

## **House Committee on Appropriations**

Minutes of Meeting  
2022 Regular Session  
March 21, 2022

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

Representative Jerome "Zee" Zeringue, chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations, called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. in Room 5, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

### **II. ROLL CALL**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Representative Jerome "Zee" Zeringue, chairman  
Representative Tony Bacala  
Representative Barbara W. Carpenter  
Representative R. Dewith Carrier  
Representative Raymond J. Crews  
Representative Mary DuBuisson  
Representative Rick Edmonds  
Representative Brett F. Geymann  
Representative Jason Hughes  
Representative John R. Illg, Jr.  
Representative Timothy P. Kerner  
Representative Jack G. McFarland  
Representative Blake Miguez  
Representative Troy D. Romero  
Representative Francis C. Thompson, vice chairman  
Representative Christopher Turner  
Representative Debbie Villio  
Representative William "Bill" Wheat, Jr.

#### **MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Representative Daryl Andrew Deshotel  
Representative Aimee Adatto Freeman  
Representative Rodney Lyons  
Representative C. Denise Marcelle  
Representative Dustin Miller

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Dazia Briscoe, committee administrative assistant  
Stephanie Little, attorney  
Jamie Tairov, budget analyst

**ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:**

Faye Talbot, sergeant at arms

**III. BUSINESS****Discussion of the FY 22-23 Budget for:****Youth Services**

Ms. Jamie Tairov, budget analyst, House Fiscal Division (HFD), 900 North Third Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 342-0474, presented an overview and discussed the FY 22-23 budget for Youth Services.

Mr. William Sommers, deputy secretary, Youth Services, 7919 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 287-7944, presented opening comments to the committee. In his remarks, Mr. Sommers discussed staff shortages, recruiting and retention hindrances, and diversion initiatives.

Mr. Sommers discussed issues within the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) Secure Care Facilities, efforts to make facilities more secure, and the need for juvenile justice specialists with Representative Zeringue.

Mr. Geary Williams, undersecretary, Youth Services, 7919 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 287-7914, discussed Special Entrance Rates (SER) with Representative Zeringue.

Mr. Sommers, Mr. Williams, and Ms. Tairov discussed expenditures and savings related to Louisiana's Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) with Representative Villio.

Representative Crews and Mr. Sommers discussed the pay plan for Juvenile Justice specialists and turnover rates.

Representative Zeringue and Mr. Sommers discussed safety issues across the board for secure care facilities.

Representative Thompson and Mr. Sommers discussed breakouts in the northern Louisiana area and how other states have handled similar situations. Mr. Sommers explained the strategic plan at Angola and part of the plan for OJJ to increase the vocational tech settings in order to teach the students skills to allow for meaningful work and progress to the next phase of students' lives. 60 percent of the youth are under 18 years old; 58 percent are 17 or 18 years old.

Representative Geymann offered his appreciation for the work that has been done at the facilities including Bridge City, Monroe, and Bunkie.

Representative McFarland and Mr. Williams discussed historical spending and state general fund.

Representative Crews and Mr. Sommers discussed the Missouri Model and reintegration with family members.

Representative Bacala and Mr. Sommers discussed juveniles who have escaped from a facility and lack of consequences.

Representative DuBuisson and Mr. Sommers discussed lack of consequences and the education offered at the facilities.

Witness cards submitted by individuals who did not speak are as follows: 1 for information only.

### **Corrections Services**

Ms. Tairov presented an overview and discussed the FY 22-23 budget for Corrections Services.

Mr. Jimmy LeBlanc, secretary, Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections, 504 Mayflower, Baton Rouge, LA 70809, (no phone number provided), shared an update on the state and local level of incarceration rates, probation and parole numbers, higher-risk needs, and three-year recidivism. Additionally, Mr. LeBlanc discussed COVID-19 in the prison population, outside visitors with prison population, Angola Prison Rodeo, and staffing challenges.

Representative Zeringue and Mr. LeBlanc discussed turnover history and voluntary and involuntary separations (Page 26 of the PowerPoint presentation).

Representative Zeringue and Mr. LeBlanc discussed recidivism rates (Page 38 of the PowerPoint presentation).

Representative Zeringue and Mr. LeBlanc discussed reduction of overtime pay, with respect to the budget, and the challenge of securing adequate correctional workers.

Representative Carpenter thanked Mr. LeBlanc for the exceptional work of his staff. As a follow-up, Representative Carpenter and Mr. LeBlanc discussed plans to begin construction on a new facility and women in prison being provided work programs which better prepare individuals for reentry into the community.

Representative Bacala shared information regarding incarceration and crime rates (Page 38 Power Point presentation) while Mr. Bickham, undersecretary, Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections, P.O. Box 94304, Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 342-6740, discussed the fiscal impact of pay increases for the correctional workers, overtime pay, and insurance costs.

Representative McFarland, Mr. LeBlanc and Mr. Bickham discussed there being one air-conditioned facility in the state while it would make it easier to retain correctional officers if done statewide.

Representative Villio challenged Mr. LeBlanc that he had stated the three-year recidivism rate was the lowest in history. Representative Villio reminded Mr. LeBlanc that COVID-19 had taken place during the last two of three years which shut down criminal trials. Accuracy of those numbers would require a visit to each district attorney and investigating the re-offense rate that each district attorney was dealing with that was subject to trial. Hence, Mr. LeBlanc's statement that the rates were the lowest in history since it has been tracked was not a fair representation that the Reinvestment Act was working, nor was it a fair measurement in light of two years of COVID-19.

