

Beshear vetoes conversion therapy bill

BY SARAH LADD
Kentucky Lantern

Fulfilling a promise he made at this year’s Fairness Rally, Gov. Andy Beshear has vetoed a bill that would cancel his administration’s restrictions on conversion therapy and prohibit Medicaid from covering transgender-affirming medical care.

The Republican-controlled legislature reconvenes on Thursday for the last two days of the 2025 legislative session, at which time lawmakers can easily override Beshear’s veto.

In his veto letter, Beshear called House Bill 495 an “unconstitutional infringement” that “promotes a dangerous and discriminatory practice that has led to the deaths of Kentucky children.”

Conversion therapy is a discredited practice that attempts to alter gender expression and sexual attraction that diverges from heterosexual normativity “with the specific aim to promote heterosexuality as a preferable outcome,” according to the The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.”

In 2024, Beshear signed an executive order aimed at ending the practice on Kentucky minors.

“Conversion therapy has no basis in medicine or science and causes significant long term damage to our kids, including increased rates of suicide, anxiety and depression,” he wrote in his veto message on HB 495.

“As leaders and policy makers, we should be in the business of protecting our citizens and kids from harm, not subjecting them to discredited methods that jeopardize their health, well being and safety.”

Beshear’s veto message did not mention the bill’s ban on Medicaid covering gender-affirming medical care.

Heavy smoking linked to unexplained stroke in young adults

BY MELISSA PATRICK AND LIBERTY GILBERT
Kentucky Health News

A recent study finds that people under the age of 50 who smoke heavily have a higher risk of experiencing an unexplained stroke.

The study, published in *Neurology*, found that this was particularly true in men and people in the 45-49-year-old age group.

“Our findings suggest that continued public health efforts around preventing smoking, especially heavy smoking, may be an important way to help reduce the number of strokes happening to young people,” lead author Phillip Ferdinand, a researcher at Keele University in the United Kingdom and a member of the American Academy of Neurology, said in a news release.

The study looked at 546 people between the ages of 18 and 49 who had had an unexplained stroke. This group was then matched for age and gender with 546 people who did not have a stroke.

A stroke occurs “when a blood vessel carrying oxygen and nutrients to the brain is blocked by a clot (ischemic stroke) or bursts (hemorrhagic stroke). When an artery is blocked, the brain can’t get the blood and oxygen it needs. Brain cells can die from the lack of blood and oxygen,” according to UK HealthCare.

Unexplained strokes are called cryptogenic strokes, which are a type of ischemic stroke caused by a blockage of blood flow, but it is unclear what has caused the blockage, says the release.

The researchers found that people who had an unexplained stroke were more likely to smoke. Of those with unexplained stroke, 33% smoked compared to 15% of those who didn’t have a stroke, according to the release.

After adjusting for factors that could affect the risk of stroke, the researchers found that people who smoked had more than twice the risk of having an unexplained stroke when compared to those who did not smoke. They also found the risk was highest in male participants who had more than three times the risk, and also in people ages 45 to 49 who had nearly four times the risk.

The researchers also looked at how many cigarettes, pipes or cigars a person smoked a day and found that people who smoked the equivalent of more than 20 packs a year had more than four times the risk of unexplained stroke compared to those who did not smoke.

“This risk was especially high in male participants with nearly seven times the risk, and in people ages 45 to 49 who had nearly five times the risk,” according to the release.

The release notes that a limitation of the study is that it primarily looked at people of white European backgrounds, so the results may not be the same for other populations. However, Healthline reports that the results echo similar findings linking stroke risk with smoking.

Stroke in Kentucky

Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in Kentucky, according to the Kentucky Stroke Encounter Quality Improvement Project’s 2024 annual report.

The counties with the highest number of patient records in the 2023 SEQIP registry are Letcher, Johnson, Floyd, Pulaski and Harlan counties.

According to the 2021 Kentucky Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, about 4.9% of Kentucky adults have been told by their doctor that they had a stroke. This rate was similar by gender and by race, but significantly increased with age, with the highest prevalence of stroke in adults aged 65 and older (10.5%).

The state Department for Public Health offers a service called Quit Now Kentucky to help Kentuckians of all ages quit smoking. To learn more, go to QuitNowKentucky.org, text QUITKY to 797979 or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW. The services are free and confidential.

