USDA to prioritize veterans in Kentucky housing programs

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

LEXINGTON, Ky. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development office in Kentucky will give veterans and surviving spouses priority in processing applications for two housing programs through Sept. 30, 2027, State Director Travis T. Burton announced Nov. 10.

The policy applies to the agency's direct home loan and home repair programs. Eligible veterans' and surviving spouses' applications will move to the front of the processing line, but applicants must still meet all program requirements. Priority status does not guarantee approval.

"Veterans and their families answered the call of service in defense of this great nation, so we're proud to show our gratitude through meaningful actions like this," Burton said.

The direct home loan program helps low- and very-low-income applicants buy safe, decent and sanitary homes in eligible rural areas. USDA said it has helped 72 families in rural Kentucky purchase homes through the program since President Donald Trump took office.

JACKSON

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earliest a.m. hours of Sunday morning since August 2025. He was turned away without a definitive answer at the time. In subsequent requests, Mayor Albert Jackson said he wanted to ensure that any changes of this nature had public input.

"The only way I would say that you could reasonably look to do it is (if) you could put it on the ballot," Jackson said in the council's March meeting when the question was brought up again.

That ballot measure suggestion never manifested into anything for Earlington residents.

At Tuesday's regular meeting DJ Jackson once again presented his request to be permitted to stay open from Saturday to the hour of 2 a.m. on Sunday, with accompanying alcohol sales. Along with his detailed request on the matter, he included a petition with signatures from community members.

There was, however, a brief concern about one of the petitioners from Councilwoman Peggy Babb.

"On the last page, it looks like someone could be from Madisonville," she said. "Now I could be reading this writing wrong, but it (the address) says Country Club (Drive)…Just, are you taking petitions from Madisonville or Earlington?"

DJ Jackson said that they could verify each address, but he believed each signature came from an Earlington resident.

Albert Jackson brought up his own research on the issue. He found that most cities in the area had sales stop at midnight, and a similar recommendation came from the Kentucky League of Cities concerning late night alcohol sales. He ultimately said that he would not feel comfortable with any decision that didn't have citizen input.

"Its a big deal in a small town," he said. "I just want the people to have a say so in it."

The group then discussed whether this issue would be a conflict of interest if it were to remain unresolved while DJ sat on the city council. In an attempt to solve the problem before it became an issue, the mayor proposed a special called meeting and public hearing be scheduled before new council members were sworn in.

However, council members Babb and Vernon Gipson said that they didn't want to make a decision which would primarily impact the upcoming council as they were not re-elected.

"That council should make the decision," said Babb. "Plus, to be fair to everybody, the holidays are crowded. You aren't going to get many people here on the holidays. Everybody's got somewhere to be. I don't think you'd get very many people, and you need to be fair about it."

To avoid a conflict of interest, Babb suggested that they resolve it at the January meeting, with DJ Jackson simply abstaining from any discussion or the vote on the matter.

"I'd still rather it be a special called meeting so that only that is discussed and we don't get caught up on everything else on the agenda," said Albert Jackson. "Maybe we can go ahead and set a date for a special called meeting at some point in January."

Following the meeting, DJ Jackson made a post on the Holler's Facebook page with the title "Holler's Closing? The Future of Earlington's Entertainment Venue is Uncertain!" In the post he states that without additional revenue which could be brought in by the longer weekend hours, Holler's could be closing in the next few months.

"The Earlington City Council is planning a public meeting to discuss extending Saturday alcohol sales until 2 a.m. Sunday," the post read. "For Hollers, the additional revenue could help us keep our doors open, bring back staff, expand our food service, and continue building something our community can be proud of. Please watch for the official town meeting announcement. When the date is announced, I encourage everyone to attend, ask questions, and make your voice heard. This is your opportunity to tell city leaders what kind of businesses, entertainment, and economic opportunities you want in Earlington."

Lt. Gov. Coleman involved in crash with deer on Bluegrass Parkway

BY CHRISTOPHER LEACH
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman is OK after being involved in a car collision with a deer Monday night, she said on social media.

The crash happened around 8:45 p.m. on the Bluegrass Parkway in Nelson County. Coleman said she and her security detail were driving home from Bowling Green when the car she was in hit a deer.

The Nelson County Sheriff's Office said no injuries were reported. Coleman she was OK, but the deer and her vehicle were not.

"Thank you to the Nelson County Sheriff's Office and other first responders," Coleman said in a Facebook post. "As always, I am indebted to Kentucky State Police for keeping me safe."

Coleman has served as the state's lieutenant governor alongside Gov. Andy Beshear since 2019. She announced in April her plans to run for governor in the Democratic primary in May 2027.

KSP investigates fatal trooper-involved for shooting in Laurel County

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

EAST BERNSTADT, Ky. — Kentucky State Police are investigating a trooper-involved shooting that killed a man Monday night in Laurel County.

