

# Visit now: Last session in historic capitol for several years

## House update

By Rep. Mark Hart

FRANKFORT — As we prepare for part two of the 2025 Regular Session to resume today, it is worth noting that this will mark a significant moment in our legislature’s history.

It will be the final session held in the Capitol building for at least three years, as extensive renovations are set to begin immediately following adjournment of the General Assembly.

This historic building, which has stood as the heart of the Commonwealth since 1910, will close its doors to the public, elected officials, and staff while the necessary upgrades and restorations that are part of the \$300 million project take place.

Those who have visited Frankfort recently have seen the scaffolding that covers the dome as exterior work began several years ago. Interior work will begin as we enter the next phase.

While this project is expensive, it would be far more expensive to replace the facility or wait longer to make improvements.

The fact is, while still an architecturally beautiful symbol of our state’s potential, it is old, out-of-date, and requires structural upgrades to ensure it remains a part of our state for generations to come.

This project also means that those who have yet to visit or wish to visit again need to do so now. For everyone’s safety, the Capitol building itself will be completely off limits until all renovations are complete.

During this time, the

Legislature will be meeting in the temporary chambers constructed in the parking lot on the east side of the Capitol Annex.

These chambers have been designed to accommodate both the House and Senate. They will serve as our working home until the Capitol is ready to reopen.

The transition to the temporary structure was initially scheduled to occur this session. However, the governor’s administration decided to delay the construction project a year.

While change is often bittersweet, the renovation project represents our investment to preserve our Capitol for future generations. We look forward to seeing our Capitol restored to its full glory, coupled with some modern enhancements while maintaining its history.

For now, I encourage you to take the opportunity to visit while we are in session. Use this time to make the most of our last session in the Capitol building as we prepare to turn the page on a new chapter in our Capitol’s history.

For your convenience, I will include information on how to visit the Capitol and the Capitol Annex:

### Capitol Building

Hours of Operation:  
Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (excluding specific holidays).  
Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. (excluding specific holidays).  
Sunday, closed.  
Parking: On-site parking is available on Capital Avenue. Large groups and school tours are asked to call 502-564-3449 to make arrangements and get in-



State Rep. Mark Hart

formation about providing identification. Bus parking is available along Capitol Avenue in front of the Capitol building.

Tours: For tours or additional information, please contact my office at 1-800-372-7181 or 502-564-8100, or email me at Mark.Hart@kylegislature.gov.

**Capitol Annex**  
Legislative Committee Meetings: Legislative committee meetings are held throughout the year and are open to the public. No special passes are needed. Most committee meetings occur on the first floor of the Capitol Annex, although some are held in various spaces in the Capitol during a legislative session. Visitors should consult the Legislative Calendar on legislature.ky.gov for dates, times and room numbers, and be prepared for last-minute changes.

Parking: A large parking garage is located on the east side of the Capitol Annex (the office building directly behind the Capitol). The surface lot of the garage provides public parking, and several ADA spaces are in the row closest to the Annex. Levels 4-6 also provide

parking for the public, and Levels 4 and 5 offer ADA accessible parking near the elevators. Level 2 and half of Level 3 are reserved for vehicles with permits.

**Resources**  
School Group Tours: The Legislative Research Commission (LRC) is great resource for teachers and students who are interested in learning about the legislative process! To schedule a school group tour, please contact my office at 502-564-8100 or email me at Mark.Hart@kylegislature.gov.

Alternatives to Capitol Visit: While the Capitol is closing for at least three years, Frankfort is still a place rich with history. Bring children to visit the Thomas D. Clark Kentucky History Center, the Old Capitol, or the Military History Museum. I also have some resources for groups that cannot make the trip – including a video tour and activity books.

Watching Online: If you are not able to visit in person, we use a variety of tools to keep the legislature’s work accessible and transparent. For decades, Kentucky Educational Television (KET) has televised committee meetings and the work we do on the House Floor. In addition, the legislature now offers a YouTube channel and broadcasts live from all committees, including those that KET is unable to cover. To access the KET and YouTube coverage, visit [www.legislature.ky.gov](http://www.legislature.ky.gov) and click on the Live Coverage box. You may also go directly to them via [www.ket.org](http://www.ket.org) and KY LRC Committee Meetings on YouTube.

