

# Ky. AG demands resignation of fish & wildlife chair

By **LIAM NIEMEYER**  
*Kentucky Lantern*

The Kentucky attorney general is demanding the resignation of the board chair overseeing the state’s wildlife management agency, arguing he is ineligible under Kentucky law — a position that could have broader implications for the state’s hunters and anglers.

Attorney Aaron Silletto, head of the Office of Civil and Environmental Law within the AG’s office, wrote Chuck Meade, the chair of the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Commission, a Dec. 19 letter reviewed by the Lantern.

In it, Silletto said Meade had not held a hunting or fishing license for five consecutive years as required by state law to serve on the commission.

Nor did he qualify for an exemption that allows residents to hunt and fish without a license on their farmland during that five-year period.

“Your failure to obtain hunting and fishing licenses in 2021 and 2022 means you continue to be ineligible to serve on the Commission, and you will be ineligible to serve on the Commission until the 2027 license year, at the earliest,” Silletto wrote.

“The citizens of Wildlife District 7 and I look forward to your timely response and resignation.”

Silletto demanded Meade resign by Dec. 31 or the attorney general’s office would seek to remove Meade from the commission through action in circuit court.

Meade, a former state representative, told the Lantern in a phone interview that his attorney planned to ask for a continuance of the deadline until January to give him more time to prepare a response.

He said his response would address an interpretation of a Kentucky Court of Appeals decision from 1955 that the attorney general’s office is citing to argue that Meade does not qualify for an exemption allowing Kentuckians to hunt and fish on their farmland without a license.

“I believe that if just minds will just take a fresh look at the old decision, these matters can be resolved,” Meade said.

“I’ve told this to everyone: The commission is a great privilege, and I’m proud to represent many Kentuckians who enjoy hunting and fishing on their family farms. I have been a lifelong sportsman of the commonwealth.”

Meade said he would defend himself in court if necessary.

Meade was appointed to the district seat, representing Eastern Kentucky, by Democratic Gov.



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES  
Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Commission Chair Chuck Meade speaks during a May commission meeting.

Andy Beshear in January 2024, after being nominated by sportspeople in his district. The GOP-controlled Kentucky Senate confirmed him in April 2024.

Commission members oversee the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources’s budget consisting of tens of millions of dollars in hunting and fishing license fees, boat registration fees, and federal grants.

The commission also implements and changes hunting and fishing regulations.

State law directs the commission to keep a “watchful eye” over the department, and the commission controls the employment of the department’s head executive, Commissioner Rich Storm.

## A ‘STRONG CONNECTION’ TO A FARM

Silletto wrote in his four-page letter that Meade was initially advised through a separate letter on Dec. 5 of a “citizen’s complaint” that challenged Meade’s eligibility to serve on the commission.

Kevin Grout, a spokesperson for Coleman, said in an email that Coleman’s office received the complaint on Oct. 6, but he did not address a Lantern question on who filed it. Grout said Coleman’s office was not aware of “another recent challenge to the eligibility of a Fish and Wildlife Commission member.”

At issue in Silletto’s letter are two parts of state law: One part details eligibility requirements for commission members to serve when a prospective member of the commission goes through a nomination process; another part allows a “resident owner of farmland” to hunt and fish on their own property without getting a license, one of a number of license exemptions permitted for Kentuckians.

Silletto wrote in his letter Meade did not have

five consecutive years worth of hunting and fishing licenses when he was nominated, a requirement that became law in 2022, noting that Meade purchased a 2023 sportsmen’s license “a mere two days before the meeting of sportsmen at which you were nominated.”

Silletto’s letter also details how Meade cited an exemption in state law that allows a “resident owner of farmlands” to not purchase a hunting or fishing license.

Silletto wrote that Meade argued, and had witness testimony, that he hunted on a 100-acre farm he owned in Lawrence County every year since 2008.

But Silletto said because Meade did not live on that Lawrence County farm — instead appearing to live in a “gated community in a subdivision” in Johnson County — he did not qualify for the farmland license exemption.

“You may not use your non-resident ownership of the Lawrence County property to avail yourself of the ‘resident owner of farmlands’ exemption,” Silletto wrote.

Silletto cited two separate opinions from the attorney general, one from 1963 and another from 1979, along with the Kentucky Court of Appeals decision from 1955 to argue the law meant that a person had to have a “sufficient connection to the particular tract of land” to be “deemed residents of that tract of land.”

Meade told the Lantern he does have a “strong connection” to the Lawrence County land, mentioning it has been in his family for more than 100 years.

“We have raised our families. We’ve raised livestock on it. We’ve raised gardens on it. We’ve survived from it, and we feel the connection expressly mentioned in the prior court case,” Meade said.

**PAST POLITICAL CLASHES**

The League of Kentucky Sportsmen, which represents thousands of hunters across the state, is concerned the attorney general’s office’s interpretation of the license exemption for resident farmland owners conflicts with how it’s long been interpreted by state game wardens.

A copy of a draft resolution shared with the Lantern calls on the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources to take “immediate action” to clarify how the resident farmland exemption is interpreted.

The resolution states the resident farmland exemption “has historically afforded Kentucky residents the right to hunt

and fish on their own land” regardless of whether the landowner lived there. The resolution also states that after checking in with various wildlife law enforcement officers, they have shared their interpretation “that it is not necessary for landowners to reside on their property to be granted the landowner license exemption.”

Doug Ramey, the president of the league, told the Lantern he questioned why Meade’s eligibility was being brought up after the Kentucky Senate had already confirmed him.

“Why is it being brought up now when he’s owned his own property forever?” Ramey said. “I suspect there is an ulterior motive.”

Scottie Ellis, a spokesperson for Beshear, said the governor was not aware of the investigation into Meade.

“The governor does not yet know all the underlying facts but is concerned that every time a member of this commission attempts to exert real oversight and demand transparency, a Republican AG intervenes,” Ellis said.

“The vast majority of sportsmen have serious and grave concerns with the operations of fish & wildlife, yet their elected members to the board are denied confirmation or threatened with lawsuits.”

Beshear and Storm have clashed on a number

of issues in the past, including executive branch oversight of procurement and conservation easements.

Republican Kentucky Senate President Robert Stivers has previously told reporters that a priority for the Senate, when considering whether to confirm Beshear’s appointments to the commission, was to protect Storm from retaliation.

Hunters and anglers have decried past Beshear appointments being denied by the Senate, arguing apolitical wildlife management work was becoming politicized.

Lisa Jackson, a spokesperson for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, in an emailed statement said Storm was not involved in initiating or encouraging any complaint.

She said the department is not taking a position on whether Meade should resign and would refer to “the appropriate legal authorities” for a resolution.

“This matter is between the Attorney General’s office and a gubernatorial appointee to the Fish and Wildlife Commission,” Jackson said. “Storm remains committed to carrying out his duties in accordance with the law and maintaining public confidence in the work of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.”



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## Ten Commandments monument restored to capitol grounds

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**FRANKFORT** — The historic Ten Commandments monument given to the Commonwealth of Kentucky in 1971 by the Fraternal Order of Eagles has been restored to the

Kentucky Capitol on the State Capitol grounds in Monument Park.

This historic restoration comes as a result of the passage of the 2025 Regular Session’s House Joint Resolution (HJR) 15, authored

by State Rep. Shane Baker (R - Somerset).

The Family Foundation was proud to support HJR 15’s passage during the 2025 General Assembly earlier this year.

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