

# Senator Jimmy Higdon's Legislative Update

The 2026 Regular Session continued to move forward this week as committees reviewed legislation, heard testimony and advanced bills to the Senate floor. We're awaiting the state budget and road plan from the House of Representatives, and I continue to pay close attention to both because these proposals set the foundation for what we can do to support education, public safety, roads and local services across Kentucky. This stage of the session is when we dig into the details, refine proposals and make sure the bills we file are practical, responsible and reflective of what people back home are telling us they need.

## GROW YOUR OWN TEACHER WORKFORCE BILL MOVING FORWARD

One piece of legislation I sponsored that has real momentum is Senate Bill (SB) 22, the 'Grow Your Own' bill. This week, the Senate approved the bill and sent it over to the House for consideration. I'm proud of the work we've done on this bill because it addresses a real challenge our communities are facing. SB•22 expands dual credit opportunities for high school students enrolled in approved teacher apprenticeship programs. Starting in the 2027•2028 school year, eligible students can complete up to 20 required courses at no cost. This helps future teachers enter the profession with less debt, get real classroom experience and stay rooted in the communities they call home. We already see success in places like Nelson County, where local students have earned dual credit and moved on to teach in their own schools. This is about giving young people a clear path into teaching, keeping talented educators in their hometowns and strengthening our local schools. I'm grateful for the bipartisan support this bill has received, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the House to move it across the finish line.



JIMMY HIGDON

## PHONE DOWN KENTUCKY ACT ADVANCES

Another priority of mine this session is SB 28, the Phone Down Kentucky Act, which I have discussed recently. I filed this bill to improve road safety across the commonwealth. Currently, Kentucky law prohibits texting while driving, but drivers can still hold their phones, scroll through them or dial numbers while behind the wheel. SB 28 closes that gap by requiring hands-free use of cell phones for all drivers. By reducing handheld phone use, this legislation addresses one of the leading causes of driver inattention and moves Kentucky toward safer roads for everyone. Thirty-three other states already have similar laws in place. I am hopeful this bill will earn the support it needs in the House as it continues through the legislative process.

## FINANCIAL RELIEF FOR SENIORS

SB 51 is a constitutional amendment proposal that would let voters decide whether to freeze increases in the assessed value of homes for Kentuckians age 65 and older, which, in many cases, have priced those who are on fixed incomes out of their homes. Many seniors have told me this issue matters to them, and it's one of the issues we hear about most in the legislature. I was happy to co-sponsor this bill. Other bills moving forward SB 10 is another constitutional amendment and a Senate priority bill that, if approved by voters, would place a limit on gubernatorial pardon powers late in an administration. This bill reflects a long-standing effort to protect transparency and accountability. SB 13 allows military installations to appoint a nonvoting advisory representative to local planning commissions. The goal is to give nearby bases a formal voice in local land-use decisions that could impact national security or military operations. It

ensures better coordination between local governments and military facilities on development projects near their borders. SB 38 cuts costs and ER use by allowing neighborhood pharmacists to receive fair Medicaid reimbursement for all services they are qualified to provide, and at a lower cost to patients than hospitals. SB 40 allows a county judge/executive to fill vacancies on a library board with the fiscal court's approval, without being required to consider recommendations from the board or the state librarian, if the county has adopted an alternative process. The bill aims to give more autonomy and local accountability in library governance. SB 46 allows schools to use 10•passenger vans for regular student transportation and approved school activities. I joined many of my colleagues in supporting this measure to give local districts more options for safe and efficient transport.

## CLEANING UP SCHOOL COMMUNICATION RULES

The Senate Education Committee, on which I serve as a member, advanced SB•181 this week, a bill that clarifies parts of last year's school communication law of the same bill number. After the original law was passed with strong bipartisan support and signed by the governor, concerns emerged in the summer about exactly what was permitted between school staff and students. During committee discussion, I noted that this teachable moment shows the importance of hearing feedback while we are in session, so we can fix issues before schools try to implement them. SB•181 makes it clear that school-related calls, virtual instruction with parent involvement and public social media posts are all allowed. This correction strengthens the law and gives families and educators peace of mind about how communication works in their schools.

## KEEPING KENTUCKIANS INFORMED

Hearing directly from folks from LaRue, Marion,

Nelson, Spencer and Washington counties has been one of the most valuable parts of this session. Whether it's at committee hearings, community stops or conversations in the Capitol hallways, your input helps shape the work we do here. We still have a long session ahead, but I'm encouraged by the progress we're making. I'll continue working hard to make government work for you. Winter weather Due to severe winter weather, the General Assembly will not convene on Monday, January 26. Session will resume Tuesday, January 27. I'll have another update for you on week four next week. I hope you and your loved ones are safe and warm. A big thanks to our road crew workers, first responders, line workers, national guard and others who are out in snow and cold keeping our roads clear, communities safe and power on. If you have questions or concerns, I'm just a call or an email away. You can reach my office at 502-564-8100 or email me at Jimmy.Higdon@kylegislature.gov.

