

## House Committee on Appropriations

Minutes of Meeting  
2021 Regular Session  
April 15, 2021

### I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Jerome "Zee" Zeringue, chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations, called the meeting to order at 9:11 a.m. in Room 5, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

### II. ROLL CALL

#### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative Jerome "Zee" Zeringue, chairman  
Representative Roy Daryl Adams  
Representative Tony Bacala  
Representative Barbara W. Carpenter  
Representative R. Dewith Carrier  
Representative Raymond J. Crews  
Representative Daryl Andrew Deshotel  
Representative Mary DuBuisson  
Representative Rick Edmonds  
Representative Aimee Adatto Freeman  
Representative John R. Illg, Jr.  
Representative Frederick Douglass Jones  
Representative Timothy P. Kerner  
Representative Rodney Lyons  
Representative C. Denise Marcelle  
Representative Jack G. McFarland  
Representative Dustin Miller  
Representative Troy D. Romero  
Representative Francis C. Thompson  
Representative Christopher Turner  
Representative William "Bill" Wheat, Jr.

#### MEMBERS ABSENT:

Representative Gary M. Carter, Jr., vice chairman  
Representative Lance Harris  
Representative Tanner D. Magee  
Representative Blake Miguez

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Katie Andress, committee administrative assistant  
Stephanie Little, attorney  
Amanda Trapp, legislative analyst

**ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:**

Faye Talbot, sergeant at arms

**III. DISCUSSION**

Overview of the proposed FY 21-22 budgets for:

**Department of Military Affairs**

Mr. Ashari Robinson, budget analyst, House Fiscal Division (HFD), 900 North Third Street, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 342-2412, presented an overview of the FY 21-22 budget.

Brigadier General Keith Waddell, Louisiana National Guard,, 1306 Tomahawk Drive, Lake Charles, LA 70611, (318) 416-7534, addressed the committee on the state and federal missions of the National Guard Louisiana emergency support to every parish in the state. Some of the projects the guardsmen and women were involved with during 2020 were tornadoes, hurricanes, alarming cyber incidents, a record winter weather event, along with the year-long COVID-19 pandemic. Ready for these challenges, all 12,000 members rapidly and robustly responded to all events – search and rescue, evacuations, sheltering support, and security. They provided over 5.7 million meals to hurricane victims, 7.8 million liters of water, 1.4 million bags of ice. They integrated liaison officers to support teams and to parish emergency operations centers to help coordinate local responses. They provided 473 generators to 35 parishes to keep critical infrastructure such as water systems, sewer lift stations, sewer treatment plants, nursing homes, and clinics operational. Engineers cleared debris from over 2,062 miles of road and 210 municipal facilities. In light of the winter storm, guardsmen and women participated in commodities distribution, debris clearance, emergency vehicle/wrecker support, communication, and drinking water systems being impacted.

Representative Zeringue offered his gratitude to the Brigadier General and all the Louisiana National guardsmen/women.

Representative Marcelle shared her gratitude to General Waddell for the National Guard's support with the vaccinations statewide.

Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Paul, La. Military Department, 505 F Street, Pineville, LA 71560, (318) 641-5800, addressed Representative Marcelle's question regarding the Starbase program, which is offered at the elementary level and prepares students for engineering and other science-related fields of study. Starbase programs are selected based on Title I funds, and there are 112 academies across the state.

Lieutenant Colonel Paul also extended an invitation to all committee members to visit Youth Challenge Program (YCP), an alternative educational program which offers adolescents an opportunity to change their future. Students looking for a way to succeed outside of a traditional school setting learn self discipline, leadership, and responsibility while working to obtain a high school equivalency diploma.

Representative Carrier offered his thanks to General Waddell for the National Guard's help in his area.

Representative Jones offered his thanks to General Waddell for those citizens in Southwest Louisiana and North Louisiana with various efforts provided during 2020.

Brigadier General Lee Hopkins, director, La. Military Department, 5445 Point Claire Road, Carville, LA, (225) 642-3710, addressed the committee on 44 open positions. As turnover occurred, they drew on military forces to fill those positions, while 17 positions had been filled in the last two months.

