

Three from Kentucky accused of human trafficking, sexual contact with a minor

BY CHRISTOPHER LEACH
cleach@herald-leader.com

Three people from Kentucky have been indicted on human trafficking and child sex offenses, according to Kentucky State Police.

The indictment came after a lengthy investigation that began in September 2024. The case was presented to a grand jury in April, but the charges weren't announced until Thursday. The indictment charged Christopher Firkins, 39, of Springfield; Samuel Firkins, 33, of Taylorsville; and Brandy Doyle, 41, of Mount Washington with numerous counts related to human trafficking and sexual contact with a minor, according to state police.

Christopher Firkins is charged with:

- Six counts of human trafficking - commercial sexual act with a victim

- under 18
- 18 counts of first-degree unlawful transaction with a minor
- Six counts of first-degree sex abuse
- Six counts of second-degree rape
- Six counts of second-degree sodomy
- 12 counts of incest

State police said he was arrested April 19 in Washington County. He's being held on a \$500,000 bond, according to court records.

Samuel Firkins is charged with:

- One count of human trafficking - commercial sex act with a victim under 18
- One count of first-degree sex abuse

He was arrested in Louisville May 13, but court records indicate he paid a \$10,000 bond July 27 and was released from custody. His bond was originally \$500,000 before it was lowered on July 22, according to court records.

Doyle is charged with:

- Six counts of human trafficking - commercial sex act with a victim under 18
- 18 counts of first-degree unlawful transaction with a minor
- Six counts of first-degree sex abuse
- Six counts of second-degree rape
- Six counts of second-degree sodomy

State police said she was arrested July 8 in Bullitt County. Doyle is being held on a \$500,000 bond, according to court records.

All three suspects are next scheduled to appear in Washington Circuit Court Aug. 19 for a pre-trial conference. A jury trial has been scheduled in the case for November 23, according to court records.

State police is investigating the allegations.

Kentucky man hospitalized in critical condition shortly after being arrested

BY CHRISTOPHER LEACH
cleach@herald-leader.com

A Kentucky man is in critical condition at a hospital after he became unresponsive at a jail following his arrest, according to multiple law enforcement agencies.

Around 7:20 a.m. Thursday, the Marshall County Sheriff's Office responded to a report of a man acting erratically and walking through yards on Delaware Road, officials said.

An off-duty deputy who lived in the area detained the suspect, 35-year-old Benton resident Kendrick Owens, before on-duty deputies arrived, according to the sheriff's office.

Owens was uncooperative and appeared to be under the influence of "intoxicating substances" during the encounter with deputies, the sheriff's office said. Owens kicked deputies when they placed him under arrest.

Owens was booked into the Marshall County Detention Center on charges of third-degree assault, public intoxication, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest.

While at the jail, Owens became unresponsive and required medical attention, according to Kentucky State Police.

Owens was originally taken to a Marshall County hospital before being transferred to another hospital in Louisville. State police said he was in critical condition as of Thursday night.

No other details about the incident were provided. State police are investigating the incident while the sheriff's office said it will conduct its own administrative investigation.

What each of Lexington's at-large council candidates thinks about data centers

BY ADRIAN PAUL BRYANT
abryant@herald-leader.com

As data centers become one of the hottest issues affecting cities across the U.S., Lexington's local government has adopted a data center moratorium through Oct. 31 and has been working on regulations that would prohibit large-scale facilities.

Both of the candidates for Lexington's mayoral race have said they oppose hyperscale data centers being built in the city. And now, most of the city's at-large candidates have said the same.

Six candidates are vying for the three at-large seats on the Urban County Council this fall. Those seats are elected by all Fayette County voters, with the top three vote-getters earning the slots. The top vote-getter in the at-large election becomes the vice mayor of the city and presides over the council.

On Aug. 10, longtime First District council member and current at-large council member James Brown shared a statement on social media saying he does not support hyperscale data centers being built in the city.

"Lexington already has several smaller data centers, and I support responsible technology and economic development," Brown said. "But hyperscale facilities are a different conversation, and they warrant careful consideration ... We should not rush into development of this scale without fully understanding the consequences."