The agency's Critical Incident Response Team was asked by KSP Post 11 in London to investigate the shooting, which occurred about 7:30 p.m. Monday.

A preliminary investigation indicates a trooper stopped a car on southbound Interstate 75 near mile marker 46 in East Bernstadt. The driver, Tommy Velasco, 40, of Jeffersonville, exited the vehicle and was given field sobriety tests, state police said. After showing signs of impairment, Velasco fled on foot as the trooper tried to take him into custody.

The trooper chased Velasco and deployed a Taser, which had limited effect, according to state police. A physical altercation followed, and the trooper fired an agency-issued pistol, fatally wounding Velasco.

The investigation is ongoing. State police said they investigate officer-involved shootings across Kentucky when requested by local, state or federal law enforcement agencies.

The agency said it does not release specific details during an ongoing investigation until key witnesses have been interviewed and relevant facts gathered. Investigation timelines vary depending on the case's complexity.



Amber Hammond via AP

This photo provided by Amber Hammond shows Koah Sharp, 11 months old, at at his great-aunt's home in West Columbia, S.C., on Saturday.

Missing South Carolina infant rescued after being buried alive in a dog crate for 24 hours

BY ALLEN G. BREED AND KATHY MCCORMACK
ASSOCIATED PRESS

When an 11-month-old infant was reported missing in South Carolina, dozens of first responders combed the countryside for the "bright boy with reddish blond hair" who, the sheriff's office said, had disappeared while his grandmother ran errands.

After a full day of searching, authorities found freshly disturbed soil in the woods not far from the home of the boy's grandfather. They began digging and soon unearthed little Koah Sharp, who was "clinging to life" after being buried alive in a dog crate wrapped in a towel, the sheriff said.

"Certainly, God is good," Lexington County Sheriff Jay Koon said Tuesday at a news conference, not long after Koah was found. "He was screaming at the top of his lungs, which is a good thing in the baby world, I would guess."

The child's father, Michael Comer, 25, was arrested and was being held without bond on a burglary charge, Koon said. Investigators were working with prosecutors to confirm further charges, he said.

AN AIR POCKET LIKELY KEPT THE BOY ALIVE

The towel probably created an air pocket that allowed the boy to breathe in the crate, the sheriff said. Cool temperatures also may have helped.

Koah, who disappeared Monday in the county just west of Columbia, was taken to a hospital. His condition was not immediately known Wednesday. Nearly 100 first responders participated in the search.

"We're better now that we know that Koah is safe," his great-aunt, Amber Hammond, told The Associated Press. She was watching as he was freed from the crate.

Deputies who searched the grandfather's home found the doors open and baby belongings inside, but they did not see Comer or the child, the sheriff said. Then the digging started.

"It was shallow," Koon said. "I think once that crate hit the ground, it was probably about at least a foot from the top of that crate to the top of the ground."

It was not immediately known if Comer had a lawyer. A phone number could not be found for him. The AP sent emails seeking information to the public defender and prosecutors.

SURVEILLANCE VIDEO SHOWED DAD BUT NOT HIS SON

Authorities said Koah had been in the care of Comer's mother. She had to run an errand and left the boy in Comer's care while another caregiver was on the way, Koon said.

"By the time the caregiver got there, Michael was gone, and Koah was gone with him," the sheriff said.

Surveillance video from several businesses in the area showed Comer without the infant on Monday afternoon, Koon said. The father was found Monday night and was arrested.

Koah's parents "have had some situations" regarding domestic violence charges, the sheriff said.

"Children," he said, "sometimes get caught in the middle."

Hammond said her nephew had talked about taking the baby to New York because "he didn't want to be in the same state as the mom." When Koah vanished, she and others assumed that Comer had given the boy to someone.

"We had no idea something like this would happen at all," Hammond said.

Comer was sentenced to probation in October after pleading guilty to domestic violence and aggravated breach-of-peace charges related to an arrest in July, Lexington County online court records show. Prosecutors dropped a gun charge as part of the plea deal. He also got credit for spending more than two months in jail.

At nearly a year old, Koah has been trying to stand on his own, said Hammond, who cared for him last weekend. And he already has some TV favorites.

"I'd go to feed him, and it had Mickey Mouse on," Hammond said. "You can't feed him and have Mickey Mouse on at the same time."

STUDY

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school living in Florence Schneider Hall on the WKU campus. At the end of her two-year course of study, she will graduate from high school with a minimum of 60 college credit hours and an Associate Degree of Interdisciplinary Studies from WKU.

"Elanor is an exceptionally driven student whose academic excellence is matched only by her clarity of vision," added Ethridge. "Attending the Gatton Academy has been a long-term goal of hers, and she has pursued it with remarkable focus and maturity — rather than simply aspiring to the goal, Elanor proactively collaborated with school staff and her support network to ensure every application requirement was thoroughly met."