

State of Louisiana

***FIREMENS' SUPPLEMENTAL PAY BOARD OF REVIEW
MEETING***

AUGUST 18, 2021

10:00 a.m.

Firemens' Supplemental Pay Board of Review

AUGUST 18, 2021

10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS AND STAFF PRESENT:

Brien Ruiz, Chairman
Dwayne Thevis
Ronald Schillace
Richard Parker
Charles Morgan Williams
Kay DeBenedetto
Candace Oby
Candy Diez
Conner Junkin, Esq.

OTHERS PRESENT:

Lt. Col. Jason Starns
Cassie Porche

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Firemens' Supplemental Pay Board of Review Meeting

August 18, 2021

ROLL CALL

MR. RUIZ:

All right. We'll call to meeting to order for the August meeting.

Roll call, please.

MS. DIEZ:

Roll call, we have Mr. Ruiz.

MR. RUIZ:

Here.

MS. DIEZ:

Mr. Schillace.

MR. SCHILLACE:

Here.

MS. DIEZ:

Mr. Thevis.

MR. PARKER:

I know he's here. I saw him, but he's muted.

MR. RUIZ:

Is Dwayne in?

MR. PARKER:

It's showing he is.

MS. DIEZ:

He's in.

1 **MS. OBY:**

2 Dwayne, we can't hear you. You're muted. He's here. He's just still muted
3 right now.

4 **MS. DIEZ:**

5 Okay. Mr. Parker.

6 **MR. PARKER:**

7 Here.

8 **MS. DIEZ:**

9 Mr. Williams.

10 **MR. WILLIAMS:**

11 Here.

12 **MR. RUIZ:**

13 We have a quorum.

14 **REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES FROM AUGUST 18, 2021**

15 **MR. RUIZ:**

16 We need to approve the minutes of August 18th, 2021.

17 **MR. SCHILLACE:**

18 I'll make a motion to -- to approve the minutes.

19 **MR. RUIZ:**

20 Do we have a second?

21 **MR. PARKER:**

22 Parker seconds. Parker, second.

23 **MR. RUIZ:**

24 All in favor, signify by saying "aye."

25 (All aye.)

1 **MR. RUIZ:**

2 Motion passes.

3 Gentlemen, when we speak, I guess we got say who we are just in case
4 Michelle can't recognize our voice.

5 **MR. SCHILLACE:**

6 Okay.

7 **MS. OBY:**

8 Okay. So, Kay, do you want to introduce Jason?

9 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

10 Yes. Today, we have a good update from our undersecretary, Lieutenant
11 Colonel Jason Starnes. He would like to address the Board on some new things
12 that are going to be happening soon. I think y'all will really like it.

13 Jason, thanks for coming today. I know you're busy.

14 **UPDATE FROM LT. COL. JASON STARNES - COMPUTER UPGRADE**

15 **MR. STARNES:**

16 Hey. Good morning, everyone. Thank -- thank you, Kay.

17 Chief Ruiz, thank you for carving out a few minutes. I'll try to be brief.

18 I just wanted to provide the board with an update on where we are with the
19 modernization of our system for the warranting process, the application process,
20 and ultimately submitting payment files. We've been use -- the system that
21 we've been utilizing has been in place for 40-plus years, so it's, obviously, from a
22 technology perspective, very antiquated and limited in its abilities. It's something
23 that we've been working on for a few years. We needed to get the funding to do
24 it, to -- to do a conversion and basically build out a new application and warrant
25 system. We were able to, under the Division of Administration and the Office of

1 Technology Services worked with us on that knowing that it was a critical piece
2 that needed to be modernized. We went through the legislative process. The
3 legislature did ultimately appropriate the money to Public Safety so we can work
4 on the build out of the system.

5 What it's -- essentially, from a high level, what we're going to be moving to
6 is -- is a -- more of an automated -- or an automated system that allows, not only
7 efficient -- you know, processes that we do here on the public safety
8 administratively, but also on the end users for all the municipalities will have the
9 ability to submit applications electronically, electronically sign them, submit
10 them. We can track them.

