

State Report Tallies Tens of Millions in Media, Travel and Event Costs

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Kentucky executive branch agencies spent more than \$39 million on advertising and communications and millions more on travel, conferences and contracted services in the 2025 fiscal year, according to a report released by Allison Ball, Kentucky Auditor of Public Accounts, on Feb. 10.

Governor Andy Beshear disputed some of the findings a day after the report was released in a Team Kentucky update after a press member asked about the findings, likening it to a “political attack.”

The report lists \$39,055,133.96 in advertising expenditures and notes that every executive branch entity maintains some form of communications staff. Payments included \$2,488,789.77 to marketing firm Red7e.

The report details \$7,438,490 in out-of-state travel, including nearly \$930,000 by the Kentucky Department of Education and \$183,575.87 by Kentucky State Police while providing security for Gov. Andy Beshear and staff. Expenses included international flights, resort lodging and conference travel.

In-state travel totaled \$23,278,869, much of it tied to education-related conferences and seminars.

Agencies also reported \$16,693,103.32 in spending on trainings, conferences, food and trade shows. The report cites Derby-related payments totaling \$338,452.10 by the Tourism Cabinet and Governor’s Office, six-figure annual conference costs by the Department of Public Advocacy and a \$34,392 banquet by the Department for Medicaid Services.

Beyond travel and events, the report lists \$69.8 million in “temporary manpower services,” nearly \$8 million by the Division of Driver Licensing, \$51.8 million in services categorized as “not otherwise classified,” \$118.4 million in “other” expenses and \$3.98 million for travel by non-state employees.

The Cabinet for Health and Family Services’ Office of the Secretary and Office of Medical Cannabis paid a single vendor \$339,365.90 for services that included video production and



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State Auditor Allison Ball presents a recent review of executive branch spending to the House Appropriations and Revenue Committee on Feb. 10.

consulting, editing, branding graphics, introductory materials and digital formatting. The contract also covered development and implementation of a social media strategy representing the cabinet and its agencies, as well as management of digital communications channels. The auditor’s report states it appears the competitive bidding process was not used to obtain the services.

Beshear responded to this finding, noting that false information was given under oath. “They spent \$93,000 to create training and educational videos for the public. The videos were for prospective medical cannabis licenses. They were for law enforcement about what’s legal and what’s not. They were for patients, providers, and for local government officials.”

He also denied the claim that the bidding didn’t go through a competitive process.

The report also highlights more than \$34.3 million in IT-related services at CHFS despite the cabinet having internal IT resources, and raises concerns about billing practices tied to certain contracted services within the Department for Community Based Services.

The Cabinet for Health and Family Services paid \$249,950 for a campaign that included messaging encouraging COVID-19 vaccinations. The Kentucky Historical Society paid \$83,500 for digital media and professional services.

CHFS offices also paid a vendor \$339,365.90 for video production, branding and social media strategy services. The auditor’s report states that it appears the competitive bidding process was not used to obtain those services.

The Council on

Postsecondary Education paid \$300,000 to promote the value of postsecondary education. CHFS’s Department for Aging and Independent Living spent \$198,000 on a media campaign for the Senior Meals Program, despite previously citing a program shortfall, and \$17,275 on promotional items. The Department for Community Based Services spent \$45,635.20 on promotional products.

Beshear said the \$198,000 for the Department of Aging and Independent Living was the membership fee paid to be included in a federally required public education program.

The auditor’s findings summarize extensive spending across multiple categories and call attention to procurement practices, oversight and internal controls within state government.

Ball told members of the Kentucky House Appropriations and Revenue Committee this week that some executive branch agencies are spending taxpayer dollars excessively, citing examples of travel, conference and event expenses.

“It is clear that some executive branch agencies are spending tax dollars extravagantly and this needs to stop,” Ball said in her presentation. “Public servants should be safeguarding money as if it was coming from their own pockets, rather than doling it out on extravagant travel and other unnecessary expenses.”

The Auditor’s Office reviewed executive branch spending data in the state’s eMARS accounting system, focusing on categories it identified as prone to wasteful or excessive spending, including out-of-state travel and advertising.

■ RULES CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

and local governments publish legal notices, including tax notices and public hearing announcements.

The proposal is the result of collaboration among the Kentucky Press Association, the Kentucky League of Cities and the Kentucky Association of Counties.

Jay Nolan, government affairs co-chair of the press association, told lawmakers the process involved compromise among stakeholders.

“There’s nothing in this bill that I love 100%, and I don’t think that’s true for any of us,” Nolan said. “But all of us feel like it modernizes the Kentucky public notice infrastructure.”

Jeff Jobe, the behind-the-scenes co-chair of the press association, said the agreement reflects roughly a year of work and began with conversations at the local level.

“This is an agreement that has been an entire year of working toward,” Jobe said. “We began by listening to the county judge-executives and mayors in the region our newspapers serve. I made notes of their needs, and

we then met with their organizations’ leadership, JD Chaney and Jim Henderson. The press association knew we were going to have to evolve if we were going to keep Kentucky legal notices in our weekly newspapers.”