As always, I can be reached anytime through

## Hart appointed to ag committee

### House Majority Caucus

FRANKFORT — State Rep. Mark Hart, R-Falmouth, has been appointed by Kentucky House Speaker David Osborne to serve as a member of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee of the Council of State Government’s Southern Office.

“I am incredibly grateful to have been chosen by Speaker Osborne to serve on a committee that has such an impact not just here at home, but across the southern United States,” Hart said.

“I do not take this appointment lightly, and understand the weight of representing Kentucky on such a prominent stage.

“I will be an active member, and will ensure that the committee is provided with all necessary materials in order to help them understand the efforts we have made in Kentucky to help our farmers and rural communities, while at the same time learning more about the strides and struggles other states have made and faced to serve their constituents in similar environments.”

Founded in 1947, the Council of State Government’s Southern Office provides nonpartisan expertise on a wide range of topics through reports, briefs, leadership development, and inquiry services. Each year, the

southern office hosts the Southern Legislative Conference, the largest regional gathering of legislators and their staff from across fourteen states.

The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee focuses on topics pertaining to farming and rural communities. This includes access to natural resources, export opportunities for agricultural products, and concerns regarding healthcare, transportation, and infrastructure for our rural populations.

“Kentucky’s participation in the Council of State Governments provides both resources and an opportunity to collaborate with our legislative colleagues throughout the region,” Osborne said.

“We learn a great deal about what worked and what failed in other states, and it is more important than ever that we work together.

“The issues we face in areas like education, health care, energy resilience, and economic development don’t recognize state boundaries.”

Hart has served as a member of the General Assembly since 2017, representing Kentucky’s 78th House district.

For information on the General Assembly, visit [legislature.ky.gov](http://legislature.ky.gov), and for more information on the Council of State Government’s Southern Office, visit [csgsouth.org](http://csgsouth.org).

the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via email at Mark.Hart@kylegislature.gov

and keep track through the Kentucky legislature’s website at [legislature.ky.gov](http://legislature.ky.gov).

# Fiscal Court, Champions consider opioid settlement distributions

By Jim Thaxton

FALMOUTH — On Jan. 9, Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman announced a \$110 million settlement with The Kroger Company in support of efforts to combat the opioid crisis. It was the latest in national and state settlements with pharmaceutical companies and distributors to combat addictions caused by the prescription medications.

On Jan. 28, Pendleton County Attorney Stacy Sanning read, and the Fiscal Court approved, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the county Fiscal Court and Champions for a Drug Free Pendleton County. This agreement spells out the responsibilities between the Court and Champions in using funds provided by the national opioid settlements.

Champions is funded through a federal Drug-Free Communities grant.

The organization addresses drug, alcohol and tobacco prevention in Pendleton County youth. Champions also provide resources for families aimed at helping to help build social and emotional skills in their children.

County Judge Executive David Fields invited Champions Executive Director Stephanie Green to address the Court.

“This MOU outlines the relationship between the fiscal court and our Champions Advisory Board, in which this board was created to help assist the county with making recommendations for use of the opioid settlement funds that resulted from litigation between the state and pharmaceutical companies several years ago,” she said.

“These funds are for the purpose of helping communities combat the opioid crisis, in line with the guidance for use of funds set forth by the Kentucky Association of Counties.

“Our Champions Advisory Board is made up of members with different areas of subject matter expertise regarding prevention, treatment and recovery, and we are so thankful to have this partnership with our county officials.”

Green gave members of the Court and others in attendance copies of the just-published Champions Resource Guide “Talk to Your Kids About Drugs Over Dinner.”

She was passionate as she explained, “We are so excited to be able to provide this resource to parents, families and community members. It’s our goal to get the word out and share this resource guide with as many local businesses, organizations and community partners as possible over the coming months.”

Magistrate Darrin Gregg asked about a graphic on the bottom of page 11 of the guide: “How does a kid know the difference between Nerds and Nerdy?”

