

Last Week at the Capitol

FRANKFORT — The Old State Capitol was full of spirit this week as lawmakers gaveled in to session under the painted gaze of Isaac Shelby and George Washington and advanced a pair of bills that would designate every June as Kentucky History Month.

House Bill 313 and Senate Bill 313 are companion measures that each received a nod Tuesday in the Old Capitol building, which served as the home of the Kentucky General Assembly from 1830 to 1910.

Lawmakers conduct a session day in the Old Capitol every few years in a nod to legislative tradition, and this year’s event seems like it happened a century ago given the schedule that unfolded throughout the rest of the week.

Over a packed four days, bills on smoking, insurance fraud, tax exemptions, and driver safety all received action. Lawmakers discussed the legal theories behind Chevron deference and debated a proposal to display the Ten Commandments on the Capitol grounds.

Deliberations were especially pointed Thursday when the Senate Judiciary Committee took up Senate Bill 2, which would prohibit public funds from being spent on procedures, treatments and surgeries related to gender transition in Kentucky prisons.

Lawmakers sparred over the nature of the procedures — whether they are elective or constitute necessary medical treatment. Ultimately, the bill cleared the committee with a 6-2 vote and now heads to the full chamber. One member voted “pass.”

Lawmakers were more unified when the House Judiciary Com-

mittee green-lighted a bill related to wrongful convictions.

Under House Bill 206, wrongfully convicted individuals who prove their innocence could petition to receive financial compensation based on the amount of time they spent imprisoned, on parole or under supervision. The bill won committee support with a 19-0 vote on Wednesday.

Like many weeks in the general assembly, education issues also loomed large on the agenda.

The House Primary and Secondary Education Committee advanced a measure Wednesday to strengthen dyslexia interventions in public schools.

House Bill 272 would require local boards of education to develop a policy for identifying and assisting students in kindergarten through third grade who have dyslexia. It also calls on the state Department of Education to collect data and annually review and update its guidance on reading and writing difficulties.

The same committee also advanced legislation — House Bill 240 — that would require schools to administer a reading assessment to kindergarten students at the end of the academic year. Students who fail to meet grade-level benchmarks and standards would likely need to repeat kindergarten under the proposal.

Two bills related to driving are also picking up momentum.

Senate Bill 99 would forbid drivers from using a personal communication device while operating a motor vehicle. The bill provides some exceptions for emergency use and for adults who use hands-free options. It cleared

the Senate Transportation Committee on Wednesday.

House Bill 15 would reduce the minimum age for getting a learner’s permit in Kentucky from 16 to 15 years old. It cleared the House Transportation Committee on Tuesday and passed off the House floor Thursday. The bill now heads to the Senate.

More than one third of the 2025 legislative session is now over, and many other bills made progress this week. Here’s a look at some of the bills that were on the move:

Educator Preparation Programs — House Bill 251 would establish the Education Professional Standards Board as the primary oversight authority for teacher education programs at state colleges and universities. The Council on Postsecondary Education currently serves in that role. The House Committee on Postsecondary Education advanced the legislation Tuesday.

Cigar Bars — House Bill 211 would authorize cigar bars that generate at least 15% of their revenue from cigar and pipe products to operate in communities that otherwise prohibit smoking. In addition to the revenue threshold, cigar bars would need to meet a series of other requirements in the bill. HB 211 won support in the House Local Government Committee on Tuesday.

Manufactured Housing — House Bill 160 would prohibit local governments from adopting or enforcing zoning regulations that treat manufactured homes differently from single-family homes. HB 160 cleared the House Committee on Local Government on

Tuesday.

Insurance Fraud — Senate Bill 24 would expand the definition of property and casualty insurance fraud to help crack down on unscrupulous contractors and public adjusters who charge unnecessary or fraudulent fees. The Senate Banking and Insurance Committee passed the bill Tuesday.

Protective Orders — House Bill 38 would create tougher penalties for people who repeatedly violate protective orders. Offenders could face a class D felony if they violate an order three times within five years and the third violation involves the use or threat of violence. The House Judiciary Committee voted in support of the measure Wednesday.

Homeowner Tax Exemptions — Senate Bill 67 proposes a constitutional amendment that would exempt homeowners who are 65 and older from paying property taxes that result from higher assessments on their permanent residence. The measure cleared the Senate State and Local Government Committee on Wednesday.