Brown is seeking a second term as an at-large council member. He represented the First District from 2015 to 2022 before being elected to his current seat.

"For me, protecting Lexington's long-term interests must come first," he said. "Protecting neighborhoods, preserving our agricultural resources and ensuring that we maximize opportunity for economic development and housing opportunities."

After his statement, the Herald-Leader asked the five other candidates in the race how they feel about data center regulations.

All but one candidate said they outright oppose large-scale data centers.

Vice Mayor Dan Wu, who is also seeking a second term on the council, said Lexington needs to adopt regulations that ban hyperscale centers while preserving the

smaller existing centers that are inside banks, communication hubs and other established buildings.

"Do we want AI-centric hyperscale data centers in Lexington that raise our electric bills and cause harm to our communities? My answer to that is a clear and emphatic NO," Wu told the Herald-Leader.

"Do we need to craft smart policies that enable our local businesses to maintain their existing small scale data centers that continue to serve our local banking, medical, educational, and other needs? Absolutely," he added. "We can do this and still prohibit the development of hyperscale data centers in Fayette County."

The data center regulations approved by the Urban County Planning Commission July 30 aim to strike that balance. Those regulations prohibit data centers larger than 40,000 square feet and have many strict regulations for those smaller than 40,000 square feet.

The regulations also include a provision allowing "server rooms," which commissioners and planning staff include to protect existing businesses that have long-established and smaller data centers typically on-site.

The council will discuss those regulations in its Aug. 25 council work session. The council will have final say over what data center regulations look like.

Stephanie Spires, a former Fayette County Public Schools board member and at-large council candidate, told the Herald-Leader she fears the regulations adopted by the planning commission aren't strict enough about minor data centers smaller than 40,000 square feet.

"I would encourage the current council to extend the moratorium on data centers past October 31st and ask the planning staff to further identify neighborhoods and communities where minor data centers could be located and how these centers could impact other residents and neighboring businesses," Spires said.

Spires also added that Lexington needs to use its land for housing, jobs and agriculture. "We simply do not have the land in Fayette County for major data centers."

Spires spoke against major data centers at a June 15 community forum hosted at the Lyric Theater, and reiterated

her opposition to them to the Herald-Leader.

Fellow candidate Herbert Lynn, an HVAC dispatched affiliated with the Bluegrass Democratic Socialists of America, also spoke at the Lyric Theater event. He has been very vocal about his opposition to data centers in recent months, speaking at several community events focused on data centers — including the July 30 planning commission public hearing on the proposed regulations.

"These companies come into our towns and they cost us money, in terms of all of our electric bills, our health, our well-being. And I don't know about you all, but I remember my middle school biology," Lynn said at the Lyric Theater event. "When something comes in and takes and takes and takes and gives nothing back and damages its host, what is it called? It's a parasite."

Lynn told the Herald-Leader, "I will always use my office to protect Lexington from the environmental and health effects of data centers, and to prevent AI from displacing working people."

City employee and council candidate Chris Shafer told the Herald-Leader "my responsibility is to listen to the people of Lexington and make decisions that put our residents, neighborhoods, and quality of life first."

"At this time, I am opposed to building hyperscale data centers in Lexington," he said. "I have heard from dozens of Lexington residents who have expressed serious concerns, particularly about where these facilities could be located and what impact they could have on surrounding neighborhoods ... Lexington needs to fully understand the demands they could place on our infrastructure, power and water resources, and the communities where they would be located."

Tate Ohmer, a contract construction worker who has also worked in state politics, was the only candidate who did not outright say he opposes all hyperscale data centers.

"As a general principle, I believe private property owners should be able to make lawful use of their property," he told the Herald-Leader. "At the same time, large-scale data centers raise legitimate questions that deserve careful examination."

Ohmer said any infrastructure or energy costs brought on from data centers should be paid for by private companies and "not by Lexington families already struggling with rising costs."