11 Also, the -- the warrant process will work the same way in an automated
12 fashion. There's gonna be, you know -- we have some high-level requirements
13 we've already had.

14 Kay is going to kind of be taking the point on the DPS side of -- of
15 managing the project going forward and -- and working with our contract and
16 technology vendors to develop all of those system requirements, what the
17 workflows need to be.

18 So it's -- I think this is -- this is going to be a huge benefit to everyone
19 involved, both the end users, and it's going to create a lot of process efficiencies
20 on that end, as well as what we have to do administratively in processing those
21 applications and warrants on our end.

22 So we're excited about it. We just wanted to pass along that information. I
23 don't have a specific timeline of when it will -- we'll be in a place where we can
24 start testing and eventually go live with it, but it's -- it's a huge leap forward from
25 a technology perspective and -- and getting something that's going to work better

1 for everyone.

2 So -- and -- and Kay, please, add anything you'd like to with the
3 conversation, but we just wanted to -- to share that information with y'all.

4 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

5 Thank you so much, Jason.

6 We also have on the call with us today Cassie Porche. Cassie works for the
7 Louisiana State Office of Information Systems, and she will be taking the lead
8 on their side and is right now going through the process of hiring our
9 development team. We will hire some contractors that we will work with that
10 will do the actual development of the system. It is likely to be a web-based
11 system.

12 The main thing that we are going to start -- the first thing we want to really
13 start doing is sending out some information to the towns and try to get some
14 information from them about their technology, what they have in place, and let
15 them know this is coming so they can begin to get the technology. Because this
16 will be no longer where we can take a Joefirefighter@hotmail.com email address
17 to -- to be able to work this system. They are going to have to have something --
18 there won't be software that they'd have to keep updated or anything like that,
19 but at least a good web-based communication tool so that they can -- can
20 communicate with us.

21 We will certainly keep y'all updated as we go through this process, where
22 we are. There will be decisions that will need to be made along the way, and we
23 will include the Board in all of those decisions. We will need y'all to act as a
24 stakeholder for us in this project to make sure that the towns are on board with
25 the -- with the new system and getting it set up. We will involve everyone in

1 training and testing and all of those items. So we just want to make sure
2 everybody's comfortable with it. We -- I think we said we looked to maybe have
3 a team in place by like November.

4 **MS. PORCHE:**

5 Yes, that our goal.

6 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

7 Okay. So look forward to hearing from us on that.

8 Anybody have any questions?

9 **MR. RUIZ:**

10 Ms. Kay?

11 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

12 Yes.

13 **MR. RUIZ:**

14 The -- that's the problem -- and I don't want it to be a problem. The only
15 problem is, some smaller fire departments might not have the IT people. How
16 are we going to help them?

17 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

18 Well, that's going to have to be a discussion point. That's why we want to
19 find out just what we're looking at in the terms of -- I mean, y'all have a huge
20 population of customers, you know. You'll hear the term "customer" quite a bit,
21 and that will be the Hammond Fire Department and the Ville Platte Fire
22 Department and all of these little fire protection districts. So we will get contact
23 information on them and -- and -- and work with them. And, like I said, we're
24 going to offer a lot of training, web-based training. We can do in -- in-person
25 training, Zoom training.

1 Did you have -- did that answer your question?

2 **MR. RUIZ:**

3 Yes.

4 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

5 I know that that's a concern. I know that that's a concern.

6 **MR. RUIZ:**

7 It is a concern, because like Scott -- we approved Scott last -- last meeting,
8 that's not a very big town, and I -- I wouldn't think that they would have that big
9 of a IT department because they got two or three guys that work for the fire
10 department.

11 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

12 No, no, no. They're not gonna -- they're not gonna need an IT department to
13 do this. It's going to be a web-based thing. Just like every other little system,
14 they'll have to have a password to get in and that kind of stuff. We don't have
15 any of the -- the details on that end yet, but anyone should be able to do the
16 system via the web. It's not going to be a software program that they have to
17 continuously maintain and update. It will be web driven. It will be password
18 protected. We're going to try to make it as -- as all inclusive as possible for even
19 the signature processes and the approval processes.