Representative Crews offered his thanks to General Waddell for those in North Louisiana who were supported by the La. National Guard in 2020.

Representative Kerner expressed his gratitude to Brigadier General Waddell for the help of the La. National Guard during 2020 in Jefferson Parish.

Representative Crews expressed his thanks to Brigadier General Waddell for the assistance of the National Guard during the 2020 winter weather event in north Louisiana and requested statistics of those who serve overseas.

Representative Deshotel and Brigadier General Waddell discussed the participation of cybersecurity, which is routed to GOHSEP, OTS, and the La. National Guard. Representative Deshotel explained an instrument that he would be presenting that session regarding standards related to network installation. Brigadier General Waddell shared that the La. National Guard had responded to cyber issues since July 2019.

Representative Illg and Brigadier General Waddell discussed recruiting and had a 82% retention rate, which was a credit to the leadership of the National Guard. Major General Kenneth Paul and Representative Illg discussed the YCP at the national level. General Craig McKinley had said, "Louisiana has the best three programs in the nation".

Representative Illg and Major General Lee Hopkins, discussed the operating budget, which does not include major repairs. With the capital outlay budget during the last two to three years, the La. Military was able to take care of large repairs of older buildings.

*Representative McFarland in the chair.*

Representative Romero shared with the major generals that Louisiana is proud of our military for the service, compassion, and pride they provided the people of Calcasieu and Jefferson Davis Parishes.

Representative Lyons expressed the character of the La. National Guard and plans to increase the numbers of guardsmen post-COVID-19. Major Kenneth Paul responded that the program continues to progress, with hopefully a 10% increase in students during the next phase. Representative Lyons shared that young people, post COVID-19, were faced with anxiety, stress, tension, and adaptation to virtual learning, lending an extra burden on parents creating structure for the students.

### **Department of Public Safety - Correction Services**

Ms. Jamie Tairov, budget analyst, HFD, 900 North Third Street, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 342-2412, presented an overview of the FY 21-22 budget.

Secretary Jimmy LeBlanc, Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections, P.O. Box 94304, Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 342-6740, addressed the committee and provided a handout, Exhibit A, which is included in the committee records, on COVID-19 deaths within the department, staff testing and infection of COVID-19, recruitment, unprecedented turnover, salary, and supervisory training before assuming a post.

Representative Dustin Miller and Mr. Thomas Bickham, undersecretary, Dept. of Corrections, 504 Mayflower Street, Baton Rouge, LA, no phone number provided, discussed the increase in the operating budget from \$581 million in FY 21 to \$614 million in FY 22, increased if the prison population had decreased by 120,000. Mr. Bickham explained the department's budget included an increase of \$21.5 million for overtime, classified pay increases, and supplies (food, operation servicing, pharmaceutical, electricity, etc.). The department typically came up \$8 million short by the start of the year. This was an attempt by the administration to right the size of the department's budget.

Secretary LeBlanc and Representative Miller discussed \$10.2 million on the Office of Technology Services with regard to the Dept. of Correction Services. Mr. Bickham stated the money provided IT services and the consolidation that took part five years ago and was an improvement in modernizing the technology services in the department.

Representative Wheat asked Secretary LeBlanc during COVID-19 how the lack of prison ministries affected prisoners during COVID-19 and at what level were the ministries permitted to visit facilities. Mr. LeBlanc stated the ministries were shut down completely during the pandemic, but prisoners were permitted to worship with social distancing measures in place. Forty volunteers were currently visiting prisoners.

Representative Carrier thanked Secretary LeBlanc for his work in Allen Correction Center in Allen Parish, La., and suggested the committee members visit the local prisons. Representative Carrier referenced R.S. 13:793 with a funding issue related to a salary fund for the clerk of court. Mr. Bickham stated it was specifically a line item in 2004 and was contained in the supplemental bill.

*Representative Zeringue in the chair.*

Representative Marcelle and Secretary LeBlanc discussed the Criminal Justice Reform in 2017, which saved over \$35 million. Secretary LeBlanc shared that Louisiana leads the nation in the reduction of incarceration rates. Representative Marcelle suggested allowing medically incarcerated, non-violent persons who cause no harm to society to be released in order to save costs.

Representative Carpenter and Secretary LeBlanc discussed the number of women at Jettson Correctional Center and Elayn Hunt Correctional Center and the type of educational and vocational training available to the women. Representative Carpenter and Secretary LeBlanc also discussed vacancies, benefits, recruitment, and the increased amount of money locals received for housing. Mr. Bickham explained the statutory change and the increased costs to operate the jails.

Representative DuBuisson offered to email her questions to Mr. Bickham and Secretary LeBlanc.

Representative Thompson discussed job opportunities, housing for officers, and compassionate leave for those who have less than 30 days left to serve. Representative Thompson voiced his concern regarding job opportunities and training for prisoners.

Representative Crews and Mr. Bickham discussed historical overtime and vacancies, staff-offender assaults, and training of guards.

Representative Deshotel and Secretary LeBlanc discussed prison enterprises with the Avoyelles Correctional Center facility.

Representative McFarland and Secretary LeBlanc discussed increase of employees' wages within the prison system.

**Public Safety Services**

Ms. Jamie Tairov, budget analyst, HFD, presented an overview of the FY 21-22 budget.

Colonel Lamar Davis, superintendent/deputy secretary, Dept. of Public Safety, Office of State Police, 7979 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 925-6118, thanked the committee for their work and explained the mission of the organization. He expressed his thanks for the troopers' service, dedication, and risk of life every day. Colonel Davis promised to take care of the state's citizens, build their troopers to be leaders, and continue to increase transparency, which increases trust within the communities and within the organization.

Lieutenant Colonel Jason Starnes, chief administrative officer, Dept. of Public Safety, Office of State Police, 7979 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 925-6032, and Representative Zeringue discussed federal funds received in 2020 and unreceived American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Dollars.

Representative Illg and Colonel Davis discussed academy training, recruiting, and funding.

**Office of Motor Vehicles**

Ms. Jamie Tairov, budget analyst, HFD, presented an overview of the FY 21-22 budget.

*Representative Thompson in the chair.*

Ms. Karen St. Germain, commissioner, Department of Public Safety, Dept. of Motor Vehicles, 7979 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA, (225) 925-4228, introduced herself to the committee members.

Ms. Staci Hoyt, assistant commissioner, Department of Public Safety, Dept. of Motor Vehicles, 7979 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA, (225) 270-1556, introduced herself to the committee members.

Representative Lyons and Ms. Hoyt discussed reinstatement issues and the Harvey, Louisiana, OMV office.

Commissioner St. Germain shared that, in 2016, OMV had over 900 employees and was currently at approximately 530 employees.

Representative Carpenter expressed her thanks to Commissioner St. Germain and Ms. Hoyt for the assistance with statewide universities, international students, and drivers' licenses.

Representative Illg, Commissioner St. Germain and Ms. Hoyt discussed Louisiana Real ID 2021 and third-party vendor convenience fees.

*Representative Zeringue in the chair.*

Representative Crews asked how a person would recognize he was Real ID ready, to which Ms. Hoyt stated a gold star would be placed in the top right hand corner of the license. Representative Crews and Ms. Hoyt discussed the main frame, networking issues, and the \$4 million for modernization projects.

Representative Marcelle and Ms. Hoyt discussed automatic payments during the COVID-19, defaults on payments, and new installment agreements.

### **Office of the State Fire Marshal**

Ms. Jamie Tairov, budget analyst, HFD, presented an overview of the FY 21-22 budget.

Mr. H. "Butch" Browning, state fire marshal, 8181 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 806-0803, addressed the committee on fire safety, buildings standards, appeals process, fire protection contractors, enforcement in role in maintaining fire and explosion state laws, technology advancements, urban search and rescue, and emergency services, as well as a conduit to other local agencies.

Representative Zeringue took a personal privilege to recognize former representative, Brian Adams.

Representative Kerner acknowledged the work of Marshal Browning's office in saving lives, and training firefighters within the state to promote fire ratings, which help citizens' insurance costs.

