

# 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.

The Council on

## RULES

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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](http://legislature.ky.gov/recorddocuments/bill/26RS/sb141/orig_bill.pdf).

2/19/26

## Super Crossword

REPTILIAN EMPIRE

ACROSS	61	117	11	49	85
1 Soft drink giant	Computer menu option	Riddle's answer	Biden's party: Abbr.	Tariff	African capital on the Gulf of Guinea
9 Pappy	62 Revise, as a manuscript	Vincent van —	12 Basketball coach Rupp	51 Sporty truck, in brief	50 Wyoming tribe members
12 "Botch- —" (old hit song)	63 Yank's home	124 Fastening feature of many a face mask	13 Re-sol linkup	55 "Cool" cash amount	87 Small swine breeds
15 Masticate	66 Try to be like	71 Mice, e.g.	14 Boiled, salted soybeans	56 Very little, as of salt	92 Several
19 Oval wind instruments	69 A couple of	73 House divs.	15 1040 pro	57 Tantrum	93 Plant-eating sea mammal
20 Took too far	71 Mice, e.g.	74 Kinda	16 Dance similar to the tango	58 Brian of electronica	95 Catches in a snare
22 Put concrete on	77 And higher, as in price	75 House divs.	17 Unsaintly soul	59 Give as a bonus	97 "Planet Money" ainer
23 Start of a riddle	80 Perfect	76 With	18 Marshy habitats	63 Like wasted food	98 Includes
25 Partially	81 Riddle, part 4	83-Down, Italian veal	21 Holy artifact	64 In a theatrical manner	100 People luging things
26 Heir, often	85 Dalai —	88 Contaminate	24 Trade show	65 Snoozing	101 Politician Mo, Mark or Tom
27 Penta- plus one	88 Contaminant	90 Big burden	29 "So true!"	66 Shoe tip	102 Ship's rigging
28 Spitting beast	91 Sports draw	91 Paper-folding craft	31 Fertilizable cells	67 Like Nin's writings	103 — known!
30 Everything	94 Part of BTW or OTC	94 Part of BTW or OTC	32 Chip go-with	68 Like Nin's writings	104 — of March
31 Unusual	96 "Allow me to assist"	96 "Allow me to assist"	33 Actress Bo	70 "Mind Train" singer Yoko	105 Taboo thing
34 "Our Gang" novelist Roth	99 End of the riddle	99 End of the riddle	35 "The risks outweigh the benefits"	72 Baseball great Roush	106 Litigated
37 Actress Peet of "Trust Me"	103 Allergy sufferer's device	103 Allergy sufferer's device	36 Intense beam	75 Old Pan Am competitor	107 Poet Pound
39 Riddle, part 2	104 White swan in "Swan Lake"	104 White swan in "Swan Lake"	38 Some reunion-goers	76 "Shy" singer DiFranco	108 "la vie!"
44 Leonardo of "Titanic"	105 Audit org.	105 Audit org.	39 U.S. women's soccer star at the Atlanta Olympics	78 ETs' craft	116 "Well well!"
45 Curvy letter	106 Spy's device	106 Spy's device	40 Living ink squitter	79 Fail to keep one's cool	118 Charged atom
46 Given a permanent post	107 With	107 With	41 Assistant	81 Return to base after a fly ball	119 Animal park
47 Cereal grain	108 Hold on!"	112-Across, "Hold on!"	42 Idaho's capital	82 — nous	120 Rx watchdog
48 Computer menu option	109 Sneak attack	112 See	43 Person doing penance	83 See	121 Dude
50 Prefix with chemistry	113 Akron's state	107-Across	44 One searching for water with a divining rod	126-Across	122 Suffix of enzymes
53 Curiosity's planet	115 Akron's state	115 Akron's state	84 "Likewise"		
60 Palatable					

