

House Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works

Minutes of Meeting
2022-2023 Interim
March 20, 2023

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Mark Wright, chairman of the House Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works, called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. in Room 3, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

II. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative Mark Wright, chairman
Representative Mack Marcel Cormier
Representative Kathy Edmonston
Representative Michael "Gabe" Firment
Representative Barbara Reich Freiberg
Representative Cedric B. Glover
Representative Dodie Horton
Representative Ed Larvadain, III
Representative Patricia "Pat" Moore
Representative Charles Anthony Owen
Representative Robert "Bob" Owen
Representative Vincent J. Pierre
Representative Rodney Wayne Schamerhorn
Representative Larry Selders

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Representative Kendrick "Ken" Brass, vice chairman
Representative Foy Bryan Gadberry

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Darcas Deverteuil, committee administrative assistant
Allison Williams, legislative analyst

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:

Myrtis Jarrell, sergeant at arms

III. BUSINESS**Discussion with the Office of Motor Vehicles regarding the phone system and resulting constituent concerns**

Chairman Mark Wright gave a brief overview to inform the committee of the purpose of meeting with the Office of Motor Vehicles (OMV) regarding their phone system. He explained that, during a meeting with the staff at the OMV, he heard about the challenges they faced and thought that the committee and other representatives with bills that deal with the OMV should be aware of.

Ms. Karen St. Germain, OMV, 7979 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA, 70806, (985) 513-0990, spoke for information only. She thanked the committee for giving the OMV the opportunity to speak on the phone system issues.

Ms. Staci Hoyt, OMV, 7979 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA, 70806, (225) 925-4656, spoke for information only. She thanked Representatives Wright, Charles Owen, and Schamerhorn for meeting with them to hear about the phone problems, and ensured the committee that the OMV staff acknowledges that the customer service of the citizens is a priority in spite of the challenges.

Ms. Hoyt and Ms. St. Germain addressed a series of questions from Representative Charles Owen regarding constituent complaints with the lack of quality customer service/latency in phone calls, the status of employment vacancies and training, and the OMV's plan to combat these issues. They stated that most of the issues with constituents not being able to get a person from OMV on the phone is tied to the lack of employees and the heavy workload. They informed the committee that they used to be authorized to staff 900 employees but are now only allowed to staff 560 employees, and currently have 62 vacancies. They further explained that the reinstatement training process for new employees takes about six to nine months due to outdated databases. When they attempted to modernize the process in 2009, it was not funded.

Representative Horton thanked the OMV for always being responsive to the representatives' requests on behalf of their constituents. She further suggested a possibility of miscommunication between the main OMV branch and the district field offices due to a difference in protocols, such as the need for appointments, and questioned how the agency recovered after the data breach a few years back.

Ms. Hoyt stated that the situation in question wasn't a data breach but was in fact a cyber attack that wasn't successful, and ensured that the hackers did not gain access to anyone's data.

Representative Schamerhorn thanked the OMV for appearing and addressing questions relative to the issues. He asked a series of questions regarding reinstatement employees and the possibility of placing reinstatement employees back in local offices instead of them working from home.

Ms. Hoyt stated that there are normally approximately 40-45 reinstatement employees on the phones on a daily basis, and as many as 90 employees during tax season. She further explained the benefits of doing reinstatements over the phone, including being able to assist customers after hours, and having the ability to oversee employees' work easily.

Ms. St. Germain testified that the OMV lost a vast majority of their trained employees because of the strenuous work load, long work hours, and insufficient salary for such a demanding job. She explained that even though offices closed at 4:00 p.m. the employees weren't leaving until 8:00- 9:00 p.m.

Representative Firment thanked Ms. St. Germain personally for helping him when he called on behalf of his constituents. Representative Firment questioned the OMV on whether or not appointments were required in the Colfax field office.

Ms. Shantel Thomas, OMV, 3241 NW Evangeline Thruway, Lafayette, LA, 70507, (225) 400-7013, spoke for information only. She stated that at that particular time appointments were required, but after further discussion she stated that effective immediately appointments would no longer be required at the Colfax field office.

Representative Firment also asked a series of questions regarding employee incentives, how employee production is tracked, and the agency's budget.

Ms. Hoyt explained that they implement retention pay as well as an annual performance-based evaluation, which can result in a one-time lump sum payment. She testified that they are able to track work from home employee production one hundred times better than tracking field employees. As it pertains to the budget she stated that the agency's budget is mainly self-generated with over 100 thousand federal dollars coming in totaling about 65 million dollars, which is inclusive of the reengineering project.

Representative Selders thanked the OMV for coming and expressed his experience with out-of-state college students having trouble buying and registering a car in Louisiana.

Ms. Hoyt assured him that this should not be an issue for out-of-state students that have a driver's license.

Representative Edmonston expressed her appreciation for the OMV and asked questions about the antiquated system and the possibility of cutting reinstatement training time.

Ms. Hoyt explained how the system was built and added onto throughout the years and that the OMV deals with so many parts that it would be very complex to get it into one system. She further explained how the training and information an employee must learn can't be shortened because they have to be trained on every issue and learn a different system for each issue.

Mr. Dana Eastridge, 910 Kings Rd., Leesville, LA, 71446, (601) 916-0888, spoke for information only and recounted his experience with the Department of Motor Vehicle field office in Leesville where he had to pay a five hundred dollar fee for not having insurance when he was not aware that the out-of-state insurance that he had was not legitimate in Louisiana.

Representative Charles Owen spoke on the need to do better by the citizens of Louisiana by eliminating laws that the legislature is unaware of but that are affecting citizens. He stated the OMV has too much to handle, and as an outcome Louisiana citizens are being hurt. He suggested a clinical process review might be helpful.

Representative Edmonston stated that she will work with the OMV to come up with a solution to the insurance problem and potentially create a bill to address the problem.

Witness cards submitted by individuals who did not speak are as follows: 5 for information only. Witness cards are included in the committee records.

Statements submitted in lieu of appearing before the committee are as follows: 1 for information only. Copies of these statements are included in the committee records.

DOTD update on rule promulgation

Mr. Joshua McNemar, LA DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Rd., Baton Rouge, LA, 70802, no telephone number provided, spoke for information only and briefly informed the committee on the process of rule promulgation. He stated that the process takes about a year from the time a bill is passed to when a rule is established.

Mr. Greg Hardy, LA DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Rd., Baton Rouge, LA, 70802, (225) 242-4622, spoke for information only and briefly updated the committee on the status of SB 477 by Senator Gary Smith, which Chairman Wright carried in the House.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS

V. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Mark Wright
House Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works

Date adopted: