Eastern Kentucky group urges Rep. Rogers to support bill boosting black lung benefits

By Liam Niemeyer
Kentucky Lantern

A Kentucky group representing miners with black lung is urging U.S. Rep. Hal Rogers to support a bill significantly boosting the federal disability benefits these miners receive.

In a Tuesday letter, the Black Lung Association of Southeastern Kentucky urged him to sign on as a co-sponsor of the Support Our Miners Act, a bill introduced by Democrats in Congress earlier this summer that seeks to increase monthly black lung disability benefits back to the same funding level, relative to inflation, as miners received in 1969.

The association wrote the monthly benefits miners receive has eroded over several decades of inflation, and the amount of benefits haven't kept up with the cost of living to pay for gas, groceries and utilities.

"We need something done, we have to help our miners and the widows. We need you to recognize that coal miners need your help now and are asking for your support," the group wrote. "Disabled coal miners need this raise to help ease the constraints of the difficult positions they face daily while living with this disease."

The association also referenced how in recent years "miners have been forced to leave the mines at younger ages due to more severe forms of the disease caused by exposure to silica dust." Earlier this month, Public Health Watch, Kentucky Public Radio and NPR reported that the rate of black lung disease among veteran underground coal miners in Central Appalachia is at its highest level in nearly 50 years, driven by exposure to toxic silica dust.

A spokesperson for Rogers did not immediately provide a response to an emailed request for comment Tuesday afternoon, telling the Lantern that Rogers and staff were traveling to events in Eastern Kentucky.

An analysis from the Letcher County-based nonprofit Appalachian Citizens' Law Center and the nonprofit Appalachian Voices found that the benefits received, as of 2023, are 30 percent less compared to what recipients were receiving in 1969.

The Kentucky Lantern reported in July that increasing black lung disability benefits has bipartisan support among local elected officials in Kentucky, but such consensus in Congress hasn't yet emerged. Republicans in Congress have previously expressed concerns over increasing benefits from the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund amid worries about the fund's solvency.

The trust fund pays out benefits when a responsible coal operator isn't identified in a black lung case or the identified operator doesn't pay. The fund receives revenue from a tax on mined coal and has taken on hundreds of millions of dollars of benefit liabilities because of coal mine bankruptcies, coinciding with the significant decline of the state's coal mining industry.

In an emailed statement last month, Rogers, 88, told the Lantern the trust fund needs "significant reform to ensure that our coal miners get their hard-earned benefits before this painful disease robs them from seeing a dime."

The association wrote it also cares about the trust fund's solvency but that "the fund's debt is a legacy of decades past when the benefits being paid were higher than the revenues."

"That is no longer the case and we ask that you not allow historic issues to act as a barrier to helping us today," the association wrote. "Representative Rogers, we are just trying to survive. There is nothing more noble than taking care of the miners that built this country."

The Kentucky Lantern, an independent, nonpartisan, free news service, can be found at, kentuckylantern.com.

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PSC issues order to investigate the affordability of electric and natural gas utility service in Kentucky

Special to Appalachian Newspapers

The Kentucky Public Service Commission announced in a statement Aug. 26 that it has opened a case to provide an opportunity for the public and stakeholders in the commonwealth to identify and discuss concerns and potential measures to improve the affordability of electric and natural gas utility service for residential ratepayers.

The commission, according to the statement, made all regulated electric utilities and the five largest natural gas utilities parties to the proceeding to create a comprehensive record.

The commission, the statement said, invites interested groups or individuals with a special interest in the affordability of electric and natural gas utility service to participate by seeking intervention to the case or by filing public comments.

Public comments may be submitted through the Commission's website at, https://psc.ky.gov/Case/SearchCasesPublicComments, or by sending an email to, psc.comment@ky.gov.

"Access to electric and natural gas utility service is fundamental to the health, safety, and well-being of Kentuckians," the statement said. "Today's order notes that data collected from the Energy Information Administration show that the calculated average residential electricity price in Kentucky was 10.87 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) in 2020 and was

13.24 cents per kWh in 2025, showing a 21.8 percent increase from 2020 to 2025."

"Given the current environment of rising utility costs, the commission believes that a broader examination of electric and natural gas utility affordability issues would help the commission better understand the factors affecting affordability across the commonwealth and evaluate existing and potential approaches for addressing those concerns," the statement continued.

The statement said the commission intends to convene a technical conference in 2027 for parties to examine issues developed in the record, the statement said. The commission has requested that parties file their initial comments and proposed topics for this case on or before Sept. 30.

The order and other records in the case are available on the PSC website, psc.ky.gov. The case number is 2026-00185.

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- **September 19, 2026 - Mail-in Absentee Ballot Request Portal Opens**
- Voters can go online or call the Perry County Election Department for these requests. The online website is as follows: govote.ky.gov
- **October 5, 2026 - Last Day to Register to Vote for the General**
- **October 20, 2026 - Mail-in Absentee Ballot Request Portal Closes**
  - **United States Postal Service recommends voters place completed mail-in absentee ballots in the mail no later than October 27, 2026**
- **October 21-23, 2026 - Excused, In-person Absentee Voting Begins**
- **October 26-28, 2026 - Excused, In-person Absentee Voting Continues**
- **October 29-31, 2026 - In-Person No Excuse Absentee Voting**

November 3, 2026 - General Election Day

Notice to the Public: If you have any questions, Please Call the Perry County Election Department (606)436-0049.