

Editor's note: Due to a glitch, the court dockets normally on this page will not run this week. "For the Record" should return next week.

Week 8 of the 2026 Legislative Session

School help for parents; Senate gets budget draft

Senate update

Sen. Shelley Funke Frommeyer

Crossover of proposed legislation is in full swing in the Capitol Annex, and more than half the session is complete.

Senate bills are being considered in the House of Representatives, House bills are advancing in the Senate and the policy debates that define this session are sharpening.

Last week, the General Assembly advanced one of the session's most significant education measures, House Bill 1, allowing Kentucky to opt in to the federal Education Freedom Tax Credit program created by Congress in 2025.

Beginning in tax year 2027, the program offers a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit of up to \$1,700 for donations to certified scholarship granting organizations that fund K-12 educational expenses.

States must formally opt in for students to benefit, and more than two dozen have already done so.

Eligible students must come from households earning up to 300 percent of the area median income, making most Kentucky working- and middle-class families eligible.

Scholarships, distributed by certified nonprofits that must direct at least 90 percent of contributions to students, may be used for tuition, tutoring, special needs services, instructional materials, technology, transportation and other

approved expenses. Public school students are not excluded and may use funds for qualifying educational support.

HB 1 does not create a new state program, raise taxes or reduce SEEK funding. The federal tax credit can be claimed regardless of Kentucky's decision; the question is whether those contributions support students here or flow to other states.

By opting in, Kentucky keeps those federal dollars in-state and expands educational opportunity without increasing state spending.

STATE BUDGET

As noted in prior updates, the top priority during a 60-day legislative session is the constitutional responsibility to enact a new two-year state budget.

We've heard from many regarding the initial version of the House's budget proposal, HB 500. Legislative budget proposals traditionally start in the House.

I want to update you that, as has been said, understood by many, but deliberately misconstrued by some, HB 500 was a "bare bones" starting point as the legislature sought — and continues to seek — critical budget information from the executive branch.

Last week, the House held a committee meeting where significant modifications were made to HB 500. With the Senate officially in receipt of the House's proposal, this week is when our deliberate and meticulous work really begins.

FOOD IS MEDICINE

I presented Senate Joint Resolution 23, declaring Kentucky a Food is



Sen. Shelley Funke Frommeyer

Medicine state.

With representatives from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and the Kentucky Hospital Association, I successfully testified before the House Health Services Committee. This nationally recognized, groundbreaking legislation declares Kentucky's commitment to a "Food Is Medicine" strategy that strengthens both patient health and rural economies.

While other states have pursued program-specific legislation focused largely on Medicaid waivers, Kentucky's approach is a statewide declaration aligning policy, education and innovation around the role of nutrition and local agriculture in improving health outcomes.

I anticipate even greater appetite in the full House later on in the session and for the resolution to be signed into law. It's yet another element of the wellness revolution moving across Kentucky.

OTHER BILLS

The Senate passed HB 314, mirror legislation to SB 64, modernizing oversight of KentuckyWired by transferring operational control to the Common-

wealth Office of Technology.

Several measures were approved in the Senate this week and were either delivered to the Governor's desk or sent to the state House for consideration.

Senate Bill 52, which I co-sponsored, establishes a 30-day deadline for state agencies to approve or deny permit and license applications when no other timeline is specified. If an agency fails to act within that timeframe, the application is deemed approved unless incomplete.

It shifts the burden of proof to agencies in administrative hearings, expands judicial review and allows courts to consider additional evidence when appropriate.

A public agency may receive an additional 30-day extension if it demonstrates a substantial and legitimate interest in protecting public health, safety or welfare. The bill does not eliminate permits or override federal requirements, but seeks to ensure permitting decisions are timely, transparent and grounded in clearly defined legal standards.

If passed by the House, the measure would take effect Jan. 1, 2027.

Senate Bill 101, another bill I co-sponsored, strengthens protections for teachers and school staff by requiring local school boards to adopt policies mandating a minimum 12-month expulsion for students in grades 6 to 12 who physically assault, batter or abuse school personnel without just cause or provocation.

The bill also requires school employees to immediately report intentional assaults or attempted as-

saults against school staff to law enforcement.

According to the Kentucky Education Association, there were over 25,000 reports of assault on teachers since 2021, and the belief is that it is underreported.

SB 33 strengthens oversight of recovery residences by closing certification loopholes and requiring the state to notify local officials when a residence seeks certification, is certified, or faces discipline.

SB 37 designates the treeing Walker coonhound as Kentucky's official state dog in recognition of its historic ties to the commonwealth's hunting heritage.

SB 52 requires state agencies to clearly define permitting standards in law, act within 30 days or grant automatic approval, shift the burden of proof to the agency, and expand judicial review to ensure fairness and accountability.

SB 56 ensures Medicaid patients have access to non-opioid pain treatments by prohibiting coverage policies that favor opioids and directing necessary program updates and federal approvals.

SB 98 requires contractors on specified public projects to follow American Welding Society standards and have welds inspected by a qualified professional.

SB 122 allows courts to consider a non-violent defendant's role as a primary caretaker during sentencing to reduce unnecessary family separation.

SB 124 permits school districts to offer educators payment for a portion of unused sick leave while preserving the option to retain leave for emergencies

or retirement.

SB 129 reduces employer contribution rates to the Unemployment Insurance Service Capacity Upgrade Fund and strengthens Kentucky's unemployment system.

SB 157 clarifies mortgage loan calculations, exempts certain low-fee loans from limits, and aligns Kentucky law with federal standards for consistency.