Beshear vetoes bill critics say would erode university tenureuniversities

BY MCKENNA HORSLEY
Kentucky Lantern

Saying it “threatens academic freedom,” Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear has issued a veto to a Republican-backed bill that some Kentucky professors warned would erode academic tenure at the state’s public universities and colleges.

Rep. James Tipton, R-Taylorsville, argued House Bill 424, was not about tenure in higher education but instead “employment contracts” between universities and academic employees. If it becomes law, the bill would give universities and colleges the ability to remove faculty members and presidents for not meeting “performance and productivity requirements” set by the institutions’ boards.

In his veto message issued Tuesday, Beshear said Kentucky should focus on ways to “attract, recruit and retain the best and brightest minds at Kentucky’s universities and colleges,” which includes having faith in “our university administrations and faculty to negotiate and offer competitive employment contracts.”

“In a time of increased federal encroachment into the public education, this bill will limit employment protections of our postsecondary institution teachers,” the governor wrote. “This bill will limit Kentucky’s ability to hire the best people and threatens academic freedom.”

However, as Republicans hold supermajorities in the House and Senate, they have the votes to override the governor’s veto when they return to Frankfort Thursday and Friday to finish the 2025 legislative session. The bill passed both chambers largely on party lines.

Over the weekend, United Campus Workers of Kentucky issued an open letter and petition to Beshear asking him to veto the legislation. In their message, the group says the bill would have “no guardrails in place to preserve the peer-driven academic review processes that have long protected academic freedom and tenure protections from partisan political interference.” Several UCW members previously testified against the legislation when it was heard in Tipton’s House committee.

The American Association of University Professors and PEN America also denounced the bill in statements ahead of Beshear’s veto.

Tipton said during House floor debate on the bill he believed the legislation would create “a more efficient, more effective system of public education for students across the commonwealth.”

Kentucky isn’t the only state where legislation has been introduced that could jeopardize the integrity of academic tenure for professors. A Nebraska Republican lawmaker recently introduced a bill that would replace academic tenure with annual performance evaluations of faculty members.

FUGATE, from 1

His commitment, Fugate said, was filled with emotion. “The moment I committed, I just felt gratitude and excitement,” he said. “I’ve always worked hard and tried to separate myself with extra effort, so seeing it pay off with this opportunity has been amazing.”

Campbellsville Harrodsburg head coach Austin Sparrow said the program is gaining more than just a basketball player.

“With Braden Fugate, we’re getting a young man who has been tested through adversity and comes out stronger,” Sparrow said. “He’s been part of two different programs and did a fantastic job representing himself, his family, and his community. He’s great in the classroom, a leader off the floor, and someone we feel brings a winning mentality.”

Sparrow added that Fugate’s versatility will be a valuable asset at the next level.

“Basketball-wise, we see Braden as a combo guard—he can bring the ball up the floor, shoot it, and attack the rim,” Sparrow said. “We’re excited to see how he continues to grow and contribute to our program over the next four years.”

Fugate credits Lincoln County head coach Jeff Jackson for preparing him for the rigors of college basketball.

“Coach Jackson has taught me that discipline is what it takes to be great,” Fugate said. “He always told us, ‘If it were easy, everyone would do it.’ That mindset helped prepare me for what’s next.”

Sparrow also praised Jackson and the Lincoln County program for producing players who arrive ready to compete.

“Coach Jackson is a Hall of Fame coach,” Sparrow said. “Whenever we get a chance to bring in kids from a program like Lincoln County, we know we’re getting winners. Those kids have faced tough competition, they’ve been coached hard, and they’re used to being held to a high standard.”

Fugate said he’s already focused on making an impact at CU Harrodsburg, both on and off the court.

“My goals for freshman year are to get settled into the new environment, work extremely hard on the court and in the classroom, and be the best teammate I can be,” he said. “I want to keep putting God first in everything I do—if I do that, everything else will fall into place.”

As he looks ahead to his college career, Fugate offered advice to younger players chasing their own basketball dreams.

“Do extra work when you already think you’re doing extra,” he said. “Keep separating yourself and believe in the work you’re putting in. You have to believe in yourself.”

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- Mercury thermostats

- Metal polish
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