The graphic shows a picture of Nerds candy box, next to a photo of a box using the same color scheme and similar font, but labeled “Nerdy Bears.” The Nerdy Bears include “a

generous amount of delta-8 THC” and CDB—ingredients found in marijuana.

Discussion followed pointing out that Nerdy Bears can be found in some states on the counter of stores and gas stations. Additionally, national statistics report accidental overdose poisoning when children mistake products like this for candy. Green added that most overdoses were toddlers.

Even though products like Nerdys are only sold in states where recreational marijuana is sold legally, the packaging is clearly attractive to children, and it is important for parents to be aware of the danger.

After reviewing the resource guide, Sanning requested additional copies to give to the parents of her juvenile clients.

Fields said, “The MOU puts into place the working relationship of the Champions Advisory Board and the Fiscal Court. The diverse background of the board members gives us a great opportunity to use the funds available in the most productive way. This way the Fiscal Court can rely on the work and research the Board has done

on each applicant to better appropriate the funds.”

Champions, the Court and others in the community spent more than a year to develop a unique, fair and effective way to distribute the opioid settlement funds, the groups said. More information about the advisory board and how to apply for grants will be available soon, officials said.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

In other business, the court:

- Approved the re-appointment of Cindy Brown to a two-year term on the Ambulance Taxing District
- Approved the Silco Fire Inspections and Monitoring Agreement, deleting one item, the EOC Fire Alarm System, the Court considered unnecessary on an annual basis, thus saving the county \$674.
- Approved the 2025 Sheriff’s State Advancement
- Approved consumer price index increases for elected officials, including the county attorney and

others.

- In the closing remarks, Fields called attention to a special meeting scheduled for Feb. 4 to address winter mix applications to roads. Fields showed slides of a possible multipurpose one-ton truck for the court to consider adding to the existing Road Department fleet.

Magistrate Rick Mineer asked, “Did they get all the trucks washed?” and members of the Court discussed how important it was to protect these assets from salt erosion. Gregg praised the school system for their role in getting the trucks washed.

Magistrate Joshua Plummer reported on the progress rerouting tractor trailer trucks off several county roads.

- Immediately following the adjournment, Fields called to order the Pendleton County Public Properties Corporation annual 2025 Meeting. Officers for 2025 are chairman, Fields; vice chairman, Plummer; secretary, Magistrate Alan Whaley; and treasurer, Mineer.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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# Slavery exception amendment proposed

### Democratic Caucus

FRANKFORT — Saying it is well past time for Kentucky to remove a slavery exception from its constitution, state Rep. George A. Brown Jr. and other human rights advocates held a news conference last Tuesday to promote House Bill 121, a constitutional amendment that would give voters a chance to make that goal a reality.

The Lexington legislator said his proposal is important because “there is no reason for slavery or involuntary servitude to have any type of legal protection.

“Kentucky needs to join the nine other states that have already taken this step — including Tennessee and Alabama — and to be an inspiration for the 40 others that have yet to do

this.”

Under Section 25 of Kentucky’s constitution, slavery and involuntary servitude are outlawed “except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.”

Brown’s amendment would strike that quoted language.

“That exception mirrors what can be found in the U.S. Constitution’s 13th Amendment,” he said. “Many others and I stand ready to do what it takes to remove that federal exception as well.”

Those speaking in support of House Bill 121 included Patricia Gailley, who represents Abolish Slavery Kentucky, and Savvy Shabazz, president of the Louisville branch of All of Us or None and a criminal justice advocate.

“Words matter, and the words in

the exception clause still mean that Kentuckians agree to be complicit in crimes against humanity,” Gailley said. “It is past time to finish the task Abraham Lincoln started.”

“The presence of the slavery clause/ involuntary servitude in Kentucky’s constitution perpetuates a painful legacy of oppression and dehumanization,” Shabazz said.

House Bill 121 will be considered during the ongoing legislative session, which began early this month and concludes in March.

Constitutional amendments require three-fifths support of state House and Senate members and then approval by a majority of voters during November elections in even-numbered years. “We will do all we can to get this amendment on the ballot in 2026,” Brown said.