

Every child needs an advocate who puts them first

BY BETSY SMITH
EDITOR



Children who live in an environment in which their basic needs are not met; who are victims of neglect or who suffer verbal, physical or sexual abuse often find their lives upended when they are removed from the situation and put in some type of out-of-home-care (OOHC). Powerless and vulnerable, these children need someone advocating on their behalf. A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer does just that.

CASA volunteers are appointed through the family court system and serve on behalf of children, monitoring all that is happening with them, she explained. Findings and recommendations are reported by advocates to the judge in charge of their child's case.

Liv Hansen serves as manager of community engagement and volunteer recruitment for the nine-county CASA of the Northern Bluegrass Region. She frequently appears at meetings, county fairs, expos and other events, trying to get CASA in the public eye and seeking volunteers.

"Rather than focusing on past circumstances, CASA volunteers prioritize the child's present needs and future well-being—helping ensure they have the support necessary to cope, heal, and thrive," said Hansen.

"In addition to spending time with the child, volunteers gather information by connecting with parents, relatives, social workers, attorneys, teachers, medical providers, therapists (non-confidential updates unless needed for safety), and others involved in the child's life to

understand how the child is doing."

Each advocate has a Court Order of Appointment allowing receipt of confidential information associated with their specific child or children, who are named in the order.

In addition to collecting information, CASA volunteers build a relationship with the child or children (usually siblings or multiple children in in the same home) to whom they are assigned, letting them know they have someone they can trust, someone who puts their best interest above all other considerations.

As of Feb. 1, 2026, there were 8,699 children in the state living in

OOHC, according to the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. This includes 2,639 children in the foster care system as well as children placed in residential homes, living with relatives or fictive kin or in Department for Community Based Services foster homes.

There are far more children in need than there are volunteers. "...Due to the limited number of volunteers, not every child in need is able to be served. As a result, judges must thoughtfully determine which children and cases would benefit most from CASA advocacy," Hansen said.

Becoming an advocate is a rewarding commitment for anyone who has a heart for helping children. While it is a significant commitment, Hansen said there are people in all walks of life who volunteer.

"We currently have volunteers who run their own small businesses, who are employed full-time, part-time, as well as retirees and full-time or part-time students."

Volunteers must be at least 21 years old, and there is a 30-hour training to complete. The training "is the most intense, non-flexible commitment during their advocacy," Hansen stated.

"CASA training focuses on the volunteer role, how to effectively engage with families and professionals, and the issues most commonly seen in our cases." In addition to the initial training, 12 hours of annual continuing education is required.

Once training is completed, every volunteer gets paired with a CASA supervisor and sworn in. Hansen explained cases are assigned by judges and, in turn, supervisors assign cases to volunteers.

Judges rely on advocates to be their eyes and ears, and they take their recommendations seriously.

"These recommendations may relate to placement, services that could benefit the child or family, or assessments for parents or caregivers. Volunteers may also provide input on visitation and whether additional supports—such as therapy or medical services—would help ensure the child's safety, stability, and well-being," Hansen explained.

Advocates provide written reports to the judge overseeing their case,

but it's also important for advocates to attend hearings in person. If possible, advocates' schedules are sometimes accommodated to allow them to be present in the courtroom.

The time commitment for a CASA volunteer varies according to the needs of the case and whether or not a hearing is imminent, but on average Hansen said volunteers worked on behalf of a case from 10 to 15 hours per month.

Classes for advocates take place year round and volunteers can usually begin training within four to six weeks. In person classes are generally offered in the CASA office in Crestview Hills, but Hansen said if enough people express interest trainers could travel to the counties in the region to conduct training.

The class meets once a week for eight weeks for three and a half hours (sometimes less) and requires one to three hours of prep work for each, Hansen said.

There is also "a revised curriculum that is offered virtually, when there is enough interest." The online class runs once a week for six weeks with each class lasting two and a half to three hours. Six to ten hours of independent curriculum work prior to each session is expected. Zoom Class time is used for debriefing, local information and case application," Hansen explained.

To learn more about what CASA volunteers do or to fill out an application to become an advocate visit <https://casanorthernbluegrass.org/>. Questions may also be directed to Hansen at lhansen@casanorthernbluegrass.org.

Two large infrastructure projects underway in Cynthiana

BY DEVON WILLIAMS
NEWS REPORTER

On Tuesday, Feb. 17, the Cynthiana Board of Commissioners gathered for their final meeting of the month. Mayor Isaac Dailey updated commissioners on a pair of infrastructure projects currently underway.

The mayor noted in his update that the fire station bid opening would be Thursday. The Columbia Gas Westside project is underway at River Road; a line is being run under the ball field and across the river, connecting everything on the west side. Finally, he said the waste water project for Country Club has begun.

"There's two pretty big infrastructure projects going on on both sides of town right now which is good," assured Dailey.

Legals
-City Attorney John Lair

gave a first reading of Ordinance 1685 - Closing undeveloped/unbuilt streets in Grays Run Estates. A motion was made to approve the first reading, which carried.

"Essentially we're closing streets that were never completed for the development to move forward," explained Dailey.

-Lair gave a reading of Resolution 2026-1, to provide local match funding and serve as grantee with KPDI Grant awarded for the Industrial Park South Project. A motion was made to provide local match funding, which also carried.

Mayor's Report
-Mayor Dailey made a motion to authorize himself to sign commitment letters for KIA Drinking Water Revolving Loan Funds for GAC facility, which carried.

-Mayor Dailey gave his Virgie report opening with

a lighthearted quip, "I'm happy to report that there's no snow on the radar for the first time in I don't know how long of these commission meetings."