"Lexington deserves a transparent process that balances economic opportunity, responsible planning, respect for property rights, and protection for taxpayers and utility customers."



MATT MILLS MCKNIGHT Reuters

Firefighter Kayla Tolbert assists in wildfire suppression efforts on Aug. 5 in Spokane County, Washington.

In record US wildfire season, firefighter entrapments rise

BY ANDREW HAY
Reuters

U.S. firefighting personnel are being overrun by wildfires at the highest rate in two decades, leading to six deaths and dozens of injuries this year, federal data showed, a grim count during a record-setting fire season in the United States.

There had been 12 entrapments in 2026 as of Aug. 12, according to the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center, a federal agency, already more than the full-year average of nine in the past 20 years, and the highest year-to-date number since 2006.

Wildfire entrapments are life-threatening situations in which fire behavior compromises the escape routes or safety zones of firefighting personnel.

The sheer number and scale of wildfires this year, which experts attribute in part to climate change caused by burning fossil fuels, mean increased risk for firefighting personnel.

Seven active and retired firefighters told Reuters they were also concerned firefighters were taking unusual risks because of an all-out approach to stopping fires mandated by the Trump administration. They also questioned the impact of U.S. Forest Service staffing cuts as part of broader federal downsizing.

A spokesperson for the U.S. Forest Service, part of the Department of Agriculture that has historically taken the lead on fighting wildfires, said firefighter safety was the

agency's highest priority and investigations were ongoing into the incidents of firefighters being trapped by flames.

The USFS did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the impact of all-out fire suppression tactics and staffing cuts.

The newly created U.S. Wildland Fire Service, which aims to consolidate federal firefighting forces under the Interior Department, said it was reviewing the entrapments to improve firefighter safety.

INTENSE FIRE SEASON

After a historically low winter snowpack, record temperatures and decades of drought in the U.S. West, the country is facing an intense fire season.

The National Interagency Fire Center said 6.4 million acres (about 2.6 million hectares) have burned to date — the highest Aug. 12 level on record and about five times the area burned in Europe this year. U.S. firefighters have had to respond to over 46,500 wildfires, the highest number in over a decade.

That means they face danger for longer periods of time in drier, more extreme fire conditions, which heightens risks, said U.S. Forest Service fire specialist Wesley Page, who has researched entrapments.

Entrapment deaths normally account for around four of the average 17 fatalities each year of wildland firefighting personnel in the United States, according to National Interagency Fire Center and USFS data. So far in 2026, six of the 13

people who died fighting fires were entrapped, based on Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center data.

Around a quarter of 2026 entrapments involved helicopter-borne firefighters, or so-called helitack crews, often dropped near blazes to create fire breaks. Four helitack firefighters died and one was severely burned after a June 27 entrapment in Colorado's Knowles Fire, the most deadly entrapment in 13 years.

"The fact that three incidents may involve Helitack crews does not necessarily mean Helitack operations have become more dangerous," the U.S. Wildland Fire Service said in a statement.

Other entrapments involved Washington fire crews who abandoned vehicles after they caught fire, and bulldozer drivers overrun by flames in Washington and Oregon as they scraped fire breaks.

Current and former firefighters said they were concerned fire personnel were taking more risks than usual after officials in President Donald Trump's administration stressed putting out all blazes immediately, an approach known as full suppression.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, responsible for the Forest Service, said in an April letter to staff that her top priority was to "accelerate initial attack and use a full suppression strategy."

Riva Duncan, president of firefighter advocacy group Grassroots Wildland Firefighters, said that was not always appropriate, given conditions on the ground were "insanely" volatile with extreme dryness and strong winds.

"We can't put people in front of some of these fires, we just can't," said Duncan, who worked as a fire duty officer on blazes in the U.S. Southwest this year.

U.S. Wildland Fire Service Director Brian Fennelly told the Hotshot Wake Up podcast earlier this month that he was confused by 2025 policies encouraging firefighters to be more aggressive on initial attack, the first response to a wildfire, adding their procedures were already aggressive.

"Aggressive does not mean taking extra or extraordinary risk of harming your people," he said.