

# Kentucky must act now to stop distracted driving. The Phone Down KY Act can help

BY SEN. JIMMY HIGDON



Some moments in public office stay with you. They're not about politics or policy, but about people and our serious responsibility to help protect them. The story of Alyssa Burns is one of those. She joined me during the interim session to tell her story. In 2022, she was driving on Interstate 71 in Louisville with her fiancé and their little girl, Camberleigh, on a sunny October afternoon. In seconds,

everything changed. A distracted driver, speeding down the interstate, never touched the brakes. The rear-end crash killed Camberleigh in her car seat. The coroner said she was nearly decapitated. No criminal charges were filed against the man responsible. The police report simply said "inattention." We don't know what distracted the driver, but we know it happens too often. You've probably seen it yourself. In 2024, nearly 5,700 distracted driving crashes occurred in Kentucky. Twenty-seven were deadly. Over the past two years, more than 400 Kentuckians have died because

someone wasn't paying attention. We can't keep ignoring this. I won't. That's why I'm filing the Phone Down Kentucky Act in 2026. Kentucky already bans texting while driving and prohibits drivers under 18 from using phones. But adults can still hold and use phones, as long as they're not texting. That loophole is dangerous. Every time someone looks down to scroll, swipe, or dial, they take their eyes off the road, hands off the wheel, and mind off driving, putting everyone at risk. The Phone Down Kentucky Act would extend the current texting ban to nearly all phone use unless

hands-free. I've supported similar legislation before. It would ban holding or using a phone while driving, unless it's hands-free via voice commands, a mount, or Bluetooth. The goal isn't to punish. It's to prevent tragedy and save lives. This bill won't bring back victims like Camberleigh, but I believe it's the seed we need to save lives. Too often, safety laws come after tragedy. As lawmakers, we have a duty to act when stories like Alyssa's reach us. We're elected to solve problems, not just talk about them. Driving isn't a right. It's a privilege that comes with the responsibility to drive safely. If putting your

phone in a holder or waiting to send a text feels inconvenient, consider what it would be like to lose someone you love. These crashes take lives, shatter families, and leave lasting pain. Some will argue that the proposal goes too far or is hard to enforce. But is checking a text worth someone's life? Is any distraction worth ending a child's future or tearing a family apart? I don't think so. And I don't believe most Kentuckians do either. Alyssa Burns isn't looking for sympathy. She's asking for action. She wants to know her daughter's life mattered and that her death might save others. I believe it can be

done, but I can't do it alone. I'm asking you to stand with me. Contact your lawmakers. Tell them you support this legislation. Let's stop talking and start acting. Camberleigh should've had the chance to grow up. Every Kentuckian deserves to get home safely. It's time to pass this law and stop tragedies like this. I'll leave you with this message from Alyssa: "Remember Camberleigh. Remember her when you get in your vehicle, so that hopefully one day you save yourselves and others from feeling this pain on both ends. Be the reason someone stops driving while on their phone, or road raging, or speeding because it is a choice. Please help me in continuing to make safety the priority."

*Sen. Jimmy Higdon represents Kentucky's 14th Senate District and serves as Senate Transportation Chair. The 2026 Legislative Session will be Higdon's final session. He will retire from the state Senate at the end of the calendar year.*



From left, President Donald Trump, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Education Secretary Linda McMahon and EPA Administrator Lee Zeld hold an event May 22 for a new Make America Healthy Again report.

# Vaccine changes will make American children suffer again

BY LISA JARVIS  
Bloomberg Opinion

By making sweeping changes to the nation's childhood vaccine schedule, America's top health leaders are recklessly maximizing the threat from previously common diseases and dismissing our collective role in preventing them. The new policy, which cuts the number of recommended vaccinations by more than a third, sends a not-so-subtle message that something was broken in the previous approach to keeping American kids healthy - despite decades of evidence to the contrary. It marks a striking escalation of Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s decades-long project to amplify doubt and confusion about the safety, necessity and availability of vaccines - one that will ultimately put everyone at risk from preventable diseases as more parents turn away from routine shots. Rather than a broad recommendation for all children, vaccines against meningitis, hepatitis A and B, dengue and RSV will now be recommended only for high-risk groups. Mean-

while, parents can consider several other shots, including the flu and COVID vaccines, through a "shared decision-making" process that involves consulting with a health care provider. It's an extraordinary departure from the days when Americans received clear guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This decision was also made without input from experts within the Department of Health and Human Services, and without the CDC's typically deliberate, evidence-based process for evaluating vaccine policy. The overhaul had been telegraphed for weeks. Last month, President Donald Trump directed HHS to amend the U.S. childhood vaccination schedule to better align with those of peer nations. And by peer nations, he really meant Denmark, which bizarrely has become the North Star for these health officials on vaccines. Why, they asked, was the U.S. doing things so differently from the Scandinavian nation? For starters, the U.S. has roughly 56 times Denmark's population. And, unlike the Nordic country, we don't have