### **Public Safety Services**

Ms. Tairov presented an overview and discussed the FY 22-23 budget for Public Safety Services.

Colonel Lamar Davis, superintendent, Dept. of Public Safety, 7919 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 925-6118, addressed the committee on police academy classes and the shortages of troopers.

Representative Hughes and Colonel Davis discussed the critical safety issue for our school district with hiring staff and the automatic fingerprint identification system.

Representative Villio, Colonel Davis, and Lieutenant Colonel Jason Starnes, deputy superintendent, 7919 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 925-6032, discussed pay increases and/or supplemental pay for the men and women of DPS.

Representative Villio and Colonel Davis discussed the bills regarding automated expungements and how it affects the Office of State Police.

Representative Wheat and Colonel Davis discussed the training and role of state police in human trafficking.

*Vice Chairman Thompson in the chair.*

Representative McFarland and Colonel Starnes discussed the challenges of background checks and the greater responsibility mandating laws to provide background checks and complaints received that the work had not been appropriately funded.

Representative Bacala and Colonel Starnes discussed crime lab issues dependent upon personnel at agencies across the state.

### **Office of Motor Vehicles**

Ms. Tairov presented an overview and discussed the FY 22-23 budget for Office of Motor Vehicles.

Ms. Karen St. Germain, commissioner, OMV, (no address provided) (225) 925-4228, introduced herself to the committee members and welcomed questions.

Representative Crews and Ms. Staci Hoyt, deputy commissioner, 7979 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 925-4656, discussed the Office of Technology's role at OMV offices were providing the value for the amount of money spent.

Representative DuBuisson and Ms. Hoyt discussed the call volume at OMV locations and the inability of customers' requests to be met.

*Representative Zeringue back in the chair.*

Representative Illg and Ms. Hoyt discussed constituents' complaints with the registration and renewal processes.

Representative Bacala and Ms. Hoyt discussed the need for an adequate number of Hispanic-speaking customer service agents.

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

Ms. Tairov presented an overview and discussed the FY 22-23 budget for Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Mr. Butch Browning, state fire marshal, 8181 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 806-0803, expressed his thanks for the assistance with the budget, and also expressed gratitude for his hard-working deputies.

Representative Zeringue and Mr. Browning discussed the fire training school at LSU in conjunction with the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Representative Crews and Mr. Browning discussed the services received from the Office of Technology and third-party vendors.

Representative Crews asked further questions regarding energy codes which provide a framework for buildings to measure their sustainability and efficiency to fulfill a triple bottom line. This means social, environmental and financial targets are met with buildings designed to save energy, but works to replenish environments and neighborhoods.

Representative Edmonds and Mr. Browning discussed how The Spirit of Louisiana, a fire truck at parades and educational tours, has retired.

### **Louisiana Gaming Control Board**

Ms. Tairov presented an overview and discussed the FY 22-23 budget for the Louisiana Gaming Control Board.

Mr. Ronnie Johns, Louisiana Gaming Control Board, at-large member and chairman, 7901 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (337) 842-0333, addressed the committee on revenue numbers which have been significantly higher and closer to where they were pre-pandemic.

Representative Illg asked Mr. Johns the number of players in the state of Louisiana, to which Mr. Johns stated he will provide the information at a later time.

Representative Villio asked about an open position within the La. Gaming Control Board.

### **Liquefied Petroleum Gas Commission**

Ms. Tairov presented an overview and discussed the FY 22-23 budget for the Liquefied Petroleum Gas Commission.

Mr. John Alario, executive director, (LP Gas Commission) 7919 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 925-4895, was available to answer members' questions.

### **Louisiana Highway Safety Commission**

Ms. Tairov presented an overview and discussed the FY 22-23 budget for the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission.

Ms. Lisa Freeman, executive director, (LHSC) 7919 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 925-6991, addressed the committee with statistical information on distracted driving,

cell phone use, impaired driving, awareness, and partnering with the hearing- and seeing-impaired, as well as military brothers and sisters.

Ms. Dortha Cummins, deputy director, (LHSC) 7919 Independence Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 252-6314, was available to answer members' questions.

Representative Illg and Ms. Freeman discussed federal funding and local communities.

Representative McFarland and Ms. Freeman discussed upcoming legislation within Louisiana.

Representative Crews and Ms. Freeman discussed staff qualifications.

Representative Wheat and Ms. Freeman discussed medically recommended marijuana, motor skills, and car crashes.

Representative DuBuisson and Ms. Dortha Cummins, discussed local benefit agencies, such as local sheriff or local police offices. The proposals and agencies that request funds is dependent upon the type of agency that applies.

#### **IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

#### **V. ADJOURNMENT**

Representative Edmonds offered a motion to adjourn. Without objection, the motion passed by a vote of 18 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Zeringue, Bacala, Carpenter, Carrier, Crews, DuBuisson, Edmonds, Geymann, Hughes, Illg, Kerner, McFarland, Miguez, Romero, Thompson, Turner, Villio, and Wheat voted yea.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Jerome "Zee" Zeringue  
House Committee on Appropriations