20 Look, we will work with all of the towns, and there may be -- some towns
21 may need to do partners. They may need to -- you know, like the fire protection
22 districts may want to have a central office that will process all of the exact
23 paperwork. You know, like I say, we -- we will deal with all that through the
24 process.

25 **MR. RUIZ:**

1 And, Ms Kay, you talking like we about to go warrants, paperless, things
2 like that?

3 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

4 Warrants, applications, and, of course, with us the pay (phonetic) system.

5 **MR. RUIZ:**

6 Okay.

7 **MR. STARNES:**

8 And I'll just add to that. Yeah, to add to that, it's -- essentially, it's -- it's --
9 instead of filling out paper applications that either have to be mailed in, hand
10 delivered, this would be just a, a system where -- that is web based, and you
11 would just log in with your -- whoever has those credentials, and you would
12 submit applications electronically, be able to process your monthly warrants
13 electronically, and where it all gets submitted. Instead of having to do
14 everything by paper and a manual process, this would just be done. All you
15 would need is, I guess, internet access on -- on that end user end to -- to process
16 things. And so there -- there -- there shouldn't be -- I don't foresee there being a
17 burden. There's -- there's no -- there's not going to really be a need for, you
18 know, local agencies to have IT departments, like what -- what Kay was talking
19 about. A lot of the work will be done on this side and to just be providing that
20 web portal to do -- process your work through instead of having to do it
21 manually by paper.

22 **MR. RUIZ:**

23 It sounds very great. Thank you.

24 **MR. STARNES:**

25 Thank you.

1 **MR. SCHILLACE:**

2 I have -- this is Ronnie. I've got a -- I don't know if this is going to be a
3 question or a suggestion. You indicated possibly maybe toward the end of the
4 year you might have the system ready, maybe, maybe not.

5 **MR. DEBENEDETTO:**

6 No, no, no, no, no. No, no, no, no, no. We'd have the team in place, the
7 team in place by November.

8 **MR. SCHILLACE:**

9 Okay. So this going to be --

10 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

11 Yes. This is going to be -- this is going to be a long process. Now, we may
12 do -- we don't know how we're going to actually do it yet. We may do a phased
13 implementation, where we may do like applications first and then -- then the
14 warrants and stuff like that. But -- but we're looking at a long-term project here.
15 This is not -- this is a total rewrite, so it's not going to be something that can be
16 done quickly.

17 **MR. SCHILLACE:**

18 Okay. That would be --

19 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

20 In a month or so, we will start -- it gives us time to get everyone on board
21 and that. It'll be a good process for them. We will not have -- I'm sorry?

22 **MR. SCHILLACE:**

23 All right. I think it would be a good idea if you implemented one step at a
24 time, just like what you said, you know, instead of throwing it all at them at
25 once, but -- yeah. Okay. Well, good. I misunderstood. All right. Good. Thank

1 you.

2 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

3 Yeah. Okay. We will probably have -- set up something for the future,
4 once we get the team in place and get rolling, where we will update y'all on a --
5 like a monthly basis and stuff like that to make sure y'all are all well informed
6 and if you start getting questions and things like that.

7 The one other thing I'll go in, if we don't have any more questions on the
8 system, I will tell you, the other project we're really working on, and that is to
9 update the administrative rules. The administrative rules for supplemental pay
10 were written back in the '80s, even before I was fooling with it, and they really
11 need some updating. And so, along with Connor, we are going through those
12 line by line trying to get them up to date. We will incorporate language that will
13 allow us to use the new system, because, of course, the -- the administrative rules
14 and the statutes have some very old language in there. They still say we're going
15 to issue checks and that the mayors are going to send us the warrants and things
16 like that. So all of that will be updated. That, again, is a long process.

17 And Connor, we'll -- we'll, you know, have to say lots of prayers for
18 Connor, because he's overworked, and it's -- as a huge thing, he will have to be
19 the one that actually submits it.

