veteran populations, primarily using the U.S. Census and the 5-year American Community Survey.

Responding to Senator Higdon, Mr. Stevens said the construction of a facility dedicated to veterans with behavioral health challenges would help solve many problems, and discussed some of the challenges related to building and staffing this type of facility.

Responding to Senator Boswell, Mr. Stevens and Ms. Tracy discussed the costs of care in public and private facilities.

Responding to Representative Bratcher, Mr. Stevens said the projected completion date for the HVAC replacement project at the Radcliff Veterans Center is 2028. According to the LOIC report, the completion of the HVAC replacement is estimated for mid-2027, but the full recovery from the HVAC project, which includes regaining full occupancy at the facility, is projected for early 2028. Representative Bratcher discussed the possibility of locking down a wing in veterans' centers to create a behavioral health unit.

Responding to Representative Johnson, Mr. Stevens discussed the differences between certified and functional facility capacities.

Chair Deneen thanked the LOIC staff and praised their report, as well as improvement efforts at the veterans' centers.

Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs

Juan Renaud, Deputy Commissioner, KDVA; LaDonna Scott, Deputy Executive Director, Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers, KDVA; and Lily Patteson, Executive Director/General Counsel, Office of Veteran Legal Services, KDVA, discussed the implementation of LOIC recommendations to improve the application and admissions processes.

Responding to Senator Berg, Ms. Scott highlighted challenges relating to care for patients with behavioral health issues.

Responding to Representative Roberts, Ms. Scott discussed the circumstances under which some applicants, particularly those with behavioral health issues, could be denied admission to a veterans' center.

Responding to Representative Moore, Mr. Renaud highlighted KDVA efforts to reduce veteran suicide.

Responding to Representative Bratcher, Ms. Scott said some veterans' centers have locked units, which are primarily used to care for patients who are likely to wander. Ms. Scott also discussed the process of evaluation for admission, which is conducted by an admissions committee.

Responding to Representative Roberts, Ms. Scott discussed reforms to the application and admission processes.

Responding to Senator Nunn, Mr. Renaud said KDVA will share their action plan, based on the LOIC recommendations, with the committee.

Chair Deneen emphasized the importance of addressing ongoing facility needs.

Adjournment

With no further business before the committee, the meeting was adjourned.