Sexual Extortion — Senate Bill 73 seeks to clamp down on sexual extortion by creating tougher penalties for offenders and more legal remedies for victims. It also requires schools and colleges to educate students and parents about the issue and display resources for reporting. The Senate passed the legislation Wednesday.

Choking Prevention — If a school acquires an anti-choking device, House Bill 44 would require the school to ensure that cafeteria staff and others are trained on using the device, along with the Heim-

lich maneuver. The bill would also provide some protection against civil liabilities if the student is injured during the intervention. HB 44 advanced off the House floor on Wednesday.

Chevron Deference — Under Senate Bill 84, courts could no longer defer to a state agency’s interpretation when dealing with ambiguity in statutes, administrative regulations or orders, a practice known as Chevron deference. The Senate Judiciary Committee gave the bill a nod on Thursday.

Juvenile Justice — Senate Bill 111 builds on a multi-year effort to reform Kentucky’s juvenile justice system. The bill aims to strengthen the process for assessing youth with severe behavioral challenges and developing an appropriate treatment and placement plan. It also calls for two female-only detention centers and seeks to establish a detention center for high acuity youth. The measure advanced out of the Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday.

Ten Commandments — House Joint Resolution 15 seeks to return a granite monument inscribed with the Ten Commandments to the Capitol grounds for permanent display. The House State Government Committee gave the resolution a green light Thursday.

Sexual Assault Response Training — House Bill 219 would require emergency medical providers to receive sexual assault emergency response training. The House Health Services Committee approved the bill Thursday.

Government Services — House Bill 182 would forbid state and local

government entities from using the word “free” to describe any benefit, product or service financed with public funds. The House State Government Committee passed the legislation Thursday.

School Athletics — Under Senate Bill 120, school coaches would receive training on the duties and procedures for reporting child abuse. The legislation would also add language to sports participation forms telling parents and students about the right to report abuse and how to make a report. The Senate Education Committee passed the bill Thursday.

Water Regulations — Senate Bill 89 would change how state law defines waterways in Kentucky to align with recent changes on the federal level. Lawmakers have debated the impact of the change on environmental regulations in Kentucky, particularly regarding ephemeral waterways. The measure cleared the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee on Wednesday and won support on the Senate floor Friday.

Friday marked day 12 of this year’s short, 30-day session. Lawmakers are scheduled to reconvene on Tuesday, Feb. 18, which is the last day to file new bills in the Senate. The next day is the last day to file new bills in the House.

Kentuckians can track the action through the Legislative Record webpage, which allows users to read bills and follow their progression through the chambers.

Citizens can also share their views on issues with lawmakers by calling the general assembly’s toll-free message line at 1-800-372-7181.

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gional offices, and that does disproportionality affect older folks.”

Jackson said his research showed renewing at a third-party location would cost an extra \$2 to \$5 compared to what it would cost at a regional center.

Two lawmakers had additional questions about the ability of the third-party entities to do driver’s license renewals.

Rep. Matthew Lehman, D-Newport, asked Jackson if Kentuckians would be able to renew a REAL ID at a third-party site. Af-

ter May 7, a 2005 federal law will go into effect requiring Americans to have a REAL ID or a passport in order to board a commercial airplane.

Jackson said, yes, the third-party site would be able to do renewals, but would not be able to issue a brand-new REAL ID.

Rep. Anne Gay Donworth, D-Lexington, asked Jackson if the third-party entities would be able to do the new state-required vision test for driver’s license renewals. Jackson confirmed the vision test would not be an

issue.

“They would have to have the refraction machine in these locations just like they would at the 34 driver’s license centers,” he said.

In addition to wanting more driver’s license renewal location options, Kentuckians have also been asking lawmakers to allow more options for driver’s tests, Rep. Tom Smith, R-Corbin, said.

Smith asked Jackson if allowing sheriff’s departments to be trained to offer driver’s tests is something he considered.

Currently, only Kentucky State Police can administer driver’s tests.

Jackson said HB 161 only focuses on renewals, but it might be something the general assembly considers in the future.

“We didn’t deal with that in this,” he said. “We wanted to basically stick our toe in the water and try renewals this way, but I could see in the future that possibly would be something that we could do.”

HB 161 is now before the full House for consideration.

How to contact your elected officials:

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