20 But there and again, we're going to keep y'all updated on our progress.
21 There will be decisions that need to be made there again too with the
22 administrative rules and the way the Board wants to handle certain things like
23 resignations, terminations, leave without pay, military duty, all of those items
24 that, you know, we normally have to bring before the Board. We're going to
25 make sure that we put in the rules and that the statutes are also updated to make

1 sure we're doing everything correctly.

2 **MR. RUIZ:**

3 Sounds very good, Ms. Kay.

4 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

5 So that's what our office is doing.

6 **MR. RUIZ:**

7 All right. Is there anything else, Ms. Kay?

8 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

9 I'm sorry?

10 **MR. RUIZ:**

11 I said, is there anything else?

12 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

13 That's it.

14 **MR. RUIZ:**

15 Okay.

16 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

17 That's it for me.

18 **MR. RUIZ:**

19 Thank you very much. Thank you.

20 **MR. STARNES:**

21 Thank you, Chief. I appreciate your time.

22 **MR. RUIZ:**

23 Thank you, sir, for coming in.

24 Candace, new applications.

25 **MS. DEBENEDETTO:**

1 Thank you, Jason.

2 **NEW APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL - 63**

3 **MS. OBY:**

4 Yeah. So next, we -- I mean, we don't have any -- anything else on the
5 agenda, any special items to review.

6 The next -- the next thing we have on the agenda is the new applications.
7 We have 63 applications.

8 **MR. SCHILLACE:**

9 I make -- this is Ronnie. I make a motion to approve the 63 applications.

10 **MR. PARKER:**

11 Parker. I'll second it.

12 **MR. RUIZ:**

13 I'm sorry. I cut you out. Who's that?

14 **MR. PARKER:**

15 Parker, second.

16 **MR. RUIZ:**

17 We have a motion. We have a second.

18 Any further questions?

19 (No response.)

20 **MR. RUIZ:**

21 We'll call for a vote.

22 All in favor, signify by saying "aye."

23 (All aye.)

24 **MR. RUIZ:**

25 The motion passes.

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SET TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

MR. RUIZ:

All right. We're going to look at the -- set the time and date of the next meeting, Wednesday, November 17th, 2021. Is that date good with everybody?

MS. OBY:

November 17th. And if -- if -- if it -- if you take a look at your schedules and we need to rearrange it, I mean, just let us know.

MR. RUIZ:

The 17th is good for me.

MS. OBY:

Okay.

MR. PARKER:

Parker, I'm good.

MR. THEVIS:

Dwayne Thevis is good.

MS. OBY:

Okay. That's all we have today, gentlemen.

ADJOURN

MR. RUIZ:

We need a motion to adjourn, please.

MR. WILLIAMS:

Second. Morgan.

MR. RUIZ:

No. You got to make the motion.

MR. WILLIAMS:

1 Oh, motion to adjourn.

2 **MR. RUIZ:**

3 We not going to have second? Did anybody second?

4 **MR. THEVIS:**

5 I'll second. Dwayne Thevis.

6 **MR. RUIZ:**

7 All in favor of adjournment, signify by saying "aye."

8 (All aye.)

9 **MR. RUIZ:**

10 All right. Motion passes.

11 Thank you all, gentlemen.

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CERTIFICATE

I, MICHELLE S. ABADIE, Certified Court Reporter in and for the State of Louisiana, as the officer before whom this hearing was reported, certify that on August 18, 2021, a meeting for the Firemens' State Supplemental Board was held, that this testimony and matters were reported by me, was prepared and transcribed by me, and that the foregoing pages, numbered 1 through 17, inclusive, is a true and correct transcript to the best of my ability and understanding; that I am not related to counsel or to the parties herein, nor am I otherwise interested in the outcome of this proceeding.

MICHELLE S. ABADIE, CCR #24032
CERTIFIED COURT REPORTER

BRIEN RUIZ, CHAIRMAN

DWAYNE THEVIS, VICE-CHAIRMAN

MICHELLE S. ABADIE, CCR
CERTIFIED COURT REPORTER