universal health care. That lack of access to free, quality care has a range of consequences for the overall health of our population that change the financial calculus for vaccination. And the idea that Denmark has it right on vaccines - even for its own population - is debatable. For example, each year, an estimated 1,300 Danish children become so dehydrated from rotavirus that they require hospitalization. Meanwhile, in 2006, the U.S. introduced a vaccine against the virus, which the CDC credits with preventing more than 50,000 hospitalizations among babies and toddlers each year. The vaccine campaign has been so effective that today, many pediatric medical residents have never encountered an infant hospitalized because of the infection, which can cause days of diarrhea, vomiting, cramps and fever. Health officials argue that they aren't taking away vaccines but rather resetting the U.S. approach to give parents more power in making medical decisions for their children. HHS noted that government pro-

grams will continue to provide the immunizations at no cost. Eventually, preventable diseases will become more common, just as we're seeing with measles, pertussis, and even tetanus. Routine immunizations not only protect children, but they also help shield other vulnerable people around them. When babies in the U.S. began receiving a vaccine against pneumonia in 2000, overall hospitalizations for the infection fell. One study found that a decade in, vaccination was keeping nearly 170,000 people out of the hospital. Similarly, evidence suggests that when children receive their flu shot, fewer people overall - and particularly the elderly - become gravely ill. The shift away from recommending that all children six months or older receive an annual flu shot is particularly indefensible on the heels of last year's flu season, which was the deadliest for kids in two decades, and amid a severe flu season this year that is straining hospitals nationwide. Health leaders are unilaterally making far-reaching decisions that will erode hard-won public health gains. The consequences might not be immediately visible and could take years to surface fully - but there's no doubt that this latest move has broken something monumental, and its effects will eventually reach us all.

## FROM PAGE 1C BLACKFORD

attention that a reporter for the Kentucky Kernel has been contacting members of our department asking for an interview to discuss 'recent regulations' and how our department may have been impacted. I strongly advise you to NOT speak with this reporter on these issues," the memo said. "While this is a legitimate request and we should all support student journalism, there are just too many risks to discussing these issues in the current environment. This could potentially lead to unforeseen consequences for you and our department."

### THE THOUGHT POLICE HIT K-12 SCHOOLS

This is happening even though House Bill 4 is not supposed to affect curriculum or research. Tichenor says her bill will not hamper classroom instruction either, but this kind of silencing is hap-

pening at UK with faculty who still have enormous job protections. What do you think will happen to a young high school teacher? Do you think they will risk telling their students about important parts of U.S. history like the Civil Rights or suffrage movements when they could just ignore it? I wasn't too bothered by the legislature forcing universities to get rid of some administrative bloat by axing DEI offices in higher ed. If there are any school districts with DEI bureaucracies, which I doubt, then by all means, drop them. But as I've said many, many times, at least DEI efforts come from good intentions, whereas efforts to dismantle them come from bad ones: the remnants of America's original sin, still hissing and snarling through history at the idea that giving rights to some people takes rights away from others.

## FROM PAGE 1C BESHEAR

right to know what the university was willing to pay so dearly to hide," Abate told the Lantern. "On top of that, the attorney general's decision attempts to re-write the narrow exemption for 'preliminary' records to include virtually any email or other 'non-final' document possessed by an agency," he continued. "That interpretation, if accepted, would gut the Open Records Act and render most of the documents now accessible to the public off-limits." "Not just journalists, but everyone, has an important stake in keeping public institutions and officials open to public scrutiny," said Jamie Lucke, the editor of the Kentucky Lantern. "And yet we keep seeing a widespread and bipartisan desire for secrecy among our Kentucky officials. That's why we have to keep defending transparency and the open government laws that have served Kentucky well for more than 50 years." The Kentucky Open Government Coalition, a nonprofit devoted to government transparency, is also fighting for our rights in court. In September, the Kentucky Supreme Court heard arguments from the coalition — also represented by Abate — that

government business conducted via private cell phones was still subject to open records requests. The case revolves around a 2021 open records request denied by the Department of Fish and Wildlife for text and email communications on private accounts that discussed official business. The state Court of Appeals ruled against the department, stating the obvious: excluding text messages on private phones "would surely operate to encourage the use of personal electronic devices and place vital public records beyond the reach of citizens." To the average citizen, these cases can seem dull and complicated. But they are at the heart of this place we call the United States, which as President Abraham Lincoln famously extolled in the Gettysburg Address, is "government of the people, by the people, for the people." This concept seems to be too often forgotten by the people we elect to office, whose jobs would be made easier at every turn if they didn't have some responsibility to the voters. These court battles are a reminder of who they work for and what is at stake.