

# Bill aims to modernize early child care system

BY PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

In her role as chair of the House Standing Committee on Families and Children, state Rep. Samara Heavrin introduced House Bill 6, aimed at modernizing the child care system in Kentucky. “High-quality child care is the key to unlocking our commonwealth’s education and workforce potential,” Heavrin said Monday. “Currently, we have a child care shortage and an



SAMARA HEAVRIN

opportunity to update rules, regulations and infrastructure in our public agencies tasked with overseeing and supporting the child care sector.” Comparing the legislative reforms to successful efforts initiated in Montana and Tennessee, Heavrin said the goals include making affordable high-quality child care available, reinvigorating communities and establishing prescriptive policies and procedures to grow early childhood education system.

HB 6 would address several of the core issues identified in the Chamber of Commerce’s Child Care Collaborative report released in May 2025, the legislative news release said. In June of 2024, the Kentucky Chamber created the Child Care Collaborative bringing together a team of 40 stakeholders from across the commonwealth to identify and address foundational issues with child care and their regulatory agencies. The effort identified 37 actionable issues to expand access, improve quality and modernize Kentucky’s child care

sector. “I would like to thank the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce for their work in this area bringing together stakeholders and state leaders to prescriptively address our child care crisis,” said Heavrin, a Leitchfield Republican. “Without the support of our community, stakeholders, state leaders and many more, we would not be able to address our child care crisis.” HB 6 can be broken down into several components. First, this measure would address the regulatory environment child care centers operate in. The bill would require

third-party review of child care regulations across an extended timeline to ensure that any regulatory reform is undergone in a prescriptive manner. Secondly, it would modernize the ALL-STARs rating system by creating an outcomes-based rating model as opposed to the current theory-based model. Another regulatory component of this measure would authorize micro facilities like regulations in Indiana. This measure implements a data collection requirement related to the child care industry. It would require the Cabinet for Health and Family

Services to track real child care capacity as opposed to licensed capacity. Other provisions would require a monthly count of child care providers and establish fiscal transparency with an annual financial report from the Office of the State Budget Director. Additional provisions of the measure would modernize programs established by previous sessions of the General Assembly such as reforms to the Employer Childcare Assistance Program and bolster the Certified Child Care Communities designation available to local governments.

# Murray State gets key approval for veterinary medicine program

BY PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

Murray State University received approval last week from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education marking a significant step toward allowing the university to offer a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine. The addition of a veterinary program at MSU would make it the only university with a School of Veterinary Medicine in Kentucky. There are only 33 veterinary colleges accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association nationwide. Eighty out of Kentucky’s 120 counties are designated as either having a veterinary shortage or an underserved rural area for veterinarians, especially in Western Kentucky, according to a 2024 study by Deloitte cited by MSU. Auburn University reserves 38 spots for Kentucky residents and Tuskegee University guarantees two positions, through contracts with the state. Murray State officials say it remains on track toward obtaining American Veterinary Medical Association program accreditation, looking forward

to the first DVM class enrollment as soon as fall 2028. The passage of Senate Bill 77 in 2025 provided a path forward for MSU to establish a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine. A variety of existing assets will contribute to the veterinary program at Murray, such as the A. Carman Animal Health Technology Center, the Rudolph Equine Education Center and the Breathitt Veterinary Center. MSU’s Hutson School of Agriculture is said to have the largest pre-veterinary medicine/veterinary technology enrollment of any university in the state and is one of the three programs already accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics provided an estimate that there are 86,300 veterinarians in the United States, with expectations for that number to grow over 19% by the end of 2031. Veterinary technology is also expected to grow 20% by 2031, with BLS reporting 122,800 people currently in the field, according to MSU.



Submitted

Murray State University offers pre-veterinary medicine program and received approval from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education to offer a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine.

# Kentucky's top lobbyists earn more than \$1 million

BY TOM LOFTUS  
KENTUCKY LANTERN

In 2025 — for the first time — a lobbyist was paid more than \$1 million to influence the actions of the Kentucky General Assembly. Actually, reports filed with the Kentucky Legislative Ethics Commission this month show that two lobbyists were paid more than \$1 million in 2025 for their work with the state legislature: Stephen Huffman was paid \$1,153,500 for representing 25 different clients; M. Patrick Jennings was paid \$1,123,988 to represent 85 clients, the reports show. Lobbyists are, and have been for many years, the highest paid people who work in the state Capitol. Reports filed with the ethics commission show that a dozen were paid more than a half million dollars in 2025 to plead the cases of their clients with state legislators. By contrast, Gov. Andy Beshear is paid \$184,826 per year to govern the state, according to the Kentucky Transparency website. Ethics commission records show

that 39 lobbyists made more than Beshear in 2025. Reports filed this month with the commission by the nearly 900 corporations, trade associations and other groups that are registered to lobby the legislature, show that the compensation of Huffman and Jennings sailed far above the \$1 million mark in 2025. Together, the nearly 900 groups reported paying more than \$26.5 million in compensation to lobbyists in 2025. “Businesses and organizations understand it’s important to have a strong presence through lobbying and campaign contributions so they have a chance to have a seat at the table,” said John Schaaf, a former general counsel and executive director of the ethics commission. “Whether they want a contract, regulatory relief, or a change in tax law, if a business is not on the playing field, they can’t win the game.” Any citizen is free to contact his or her state senator or representative with a request or a concern, but if a person is paid to make a case for others to a leg-

islator, that person is required to be registered as a legislative agent (or lobbyist) with the commission. Currently, there are 651 people registered to lobby the Kentucky General Assembly. Some are executives of the company or group for which they lobby. For instance, executives of the largest lobbying presence in Frankfort, the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, are registered and the chamber reports the lobbying compensation based on the percentage of the executive’s time at work spent on lobbying state legislators. But many are professional lobbyists like Huffman and Jennings who have contracts to represent the interests of many different corporations and groups before the legislature. Huffman, who is with the lobbying firm Stoll Keenon Government Relations, came to Frankfort in late 2003 as the chief of staff to the then-new Republican Lt. Gov. Steve Pence. Ethics commission records indicate he

first registered as a lobbyist in 2008. In the past decade he climbed to the top tier of highest paid lobbyists. In 2024, ethics commission records show Huffman ranked third with compensation of \$773,800.

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