

KY specialty courts safe, but staff positions cut in 'challenging times' for justice system



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS PHOTO

Kentucky Supreme Court Chief Justice Debra Lambert gives her first State of the Judiciary address to lawmakers on Thursday.

BY SARAH LADD
KENTUCKY LANTERN

Kentucky Supreme Court Chief Justice Debra Hembree Lambert is cutting 170 staff positions — and adding 108 — in the court system to operate within the boundaries of the budget passed by the General Assembly.

Drug, mental health and veteran courts, which were at risk of closure under an initial version of the budget, will not close.

Lambert told staff in a May 15 letter that “we are making material changes to our organizational structure and consolidating certain management functions and administrative operations so that resources remain focused on the work performed in courtrooms and clerk’s offices across the commonwealth.”

During the 2026 legislative session, during which lawmakers passed budget bills, Lambert said

the appropriation for the Administrative Office of the Courts significantly underfunded the judicial branch and put specialty courts (drug, mental health and veteran courts) on the chopping block.

According to her letter, court operations are preserved, but staff positions and other operational expenses have to be cut and scaled down.

After initial warnings about the budget, Lambert wrote, “Many court officials, employees and interested citizens engaged their Senators and Representatives to advocate for our branch. Our messaging was impactful, and I deeply appreciate those who shared their support with their legislators.”

That advocacy added \$5 million to the operating budget, she said, but still leaves a deficit of about \$30 million over the next two years: \$12.6 million in 2027 and \$17 million in 2028.

“While some of this deficit may be mitigated through the generation of additional revenue and vacancy credits, changes are necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the branch,” Lambert wrote. “It is therefore necessary to implement a series of structural changes and operational efficiencies designed to align our staffing and services with the resources available to us.”

According to Lambert’s letter, positions within the Office of Statewide Programs — the Department of Family and Juvenile Services, the Department of Specialty Courts and the Department of Pretrial Services — will be affected.

She announced:
— 170 tenured and non-tenured positions will be “abolished.” The individuals have been notified of Aug. 1 dismissal or layoff.
— 45 employees serving initial probation periods are now subject to dismissal if

they are unable to successfully complete probation prior to August 1.

— 108 tenured and non-tenured positions will be established for

placement or appointment beginning on August 1, the majority of which are frontline workers.

Other changes

Lambert announced she is making several other changes, effective July 15:

— Positions that have remained vacant for more than a year will be abolished.

— Purchases of paper copies of legal publications will be eliminated with increased transitioning to online resources.

— The paid judicial intern program will be cut.

— Use of state funds for Specialty Courts treatment will be eliminated and drug testing costs will be reduced by capping the number of participants and/or reducing the number and frequency of drug tests.

— While these changes are implemented no state funds can be used for out of state travel, judicial colleges, or circuit court colleges.

— A Kentucky Court of Justice hiring freeze announced in April will remain in effect through July 15, at which time “it may be lifted in priority areas necessary to support court

operations while remaining in place in areas where we are still assessing structural efficiencies.”

— Employees will still receive the 2% salary increase authorized for all state employees in fiscal years 2027 and 2028 under the budget approved by the General Assembly.

“I know this is a difficult moment for our court community. The employees directly affected by these changes have served the Commonwealth with professionalism and dedication, and their contributions to the administration of justice are deeply valued. These decisions were not made quickly or lightly. They reflect careful review and thoughtful consideration of how best to deliver frontline services while preserving the long-term stability of Kentucky’s court system,” Lambert wrote.

She added: “Even in challenging times, the work of the courts remains essential. Every day, employees across the (Kentucky Court of Justice) help ensure that justice is delivered fairly, efficiently and with integrity.”

