PMC COO Justice appointed to Kentucky Eating Disorder Council

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Pikeville Medical Center said in a statement Nov. 13 that PMC Chief Operating Officer Kansas Justice has been appointed by Gov. Andy Beshear to serve on the Kentucky Eating Disorder Council.

The appointment, according to the statement, recognizes Justice's outstanding leadership, dedication to improving healthcare access and her commitment to the well-being of communities throughout Eastern Kentucky.

The Kentucky Eating Disorder Council was established to provide guidance and recommendations that strengthen prevention, awareness and treatment of eating disorders across the commonwealth.

As COO of PMC, the statement said, Justice oversees daily operations for one of Eastern Kentucky's largest and most comprehensive healthcare systems.

"She plays a key role in strategic planning, operational excellence and advancing PMC's mission to deliver world-class care to the region," the statement said. "Under her leadership, PMC has continued to expand access to both physical and behavioral health services, bringing high-quality, compassionate care closer to home."

PMC said in the statement that eating disorders remain a serious public health concern in Kentucky, including in rural areas where access to specialized care can be limited.

Justice's experience and perspective, the statement said, will help the council address these challenges and develop strategies to expand resources, improve early intervention and increase awareness throughout Eastern Kentucky and beyond.

"We are extremely proud of Kansas for this well-deserved recognition," said Donovan Blackburn, PMC president and CEO. "Her insight and leadership will be invaluable in helping the council identify and overcome barriers that too often prevent individuals from receiving the care they need."

PMC, the statement said, is honored to have Kansas Justice represent the hospital and the region on this important statewide council.

"Her leadership, dedication to service and commitment to improving healthcare reflect PMC's mission to advance the health and well-being of our region through comprehensive care in a Christian environment and help further that mission by strengthening health outcomes across the commonwealth," the statement said.

Kansas Justice

Funding 'pause' for KentuckyWired infrastructure urged by legislative committee

By Liam Niemeyer
Kentucky Lantern

Some state funding for infrastructure in the KentuckyWired broadband network would be suspended under a recommendation made last week by a legislative committee.

Citing court battles that have embroiled the agency, the Information Technology Oversight Committee recommended "deauthorizing" money for bonds that have not yet been issued for "infrastructure upgrades and network refreshes" by the Kentucky Communications Network Authority (KCNA).

The report to leaders of the GOP-controlled legislature also recommends no future appropriations be made to the authority for infrastructure upgrades and network refreshes. The legislature allocated $25,359,000 in bonds for the authority in the current two-year state budget for "critical" infrastructure upgrades and purchases.

Sen. Gex WIlliams, R-Verona, a co-chair of the committee, told the Lantern that the recommendations would be a "pause" in funding until ongoing lawsuits between the Kentucky Communications Network Authority and Accelecom — a private telecom provider that partnered with the authority to manage the network — are resolved.

"We don't want to limit whoever's going to deal with this in the future" by making investments into the network today, Williams told the Lantern.

He also said the recommended "pause" is to allow time for Republican State Auditor Allison Ball to finish an audit of the authority's finances, an investigation the state legislature previously approved and allocated money toward.

The authority manages hundreds of miles of fiber optic cable built across the state to provide high-speed internet connection to every county seat, serving as a "middle mile" of internet connection. Private companies can then build a "last mile" of internet connection directly to homes and businesses.

The network construction — originally launched in 2013 under former Democratic Gov. Steve Beshear — has faced criticism in the past from state lawmakers for overspending by at least $100 million and years-long delays in getting the network live for businesses, households, school districts and other public entities to use.

The Kentucky Communications Network Authority over the past two years has been entangled in litigation with the private company Accelecom, or Open Fiber Kentucky Company LLC, which it partnered with to manage the broadband network. The ongoing contract disputes before Franklin Circuit Court Judge Phillip Shepherd include Accelecom seeking permission to connect certain customers to the middle mile network.

WDRB in Louisville reported earlier this year that the authority had terminated its contract with Accelecom earlier this year because the private company had allegedly violated the terms of its agreement. Accelcom had sent a letter to customers using the network that internet connections could be shut off at the end of the month.

Williams said he had lost confidence in the executive director of the authority, Doug Hendrix, to make "reasonable decisions" on infrastructure upgrades for the network because he's not confident the authority has proper technical expertise. Williams said he plans to file a bill during the legislative session that begins in January to remake the board overseeing the authority.

Hendrix and Greg Maddox, the general counsel for the authority, did not immediately respond to emailed requests for comment about the committee's recommendations and Williams' comments.

Rep. Chad Aull, D-Lexington, one of two Democrats on the committee, told the Lantern he was out of state when the committee released the recommendations last week and was "out of the loop" on the details of the report. During last week's committee meeting, Williams told his fellow lawmakers the committee was "not required" to vote on the report when it was released.

A spokesperson for Democratic Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear did not immediately provide a response to a Lantern request Monday afternoon asking about the committee's recommendations.

The Kentucky Lantern, an independent, nonpartisan, free news service, can be found at, kentuckylantern.com.

Shortage of rural doctors won't end anytime soon, report says

By Nada Hassanein
Stateline

For at least the next dozen years, rural areas will continue to have only about two-thirds of the primary care physicians they need, according to a report released Monday.

The nonprofit Commonwealth Fund based its analysis on federal health workforce data. Its report comes just days after states applied for portions of a $50 billion rural health fund included in the broad tax and spending law President Donald Trump signed in July. Some states want to use the federal money to expand their rural residency programs, as physicians who complete their residencies in rural areas are more likely to practice in one.

About 43 million people live in rural areas without enough primary care physicians, according to the report. Across the country, nearly all — 92 percent — of rural counties are considered primary care professional shortage areas, compared to 83 percent of nonrural counties. Forty-five percent of rural counties had five or fewer primary care doctors in 2023. Roughly 200 rural counties lacked one altogether.

Nationally, the report found there was an average of one physician per 2,881 rural residents. States in the South had 3,411 patients per physician, whereas states in the Northeast had 1,979 residents per physician.

Rural residents are less likely to use telehealth for primary care, largely because of limited broadband internet access. About 19 percent of rural respondents said they received health care from a primary care physician via telehealth over the past year, compared with the national average of 29 percent.

The report also took the pulse of states' participation in national programs for rural areas, such as a federal loan repayment and scholarship program for physicians working in areas with a shortage of health care providers. In 2023, 40 percent of rural counties had at least one primary care clinician participating in the program — compared to 60 percent of nonrural counties.

While the demand for primary care physicians will surpass the supply, the study estimates that the supply of rural nurse practitioners will exceed demand over time, as nurse practitioners are the fastest-growing type of clinician in the U.S., regardless of geography, the authors wrote.

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