

Statue

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Louisville's founding in 2028 could present another good opportunity to celebrate the repair of the statue.

The work is estimated to take three to four months to complete, Louisville Metro Cabinet for Economic Development Executive Director Jeff O'Brien told council members during a March 3 committee meeting. What will happen to the statue after it is cleaned remains an open question.

"This is going to expend the full budget that we had for restoration and re-siting of the piece, so we'll have to figure out the next steps for this after we get it cleaned," O'Brien told council members at the committee meeting.

Louisville struggled to find conservator to clean King Louis XVI statue

Louisville appropriated \$200,000 for the statue's restoration in its 2024-25 executive budget.

Some of that money has been spent on other conservation and restoration work, The Courier Journal previously reported. The statue's right hand — which was torn off during the first night of protests in 2020 — and other elements were re-attached, and work was done to prevent cracks from worsening.

Keith Hatten, a spokesman for the Louisville Metro Cabinet for Economic Development, said \$128,105 of the original allocation remains available. Other general funds will be used to cover the contract with Wiebold Studio, he added.

Wiebold Studio, a Cincinnati-based antique and art restoration enterprise, was selected to do the work after the city sought requests for proposals on two separate occasions in 2025, with neither drawing any bidders.

In November 2025, Office of Arts and Creative Industries Director Jessica Bennett Kincaid told a Metro Council committee that her office had begun direct outreach to multiple restoration studios. The agreement with Wiebold Studio was a result of that direct outreach.

"The Wiebold group was the one group that met our parameters, fell in line with our budget and was willing to do the work in a suitable amount of time," O'Brien said during the committee meeting.

History of Louisville's King Louis XVI statue

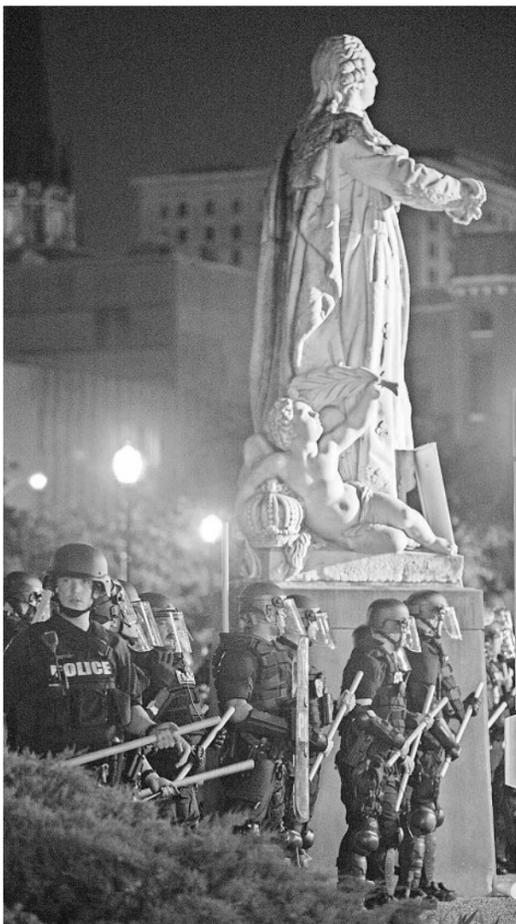
The monument to the last king of France, who was executed by guillotine in 1793 amid the French Revolution, stood in Louisville for the first time in 1967. It was a gift from Montpellier, a southern French sister city to Louisville.

Louisville was named after King Louis XVI as a token of gratitude for the monarch's support for the colonies during the American Revolution.

The statue was first damaged in May 2020, when protests over the police killing of Breonna Taylor erupted in Louisville. Other acts of vandalism throughout that summer left the statue covered in spray paint. The city also "overcleaned" the statue during this time, which damaged the statue's marble surface and contributed to structural issues, according to city records available online.

The city eventually removed it from its pedestal at the corner of Sixth and Jefferson streets, outside Metro Hall, and placed it into storage.

Some conservators over the years have expressed concern about the ethics of removing a relic of the protests that shook Louisville in the summer of 2020.



Scenes from a May 28, 2020, protest in downtown Louisville over the shooting of Breonna Taylor by Louisville police. Louisville Metro police officers line up under the Louis XVI statue at Sixth & Jefferson Streets. PAT MCDONOGH/COURIER JOURNAL

Councilman JP Lyninger, speaking in opposition ahead of the vote March 12, pointed to the statue's political past and the new political meaning the graffiti has given it.

"It is an inherently political piece of art, and what happened to it during the Breonna Taylor uprising following the murder of Breonna Taylor is part of the provenance of this political piece of art," Lyninger said. "I do not believe that this is a good use of our funds, and I do not believe that it is good stewardship of a public piece of art, which now has a new political component to its existing political component."

Multiple conservators who have examined the statue have reported extensive cracking and structural hazards. A 2025 report by Pacific Coast Conservation found 32 cracks in the statue, totaling more than 74 feet in length. Both Pacific Coast Conservation and Wiebold Studio have advised against returning the sculpture to the outdoors.

The city has reached out to museums and cultural institutions to gauge whether they would display it, but few are able to accommodate it due to its towering height (11 feet) and massive weight (9 tons), Kincaid told council members in November.

Wiebold Studio's conservation proposal notes that a protective sealant would need to be applied to protect the conservation work performed if it were to go back outside.

Killian Baarlaer covers Louisville Metro Government. Reach him at kbaarlaer@courier-journal.com or @killian72 on X.

Veto

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money and have said without action, the state runs the risk of falling behind other states that have opted in.

It was approved in the House in late February on a 79-17 vote and passed 33-5 in the Senate three days later.