SB 162 streamlines Kentucky's juvenile diversion process by removing barriers and promoting collaboration among court workers, schools, and families.

SB 170 establishes a four-year SOAR Program in at least 10 districts to address habitual truancy through early intervention and coordinated school, court, and community support teams.

SB 214 authorizes the Kentucky Department of Agriculture to accept and manage non-federal funds and clarifies its authority to use funds from all levels of government.

Senate Joint Resolution 54 directs the Department for Libraries and Archives and the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to collaborate on expanding enrollment in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library statewide.

I deeply value representing my communities throughout Bracken, Campbell, Kenton and Pendleton counties and strive to do my best to help Kentuckians. Please let me know how I can better serve your community by contacting my office at 502-564-8100 or by email at shelley.funkefrommeyer@kylegislature.gov.

Committee approves measure to prevent child brides

Capitol Update

FRANKFORT — A bill crafted to close a marriage age loophole in Kentucky law advanced unanimously last Thursday during a Senate Veterans, Military Affairs and Public Protection Committee meeting.

"Basically, this is just legislation designed to end child marriage in Kentucky once and for all by closing the remaining loopholes and ensuring that our laws are clear, enforceable and centered on the safety and dignity of our minors," the bill's sponsor, Sen. Julie Raque Adams, R-Louisville, said.

The measure — Senate Bill 156 — builds on legislation the Kentucky General Assembly passed in 2018, which essentially identified 18 as the legal age for marriage. However, the law still allowed 17-year-olds to get married if they had approv-

al from the judicial system, Adams said.

"It was kind of a checklist that they would go through. The main one being that that 17-year-olds would be emancipated, so in case anything happened, they would have full legal rights to sign a lease or enter into a domestic violence shelter, those kinds of things," she said.

The caveat has been exploited and not adhered to, Adams said.

Donna Simmons, founder of the REVIVE Collective and survivor of generational child marriage, testified that she reached out to Adams after years of trauma.

"I approached Senator Adams about filing this bill because this is not theoretical to me. This is my life. My mother was a resident of McCreary County when she was 13 years old and married my father. He was

a grown man who had already served in the Korean War and had two young sons," she said.

Simmons said when she was 14 years old, she was admitted to a behavioral health facility where she was groomed by a 29-year-old staff member.

"When I was released, that relationship continued, and at 16, my mother consented to me marrying him. He was 31. I was forced to drop out of high school before completing the tenth grade," she said.

"When I tried to escape his abuse, I was denied

housing because I was a minor and I could not enter into a contract."

Simmons said she was also turned away from a domestic violence shelter because she was underage.

"At 16, I miscarried and nearly died from complications. As a married minor, I could not consent to my own medical care. I had to wait for my abuser to decide whether I would receive treatment," she said.

Simmons said when she was choked by her husband, she knew things had to change, and now after surviving violence,

exploitation and systemic failure, she works to protect other girls from becoming trapped.

Simmons testified she had to fight to obtain public records and discovered some officials were violating child marriage laws by authorizing marriages involving 16-year-olds, clerks bypassing required judicial orders and marriages involving age gaps of 10 to 12 years receiving approval.

"Let us stop interrupting childhood in the name of marriage and give children full lives that they not have to spend decades recovering

from," she said.

Sen. Gary Boswell, R-Owensboro, said Simmons has a heartbreaking story and said he was sorry she went through it. He voted for the bill, but said he still has some questions.

"My best friend and his wife, they were married when she was 17 and he's 19. They've been married 60 some odd years, and so, I understand the issue when it comes to predators and all that," he said.

"...I'm going to be in favor of the bill, but I do have a few questions and maybe we can talk about later."

Hart's fire funding bill clears committee

House Majority Caucus

FRANKFORT—Rep. Mark Hart's bill that would modernize funding options for fire districts passed the Kentucky House Standing Committee on Local Government last week.

"Emergency responders are on the front lines every day protecting lives and property," said Hart, R-Falmouth. "HB 613 would provide fire and emergency service districts with clear, consistent funding authority while also ensuring strong transparency and accountability to the taxpayers they serve."

HB 613 would make

updates to Kentucky Revised Statutes Chapters 75 and 75A relating to revenues for the provision of emergency services. The measure would clarify and adjust the property tax authority of fire protection and emergency service districts, including those that operate emergency ambulance services as primary providers.

Under the measure, fire protection and volunteer fire department districts would be able to continue to levy up to 10 cents per \$100 of assessed value for fire services and up to 20 cents per \$100 of assessed value when operating an

emergency ambulance service as the primary provider.

The legislation would also establish a structured process for districts that seek to exceed existing statutory maximums, requiring public hearings, clear public notice, and transparency regarding the purpose and financial impact of any proposed increase.

HB 613 would place reasonable guardrails on annual tax increases, generally limiting increases over the prior year to no more than two cents per \$100 of assessed value, except for initial levies.

The bill would also cre-

ate a recall process allowing voters within a district to petition for a public vote on proposed tax increases that exceed the previous year's rate, ensuring direct taxpayer oversight.

"This legislation would strike a careful balance. It would give local districts the tools they need to maintain equipment, recruit and retain personnel, and respond to emergencies, while guaranteeing that any tax increase is subject to public input and, if necessary, a vote of the people," Hart said.

The measure now moves to the full House for consideration.

Advertisement for Thomas (Tom) Collins, Attorney at Law, with contact information and services listed.

Legal notice regarding the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and noxious weed law.

Legal notice regarding Pendleton County Code Enforcement, including citation information and appeal procedures.

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