Jobe said the negotiations addressed concerns raised throughout the process.

“As Nolan said in the Feb. 11 meeting, there were some thorny issues, and I’m pleased that we addressed every issue brought before our combined meetings,” he said.

He also credited the bill’s sponsor for initiating the effort.

“He asked me to try to establish a consensus with the organizations we have had to fight for 20 years on this issue, something I would never have attempted if he didn’t ask me to try,” Jobe said.

Sponsor Senate President Pro Tempore David Givens said lawmakers have long balanced two priorities: ensuring public transparency and controlling taxpayer costs.

“We have a need for transparency so that all the voters can understand how their tax money is being spent,” Givens said. “But we also have a need to minimize the amount of tax money we spend doing that.”

The legislation clarifies current law by defining a published statement of ownership, updating standards for which newspapers qualify to publish required legal notices, and requiring that public agencies be charged fair and reasonable rates.

It also incorporates language allowing online publication of legal notices.

Nolan said the bill would provide continuous statewide digital access to public notices at no cost to the state through the press association’s system.

Committee Chair Michael Nemes said he expects the measure to receive favorable consideration when it reaches the Senate floor.

The full text of the draft bill can be read at apps.legislature.ky.gov/recorddocuments/bill/26RS/sb141/orig_bill.pdf.

2/19/26

Super Crossword

REPTILIAN EMPIRE

ACROSS

1 Soft drink giant

9 Pappy

12 "Botch- —" (old hit song)

15 Masticate

19 Oval wind instruments

20 Took too far

22 Put concrete on

23 Start of a riddle

25 Partially

26 Heir, often

27 Penta- plus one

28 Spitting beast

30 Everything

31 Unusual

34 "Our Gang" novelist

37 Actress Peet of "Trust Me"

39 Riddle, part 2

44 Leonardo of "Titanic"

45 Curvy letter

46 Given a permanent post

47 Cereal grain

48 Computer menu option

50 Prefix with chemistry

53 Curiosity's planet

54 Riddle, part 3

60 Palatable

DOWN

1 Female whales

2 Eight, in Peru

3 "Misery" actor

4 Prado display

5 102, to Nero

6 Walk- — (small roles)

7 Plastering strip

8 Arthur of tennis

9 Troy of "A Summer Place"

10 Gardner or DuVernay of film

ACROSS

61 Computer menu option

62 Revise, as a manuscript

63 Yank's home

66 Try to be like

69 A couple of

71 Mice, e.g.

73 House divs.

74 Kinda

77 And higher, as in price

80 Perfect

81 Riddle, part 4

85 Dalai —

88 Contaminate

89 Big burden

90 Sports draw

91 Paper-folding craft

94 Part of BTW or OTC

96 "Allow me to assist"

99 End of the riddle

103 Allergy sufferer's device

104 White swan in "Swan Lake"

105 Audit org.

106 Spy's device

107 With

112-Across, "Hold on!"

109 Sneak attack

112 See

107-Across

115 Akron's state

DOWN

11 Biden's party: Abbr.

12 Basketball coach Rupp

13 Re-sol linkup

14 Boiled, salted soybeans

15 1040 pro

16 Dance similar to the tango

17 Unsaintly soul

18 Marshy habitats

21 Holy artifact

24 Trade show

29 "So true!"

31 Fertilizable cells

32 Chip go-with

33 Access Bo

35 "The risks outweigh the benefits"

36 Intense beam

38 Some reunion-goers

39 U.S. women's soccer star at the Atlanta Olympics

40 Living ink squirter

41 Assistant

42 Idaho's capital

43 Person doing penance

44 One searching for water with a divining rod

ACROSS

49 Tariff

51 Sporty truck, in brief

52 Daiquiri base

55 "Cool" cash amount

56 Very little, as of salt

57 Tantrum

58 Brian of electronica

59 Give as a bonus

63 Like wasted food

64 In a theatrical manner

65 Snoozing

67 Shoe tip

68 Like Nin's writings

70 "Mind Train" singer Yoko

72 Baseball great

73 Roush

75 Old Pan Am competitor

76 "Shy" singer DiFranco

78 ETs' craft

79 Fail to keep one's cool

81 Return to base after a fly ball

82 — nous

83 See 126-Across

84 "Likewise"

DOWN

85 African capital on the Gulf of Guinea

86 Wyoming tribe members

87 Small swine breeds

92 Several

93 Plant-eating sea mammal

95 Catches in a snare

97 "Planet Money" ailer

98 Includes

100 People lugging things

101 Politician Mo, Mark or Tom

102 Ship's rigging

108 "If only — known!"

110 — of March

111 Taboo thing

112 Litigated

113 Poet Pound

114 "— la viel"

116 "Well well!"

118 Charged atom

119 Animal park

120 Rx

121 Dude

122 Suffix of enzymes

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