Representative Wheat commended the work of the state fire marshal and asked Marshal Browning to address the 20 vacancies within the agency, along with replacing aged vehicles, totaling \$5 million.

Representative Romero, Marshal Browning, and Mr. Travis McIlwain, state director, Office of Planning and Budget Control, Division of Administration, 1201 North Third Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70809, (225) 342-7000, discussed four vacant positions (longer than 12 months) as well as 16 positions. The fire marshal's office did not have sufficient revenues to support the higher expenditures.

Representative Deshotel and Marshal Browning discussed installation, enforcement, and cost of cameras.

**Louisiana Gaming Control Board**

Ms. Jamie Tairov, budget analyst, HFD, presented an overview of the FY 21-22 budget.

Mr. Mike Noel, chairman, La. Gaming Control Board, 7909 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 925-1846, addressed the committee stating that most of the work done by the control board was in conjunction with the state police and its gaming enforcement division, as well as the attorney general's office.

Representative Zeringue and Mr. Noel discussed the board's promulgation process in July 2020, which took until January 2021; the board adopted and published rules in February 2021. Applications were being processed for third-party vendors by the state police and parish-by-parish technology and under-age sports betting were complex issues.

Representative Marcelle and Mr. Noel discussed the La. Wallet as identification to enter the casinos.

**Liquefied Petroleum Gas Commission**

Ms. Jamie Tairov, budget analyst, HFD, presented an overview of the FY 21-22 budget.

Lt. Colonel Jason Starns was available to answer questions of the committee.

**Louisiana Highway Safety Commission**

Ms. Jamie Tairov, budget analyst, HFD, presented an overview of the FY 21-22 budget.

Ms. Lisa Freeman, executive director, La. Highway Safety Commission, 7919 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 925-6991, addressed the committee on the commission being staffed at 14 full time positions. The agency receives less than 5% from the state budget. The job of the commission is to save lives with traffic safety programs and to fund law enforcement agencies, non profits, hospitals, universities, schools, court systems, regional and parish safety coalitions, occupant safety, child passenger safety, rail safety, speeding, and police traffic services.

Representative Illg and Ms. Freeman discussed bicycle safety education and enforcement for the public.

Representative Crews and Ms. Freeman discussed the effectiveness of the federal program and fully-autonomous automobiles.

Representative DuBuisson and Ms. Freeman discussed funding to local governments a requirement of the commission.



Representative Zeringue recessed the meeting at 1:48 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 1:49 p.m.

### **Youth Services (Office of Juvenile Justice)**

Mr. William A. Sommers, Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 7919 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 287-7900, was available to answer questions.

Mr. Geary T. Williams, Office of Juvenile Justice, 7919 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 287-7914, was available to answer questions.

## **IV. BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

## **V. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Persons who do not feel comfortable giving testimony in person at this time may submit a prepared statement in accordance with House Rule 14.33 in lieu of appearing before the committee:

A. Any interested person or any committee member may file with the committee a prepared statement concerning a specific instrument or matter under consideration by the committee or concerning any matter within the committee's scope of authority, and the committee records shall reflect receipt of such statement and the date and time thereof.

B. Any person who files a prepared statement which contains data or statistical information shall include in such prepared statement sufficient information to identify the source of the data or statistical information.

For the purposes of this Paragraph, the term "source" shall mean a publication, website, person, or other source from which the data or statistical information contained in the prepared statement was obtained by the person or persons who prepared the statement.

NOTE: Only statements mailed to [h-app@legis.la.gov](mailto:h-app@legis.la.gov) and received prior to noon on Wednesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, will be included in the record for this committee meeting.

All persons desiring to participate in the meeting shall utilize appropriate protective health measures and observe the recommended and appropriate social distancing.

## **VI. ADJOURNMENT**

Representative Wheat offered a motion to adjourn. Without objection, the motion passed by a vote of 14 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Zeringue, Adams, Carpenter, Carrier, DuBuisson, Illg, Jones, Kerner, Lyons, McFarland, Dustin Miller, Romero, Turner, and Wheat voted yea.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Jerome "Zee" Zeringue  
House Committee on Appropriations