Sen. Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, represents the 14th Senate District, including LaRue, Marion, Nelson, Spencer, and Washington Counties. Higdon serves as chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, overseeing efforts to craft biennial road plans, advance Kentucky's transportation infrastructure, and improve public safety. He also serves as Senate co-chair of the Public Pension Oversight Board, focusing on stabilizing and strengthening Kentucky's pension systems through reform and surplus investment. Additionally, Higdon is a member of the Senate Committees on Education, Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection, and Licensing and Occupations. He is also a member of the Budget Review Subcommittee on Transportation. During the 2025 interim, he served on the Kentucky Housing Task Force. In September, Higdon announced he will retire from the state Senate at the conclusion of his current term at the end of 2026. The 2026 Budget Session will be his final representing the 14th Senate District.

# Auditor Allison Ball release Sheriff's audit reports

## SUBMITTED

*Editor's note: Since Spencer County Sheriff Scott Herndon stepped down before his term was up, and Andrew Ware was appointed as Sheriff, there were two separate audit reports done for 2024.*

## FORMER SPENCER COUNTY SHERIFF'S FEE ACCOUNT AUDIT

State Auditor Allison Ball released the audit of the 2024 financial statement of former Spencer County Sheriff Scott Herndon. State law requires the auditor to annually audit the accounts of each county sheriff. In compliance with this law, the auditor issues two sheriff's reports each year: one reporting on the audit of the sheriff's tax account, and the other reporting on the audit of the fee account used to operate the office. Auditing standards require the auditor's letter to communicate whether the financial statement presents fairly the receipts, disbursements, and excess fees of the Spencer County Sheriff in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America. The sheriff's financial statement did not follow this format. However, the sheriff's financial statement is fairly presented in conformity with the regulatory basis of accounting, which is an acceptable reporting methodology. This reporting methodology is followed for all 120 sheriff audits in Kentucky. Finding: Final settlement was materially misstated and not presented to the fiscal court. The Spencer County Sheriff did not present a final settlement to the fiscal court by March 15, 2025, as required by statute. The final settlement presented to the fiscal court on April 7, 2025, included receipts and disbursements for calendar year 2024 including both the outgoing and incoming sheriff's financial activities. As a result, receipts and disbursements were overstated by \$208,884.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the sheriff's office comply with KRS 64.830 by presenting an annual settlement to fiscal court upon vacation of office to accurately reflect total receipts and disbursements from January through August 2024.

County Officials Response: Former Sheriff's Response: The official did not provide a response.

## SPENCER COUNTY SHERIFF'S FEE ACCOUNT AUDIT:

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the sheriff comply with KRS 134.192 by presenting the final settlement to the fiscal court by March 15 each year.

## COUNTY OFFICIALS RESPONSE

Sheriff's Response: The official did not provide a response. The sheriff's responsibilities include collecting property taxes, providing law enforcement, and performing services for the county fiscal court and courts of justice. The sheriff's office is funded through statutory commissions and fees collected in conjunction with these duties.

# Spencer County Schools ask for participation in housing survey

## SUBMITTED BY SPENCER COUNTY SCHOOLS

The Spencer County School district is conducting a confidential housing survey to better understand the needs of students and families who may be experiencing housing challenges. This survey helps us identify students who may qualify for additional educational support and services under

the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. We encourage you to complete the survey, even if you may not qualify. Responses are private and only used to connect with families who want support. Thank you for your time and commitment to Spencer County Schools. Find the form at <https://forms.gle/v2mJRX29yYurdepR6>.

# 2026 meeting dates approved at BOE meeting

## BY JEFF SOPLAND THE SPENCER MAGNET

The Spencer County Board of Education set the meeting dates for 2026 at the Jan. 29 special-called meeting. All meetings are at 6 p.m. on Tuesdays unless noted otherwise.

Meeting Feb. 10 - Work Session Feb. 24 - Regular Monthly Meeting March 10 - Work Session March 24 - Regular Monthly Meeting April 28 - Regular Monthly Meeting May 12 - Work Session May 26 - Regular Monthly Meeting

Meeting June 9 - Superintendent Evaluation Work Session June 16 - Regular Monthly Meeting July 28 - Regular Monthly Meeting Aug. 11 - Work Session Aug. 25 - Regular Monthly Meeting Sept. 8 - Work Session

Sept. 22 - Regular Monthly Meeting Oct. - TBD - Special Called Work Session Oct. 27 - Regular Monthly Meeting Nov. 10 - Work Session Nov. 24 - Regular Monthly Meeting Dec. 15 - Regular Monthly Meeting

# The Spencer Magnet Business Directory

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