He gave his usual list of meetings attended: EDA board meeting, volunteer work at God's Pantry, KIA virtual meeting, a housing authority meeting, meetings with the Cynthiana Democrat and News Graphic, a department head meeting, a meeting to discuss the chat-box which is now up and running on the city website.

Dailey also noted a meeting with the Bluegrass Area Development District director, who came to check in on the projects and process going on in Harrison County.

"I actually got an email today that the president and CEO of KLC would also like an update on the things going on in Cynthiana," stated Dailey. "It's good to be on

people's radar in a positive way and I pass and share those kudos with everybody at the city."

-The mayor made a motion to commence litigation against a property located at 212 3rd Street to collect past-due and delinquent property taxes.

"This is a property that has been on our abandoned property list for several years now," explained Dailey. "They have 11 years of past-due and delinquent property taxes with the city and I would like to begin that foreclosure process."

The motion carried.
Commissioner Reports
-Commissioner Mark Mattmiller of Public Property and Finance was absent, so Dailey gave the report in his stead.

He made a motion to pay the bills of \$116,534.09 in the general fund and \$126,574.88 in water and sewer, which carried.

An update on cash in the bank was also given: \$286,102.90 in the general fund, \$554,867.45 in water and sewer and \$164,311.85 in the municipal road aid fund.

-Commissioner Taylor Peoples of Police Safety made a motion to authorize to use DEA Asset Forfeiture Equitable Sharing Funds in the amount of \$20,071.64 for the yearly contract for the Taser 10 energy weapons, including instructor course training, replacement cartridges, holsters, batteries, training targets and training cartridges from Axon. The motion carried.

Peoples also made a motion to authorize to use DEA Asset Forfeiture Equitable Sharing funds in the amount of \$500 to purchase community awareness resources related to the suppression of drinking and driving, which carried.

Finally, a motion was made to authorize to use DEA Asset

Forfeiture Equitable Sharing Funds in the amount of \$3,000.00 to purchase one new soft body armor and vest carrier for a police officer from Protego Supply, as well as paying for the instructor who does the training course. The motion carried.

-Commissioner David Conner of Public Utilities and Works opened by saying, "Thank goodness the snow, as you said earlier, has slowed down and gotten off the radars."

Conner noted that the department has been taking advantage of the lull in winter weather to work on equipment that's been weathered in recent winter conditions.

"People don't realize the stress you put on your equipment when you're doing something that long in that kind of digit temperatures in the wintertime, it's very stressful," acknowledged Conner.

US consumer confidence improves modestly in February after cratering the first month of 2026

BY MATT OTT
AP BUSINESS WRITER

WASHINGTON — The American consumer's confidence in the U.S. economy improved slightly in February after cratering a month earlier.

The Conference Board said Tuesday that its consumer confidence index rose to 91.2 in February from an upwardly revised 89 last month.

A measure of Americans' short-term expectations for their income, business conditions and the job market rose four points to 72, remaining well below 80, the marker that can signal a recession ahead. It's the 13th consecutive month that reading has come in under 80.

The measure of consumers' assessments of their current economic situation fell by 1.8 points to 120.

Respondents' references to prices and inflation were little changed but remain elevated. Mentions of trade and politics increased, while references to labor market conditions eased as perceptions of the job market improved modestly this month.

The country's labor market has been stuck in a "low hire, low fire" state,



Nam Y. Huh/AP Photo

A shopper checks out at a cash register in a grocery store in Schaumburg, Ill. on Feb. 9.

economists say, as businesses stand pat due to uncertainty over Trump's tariffs and the lingering effects of elevated interest rates.

Earlier this month, the government reported that employers added a surprisingly strong 130,000 nonfarm jobs in January. Still, the economy gained just 584,000 jobs in 2025, about one-fourth of the more than 2 million added in 2024.

The softening job market

comes even as the U.S. economy keeps growing, often beyond projections.

U.S. economic growth slowed in the final three months of last year, dragged down by the six-week shutdown of the federal government and a pullback in consumer spending. The weaker fourth-quarter growth of 1.4% followed stronger-than-expected figures of 4.4% in the July-September quarter and 3.8% in the quarter before that.

According to the Conference Board's February survey, consumers' plans to buy big-ticket items over the next six months rose, with plans to buy used cars, furniture, TVs, and smartphones leading the way.

Home-buying expectations were little changed in February, generally a slow time for the housing market, which has been mired in a yearslong slump.

Geothermal drilling activity to begin at the Hilltop construction site Feb. 23

HARRISON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Harrison County Schools is set to begin geothermal drilling activity associated with the construction of the new Harrison County High School.

Beginning Monday, Feb. 23, 2026, contractors will commence drilling operations. According to superintendent Dr. Harry Burchett, this drilling is to install the geothermal well field that will serve as the school's primary heating and cooling system. This phase of construction involves specialized drilling equipment that will generate intermittent elevated noise levels during standard working hours.

The contractors say drilling will occur Monday through Friday between 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. (potentially later depending on how each well

goes), weather permitting.

Furthermore, while the drilling equipment operates within regulated safety and environmental standards, nearby residents may experience noticeable mechanical noise during active drilling periods. According to Steve Bivens, construction superintendent, this phase is temporary and is expected to continue until approximately July 24, 2026.

"We understand that construction activity can be disruptive and appreciate your patience and understanding as we work to enhance educational facilities in our community," said Dr. Burchett. "If you have questions or concerns, please contact our facilities director, Bill Blackburn at bill.blackburn@harrison.kyschools.us."

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