HB 1 puts the secretary of state's office in charge of opting into the federal scholarship tax credit program, which was established in 2025 in the "One Big Beautiful Bill." Kentucky's secretary of state is Michael Adams, a Republican who has said he supports the move.

The federal bill that established the program allows donors to receive a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit up to \$1,700 by donating to a nonprofit scholarship-granting organization, which would then distribute scholarships to families for educational services including private school tuition, tutoring and transportation.

Beshear has called on lawmakers to put more money during the current budget cycle to public education and has consistently supported establishing a "Pre-K for All" initiative to provide free preschool options for all four-year-old children.

That initiative has never been taken up by the legislature.

In a statement about two hours after the veto, Moser and cosponsor Rep. T.J. Roberts, R-Burlington, called the move "a shameful disservice to Kentucky students and families in public, private, and home school settings."

"By blocking this program, the Governor is once again standing in the way of a policy that empowers parents and expands educational opportunities for children — whether through tutoring, school supplies, or other academic resources," the statement said. "He's also blocking the possibility of catalyzing schools of innovation and creativity. Instead of supporting families, he doubles down on misinformation in a blatant attempt to score political points."

State Sen. David Givens, R-Greensburg, has put forward several bills related to public education in the Senate.

He called Beshear's veto misleading, as it does not use state tax revenue, and a bill that keeps donations to the federal program inside the Bluegrass State.

"Governor Beshear's meandering veto message reminds me of a student who really wishes the teacher had put a different question on the test," Givens wrote in a March 13 statement.

"Well, we will 'grade' his work next week when we override his veto and start the process of making these federal funds available to Kentucky families."

The 2026 General Assembly is nearing the finish line. Lawmakers are set to remain in session into mid-April, with a two-day period that month to override Beshear's vetoes and pass additional bills, though legislation passed in those final days could be vetoed without the option to vote the veto down. Republican legislators generally override all or at least the vast majority of Beshear's vetoes.

At least one bill Beshear vetoed earlier this session — House Bill 314, which reworks the Kentucky Wired board and gives the governor significantly less appointee power — has already been overridden.

Reach Lucas Aulbach at laulbach@courier-journal.com.

TSA

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Risk has risen, experts say

Robert Pape, a political science professor at the University of Chicago who compiled the first database of suicide attacks around the world after the 9/11 attacks, told USA TODAY the threat of terror campaigns would grow in the coming months. "The longer this war goes on, the greater the risk," Pape said. "That's what the Trump administration has bitten off."

Pape, who continues to track terror at the University of Chicago's Project on Security and Threats, has a Substack called "The Escalation Trap" that warns about the implications of the Iran war. He said a core driver for terror campaigns is when the attacker believes a foreign government is trying to change the attacker's political system, such as with Israel's control over southern Lebanon or the U.S. strikes on Iran.

Jeff Price, an aviation security expert who is a professor at Metropolitan State University in Denver, said the threat of domestic terror attacks from Iran is "absolutely" higher because of the war.

"The war in Iran can inspire attacks from people who may have been on the brink of committing a terrorist act, and the war emboldens them to finally crossing that line," Price said.

"The war motivates sympathizers, lone actors and groups already in the U.S. to conduct retaliatory attacks against government agencies, major infrastructure, and other targets of opportunity."

Elizabeth Stephens, managing director of Geopolitical Risk Advisory, agreed that the risk of attacks by "lone-wolf" actors has risen due to the conflict in Iran. If they attack, she said these perpetrators are likely to use guns or improvised explosive devices.

"The potential for suicide bombers coming from Iran is high now, because that's one way in which they can effectively attack the U.S.," Stephens said.

Security officials say lone-wolf attackers are a perennial concern because of the difficulty identifying and thwarting someone acting on their own to hurt Americans.

Fear of 'sleeper cells' rising

Iran and its network of proxies have targeted the United States for decades, according to George Washington University's Project on Extremism. Iranian assassinations date to the 1980 killing of a dissident in Bethesda, Maryland.

In more recent years, Iran targeted U.S. diplomats and high-ranking officials. Tensions escalated after the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and the start of the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran on Feb. 28.

Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth told reporters March 2 the military is prepared for terrorists who might try to attack the United States.

President Donald Trump told reporters March 9 in Miami that Iran has been trying "for a long time" to activate so-called "sleeper cells" of terrorists hiding in the United States. Trump urged Democrats to reopen the DHS because the partial shutdown hinders the government's ability to combat terrorists.

"We know a lot about them, but the shutdown doesn't allow us to do what we have to do," Trump said.

Sleeper cells don't have to be highly organized to be successful, Price said.

"Sleeper cells are definitely a concern," Price said. "Even loosely organized, small ad hoc groups can get their act together enough to attempt an attack."

Threat assessments vary

The funding lapse at DHS has raised concerns about aviation safety as TSA staffing shortages and absenteeism loom and airport security lines stretch longer.

Even so, the probability of an attack on a U.S. airport or airplane, particularly from a lone-wolf actor, is still "very, very low" considering the high level of sophistication needed to get past security, Stephens said. "Staff shortages and long lines and low morale always increase risk, but they're increasing it by a fraction of a percent, because the security at U.S. airports is of such a high standard," Stephens said.

Price wasn't so sure. He said the risk to aviation is greater because of the symbolism, potentially generating a massive response from the traveling public. A bad actor could, for example, "effectively shut down the U.S. aviation system with a bag full of burner phones by calling in bomb threats all day long," Price said. "TSA not getting paid represents a significant risk to the traveling public."

Contributing: Zach Wichter, USA TODAY



Airports across the United States are facing a shortage of TSA agents because of a partial government shutdown. MARK FELIX/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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