ORDINANCE NUMBER 26-06

AN ORDINANCE TO THE CITY OF SOMERSET, KENTUCKY, ANNEXING BY CONSENT PROPERTY AS DESCRIBED BELOW AND IN ATTACHMENTS TO THIS ORDINANCE, ATTACHMENTS INCORPORATED IN FULL BY REFERENCE HEREIN, AND

WHEREAS, ANNEXATION REQUEST FORMS HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED BY THE PROPERTY OWNER(S), AND THE FORMS HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE CITY AS COMPLETED; AND THE PROPERTY OWNERS EACH HAVING WAIVED THE SIXTY (60) DAY WAITING PERIOD, BY AND THROUGH THE ANNEXATION REQUEST FORM, SIGNED BY THE OWNER AND/OR AN AUTHORIZED AGENT OF THE OWNER AND INCORPORATED IN FULL HEREIN BY REFERENCE, AND MADE PART OF THE ATTACHMENTS TO THIS ORDINANCE; AND

WHEREAS, ALL DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS NEEDED TO PROCEED WITH ANNEXATION OF THE PROPERTIES INTO THE CORPORATE LIMITS OF THE CITY OF SOMERSET; AND

WHEREAS, THIS DOCUMENT WAS SENT TO THE JUDGE EXECUTIVE AND COUNTY ATTORNEY OF PULASKI COUNTY AFTER THE FIRST READING AS NOTICE UNDER 23 REGULAR SESSION SENATE BILL 141; AND

WHEREAS, THE PROPERTIES MEET ALL REQUIREMENTS FOR ANNEXATION AS SET FORTH IN KRS AND ALL OTHER APPLICABLE LAW.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF SOMERSET, KENTUCKY:

SECTION 1. THAT THE PROPERTIES DESCRIBED BELOW IN ATTACHMENTS HERETO AND BELOW ARE HEREBY ANNEXED INTO THE CITY’S CORPORATE LIMITS:

EXHIBIT A THE DELINEATED LAND COMPRISING A TRACT OF LAND .89 ACRES SHOWN ON ANNEXATION MAP TITLED “ANNEXATION MAP, 1 TRACT TOTALING .89 ACRES BY SURVEY, SOMERSET, KY” DATED 2/27/26 BY BOBBY L. HUDSON LAND SURVEYOR. THE PROPERTY IS PARTIALLY IMPROVED LAND ON THE EAST SIDE OF PUMPHOUSE ROAD ADJOINING SOMERSPORT PARK.

SECTION 2. THE PROPERTY IS IMPROVED AS R-3. AND THE OWNER HAS APPLIED FOR THE RECOMMENDATION AND HAS RECEIVED THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD. (SEE CASE NO: ZC-2025-06)


SECTION 3. NOTICE TO PULASKI COUNTY FISCAL COURT WAS GIVEN AFTER THE FIRST READING AND 45 DAYS BEFORE THE SECOND READING.

SECTION 4. THIS ORDINANCE SHALL TAKE EFFECT AFTER ITS PASSAGE AND UPON PUBLICATION BY LAW.

FIRST READING: MARCH 23, 2026

SECOND READING: MAY 11, 2026 (NOT BEFORE MAY 7TH, 2026)

APPROVED:


ALAN L. KECK, MAYOR
CITY OF SOMERSET, KY

ATTESTED:


NICK BRADLEY, CITY CLERK

FARM

Continued from Page 6

business as a cooperative,” said Mark Barker, Farm Credit Mid-America senior vice president of agricultural lending in Kentucky. “Our customers manage risk every day. Patronage gives them a little extra flexibility, whether that’s strengthening their balance sheet, improving cash flow or helping them plan for the season ahead.”

Farm Credit Mid-America is a farmer-owned cooperative, meaning customers are also owners. Through patronage, a portion of the cooperative’s earn-

ings is returned to eligible customer-owners based on the level of eligible business they conduct with the Association. Patronage is an annual decision made by Farm Credit Mid-America’s board of directors.

“Over the last decade, we’ve returned more than \$1.75 billion directly to the people who make agriculture work,” said Tara Durbin, chief lending officer of agriculture at Farm Credit Mid-America. “A portion of that capital stays in Kentucky where it supports farms, families and rural communities, which is exactly what our cooperative system was designed to do.”

Farm Credit

Mid-America serves agricultural producers, rural homeowners and agribusinesses across Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio and Tennessee. In addition to patronage, the cooperative invests roughly \$5 million annually in rural communities through education, leadership development, youth programs and support for the next generation of agriculture.

To learn more about Farm Credit Mid-America’s patronage program, eligibility requirements and customer-owner experiences, visit fcma.com/patronage.

— Courtesy Farm Credit Mid-America