

## Last Week at the Capitol

LAST WEEK: Continued from FRONT

of death or severe abnormalities.

Proponents say the legislation will help alleviate confusion for doctors when a pregnancy is jeopardizing a woman's life. However, some lawmakers criticized the sponsors for not gathering more input from health care providers or doing more to address concerns with Kentucky's abortion law.

Meanwhile, the bill's provisions on freestanding birthing centers have marked a significant breakthrough for supporters, who have labored for years to rally a coalition around the concept. That portion of HB 90 would create a regulatory framework for the centers to operate in Kentucky and eliminate the certificate of need requirement for small centers.

HB 90 cleared a divided final vote in both chambers Thursday and was delivered to the governor.

Much of the 2025 has focused on high-profile social issues, and few have garnered more attention or debate than publicly-funded services for transgender Kentuckians.

Senate Bill 2 moved out of the gate early this year, seeking to prohibit public funds from being spent on certain procedures, treatments and surgeries related to gender transition in Kentucky prisons. The bill won final approval in the House late Friday 73-12. Another measure – House Bill 495 – would nullify an executive order that the governor issued in September banning the use of state funds on conversion therapy for minors. The bill was expanded this week to prohibit the use of Medicaid funds on hormone treatments or surgeries related to transgender care.

It also won final passage in the House on Friday 70-18.

Many other measures have secured broad, bipartisan support this year, and among those, Senate Bill 3 proved once again that sports are the great uniter in the commonwealth.

The legislation would update Kentucky's name, image and likeness law for college athletes, aligning it with national standards in the aftermath of the House v. NCAA court case. The case could open the door to universities directly

compensating student athletes.

SB 3 sailed off the House floor on Tuesday with unanimous support, and the governor signed it into law Thursday.

But of all the stakeholders celebrating legislative victories this year, teenagers may be celebrating the most.

That's thanks to House Bill 15, which would reduce the minimum age for getting a learner's permit in Kentucky from 16 to 15 years old. The legislation breezed through final votes in both chambers this week and has been sent to the governor.

Other measures on artificial intelligence, fraud, workplace safety, state regulations, and education have all received a final tap of the gavel. Here's a look at some of the bills that won final passage this week:

• **Administrative Regulations** – House Bill 6 targets regulatory overreach by state agencies. It would prohibit administrative agencies from imposing rules that have an economic cost of more than \$500,000 over a two-year period. The bill includes some exceptions for public safety emergencies, federal requirements, court orders and regulations for health facilities.

• **Artificial Intelligence** – Senate Bill 4 would boost oversight and create standards and guidelines for using artificial intelligence in state government and elections. It seeks to protect citizens, foster innovation and address concerns related to AI-generated misinformation in campaigns. SB 4 is the result of a legislative task force that met throughout 2024 to study artificial intelligence.

• **Cannabis-Infused Beverages** – Senate Bill 202 calls for state regulations on intoxicating drinks derived from cannabis that have begun appearing in gas stations and vape shops. It would grant the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control authority over the licensing, distribution, and retail sale of cannabis-infused beverages, using a three-tier system similar to the one for alcohol. The legislation would also limit the amount of intoxicating cannabinoids in such drinks and prevent anyone under the age of 21 from buying the drinks.

• **Cell Phones in Schools** – House Bill 208 calls on



Senate President Robert Stivers, R-Manchester; Sen. Christian McDaniel, R-Ryland Heights; and Senate Majority Floor Leader Max Wise, R-Campbellsville; confer on the Senate floor as proceedings head into the evening Friday. (photo/LRC Public Information)

school districts to establish a policy for limiting the use of cell phones during instructional time with some exceptions for emergencies and instructional purposes.

• **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.

• **Child Abuse** – 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.

• **College Faculty Performance Reviews** – House Bill 424 calls for presidents and faculty at Kentucky's public universities to undergo performance and productivity evaluations at least once every four years. The university boards would establish the evaluation process for each institution.

• **Disabilities and Parental Rights** – Senate Bill 26 would clarify that disability alone cannot be used as a basis for denying adoption petitions, terminating parental rights, or determining placement of children.

• **Drone Surveillance** – House Bill 19 aims to protect individuals and their property from unauthorized drone surveillance when they have a reasonable expectation of privacy. It would allow a person who is subjected to unauthorized surveillance to initiate a civil action in court. The bill includes some exceptions for aerial mapping,

insurance investigations and others.

• **Early Literacy** – House Bill 240 would require schools to administer a reading assessment to kindergarten and first grade students within the final 14 days of the academic year. Schools have an option to require students to repeat kindergarten if they fail to meet grade-level benchmarks. However, the bill stipulates that a first-grader who fails to meet the benchmarks must repeat the year.

• **Environmental Regulations for Waterways** – Senate Bill 89 would change how state law defines waterways in Kentucky to align with recent changes on the federal level.

• **Film Industry** – Senate Bill 1 would establish the Kentucky Film Office to administer the state's film incentive program, help market the state to the film industry and develop workforce training.

• **Financial Literacy** – House Bill 342 would require high school students to earn one credit in a financial literacy course before graduation.

• **Gift Card Scams** – Under Senate Bill 130, individuals who tamper with gift cards to steal the redemption information and drain the card balance would face a class D felony charge.

• **Insurance Fraud** – Senate Bill 24 would expand the definition of property and casualty insurance fraud to help crack down on unscrupulous contractors who charge unnecessary or fraudulent fees to inflate an insurance claim.

• **Kentucky History Month** – House Bill 313 would designate June of each year as Kentucky

History Month.

• **Legislative Interference** – House Bill 399 would create criminal penalties for interfering with a legislative proceeding if the intent is to prevent the general assembly from conducting business. Interference in the first degree would be a class A misdemeanor, which escalates to a class D felony for a third or subsequent offense.

• **Moments of Silence and Moral Education** – Senate Bill 19 would require public schools to hold a moment of silence and reflection for students at the start of each school day. Under a recent addition to the bill, school districts could excuse students for up to one hour each week to attend moral instruction from approved off-campus programs.

• **Nuclear Energy Grants** – Senate Bill 179 would establish a nuclear energy grant program under the Kentucky Nuclear Energy Development Authority and set aside \$8 million to support the effort.

• **Protective Orders** – House Bill 38 would create tougher penalties for people who repeatedly violate protective orders. Offenders would 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.

• **School Calendars** – House Bill 241 aims to help school districts that have missed a significant number of days due to severe weather. It would allow districts to change their calendar from 170 instructional days to a variable 1,062 hours, clearing the way for schools to extend their school days with more instructional hours.

It would also allow the state education commissioner to grant up to five disaster relief days for alternative instruction or waive up to five days for districts unable to achieve 1,062 hours by June 4.

• **Squatting** – House Bill 10 seeks to crack down on squatting by providing a more concrete procedure for property owners and law enforcement to quickly remove unauthorized occupants from private property. It would also spell out criminal penalties for squatters who damage property.

• **Ten Commandments** – House Joint Resolution 15 seeks to return a granite monument inscribed with the Ten Commandments to the Capitol grounds for permanent display. It was first gifted to the state in 1971 by the Fraternal Order of Eagles, but was returned to group decades ago following a court ruling.

• **Workplace Safety** – House Bill 398 aims to align Kentucky's workplace safety and health regulations with federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration rules. It also calls for limits on Kentucky policies so that they are no more stringent than those on the federal level.

Lawmakers are scheduled to reconvene on March 27 and 28 for the final two days of this year's 30-day session.

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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