

# Senator Jimmy Higdon's Legislative Update

As we've reached the halfway point of the 2026 Legislative Session, I want to provide a clear update on where things stand and what Kentuckians can expect in the weeks ahead.



JIMMY HIGDON

With over 30 legislative days complete of the required 60, the Senate has remained focused on steady, deliberate progress. At this stage of the session, nine of the Senate Majority's 10 top-priority bills passed the Senate. That progress reflects months of preparation during the interim and careful consideration during committee and floor debate.

Before I begin, I have to express what a blessing it was to take part in my final Military Kids Day as your state Senator. Despite construction on our state Capitol Building, the event was a huge success thanks to the Kentucky National Guard, military families, our Senate clerk, my legislative assistant, and so many others who are involved and will remain involved beyond my time in Frankfort. It was a joy to watch the kids enjoy static displays on the Capitol campus, play with the aviation museum's flight simulators, hear from guest speakers and participate in the Capitol scavenger hunt. You can find a video clip of the day's events by going to the KY Senate Republicans YouTube Channel.

State budget update  
I have heard from many of you regarding the early budget bill filed in the state House of Representatives and the budget process more broadly. I understand these discussions affect real families, and I appreciate those who have taken the time to share their concerns.

It is important to clarify where we currently stand.

The state budget traditionally originates in the House of Representatives. The early House proposal has not yet passed that chamber and remains subject to committee revisions and floor amendments before reaching the Senate. The measure remains in its earliest stages.

To be clear: no final budget decisions have been made.

When the House delivers a proposed budget to the Senate, we will carefully review the proposal, evaluate any changes and make revisions where necessary. That is the Senate's constitutional responsibility, and we take it seriously.

Questions surrounding health insurance costs, benefit stability and long-term affordability deserve thoughtful review. Those issues require discipline, transparency and careful analysis. In fulfilling the Senate's role in the budget process, our guiding principles remain clear; we will

maintain a structurally balanced budget, ensuring recurring revenues support recurring expenses,

exercise discipline with one-time dollars and avoid short-term budgeting approaches that create long-term instability and

make thoughtful, transparent decisions that protect both taxpayers and public employees.

There is considerable work ahead before a final budget is enacted, and I will continue keeping you informed as the process moves forward.

With that, I want to update you on several bills making progress this week.

I'm happy to inform you that the first bill of the legislative session to be signed by the governor and become law is

Senate Bill (SB) 172. This bill I mentioned last week, upon its Senate approval. It provides an additional tool to the Kentucky Public Service Commission to address energy affordability challenges. Under the bill,

upon a utility company's request, the PSC could prevent sudden spikes in utility bills due to fuel surcharges by spreading the costs over time. I'm happy to see this bipartisan measure become law.

A number of bills passed the Senate chamber, some of which I sponsored.

As sponsor of SB 70, and in my role as chair of the Public Pension Oversight Board (PPOB), I brought forward a measure this week to strengthen oversight of Kentucky's public retirement systems. SB 70 makes appointment adjustments to PPOB to ensure that members have direct involvement in pension policy and relevant experience in retirement plan management. The bill adds the chair or vice chair of the Senate State and Local Government Committee and the House State Government Committee, along with the state treasurer or designee. It also allows appointing authorities to select former elected officials with pension expertise to serve. These changes strengthen accountability and improve institutional knowledge on the board. Our educators, state workers and retirees depend on us to protect the integrity of their retirement systems, and thoughtful oversight is essential to that responsibility.

As PPOB chair, I also sponsored SB 127 to address how annual leave is treated within the Teachers' Retirement System. This bill does not eliminate annual leave. It defines responsibility for the actuarial costs associated with accumulated leave and limits the retirement system's long-term exposure.

I also sponsored SB 80, a proposed constitutional amendment to restore voting rights.

I've had the pleasure of working with the primary co-sponsor of my bill, Sen. Keturah Herron of Louisville, on our joint efforts to pass this measure. The Senate passed identical legislation in 2020 before the session was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic. SB 80 provides clarity following the 2019 executive order on voting rights restoration by establishing a constitutional framework. Under this amendment, most individuals would have their voting rights automatically restored upon completion of their sentence and probation, with exceptions for election fraud, violent felony offenses, felony sexual offenses and crimes against a child.

The amendment preserves the governor's constitutional authority while providing clear statutory guidance to county clerks and the courts. It also removes outdated language from the constitution and replaces it with appropriate terminology.

This proposal allows the people of Kentucky to decide the issue directly at the ballot box.

Additional bills passed in week seven

SB 9 streamlines regulations and creates new

financing tools to support housing construction and redevelopment across Kentucky. I was proud to serve on the Kentucky Housing Task Force and be a co-sponsor of this measure. The bill is a product of the task force's work. By giving local communities greater flexibility to plan and fund growth, the bill aims to increase housing supply, strengthen local economies, and help more Kentuckians find homes they can afford.

SB 39 is another bill I co-sponsored. The measure gives private landowners greater flexibility to use and manage lakes and ponds on their own property by allowing them to stock and fish without certain state limits on size, creel or methods. It also allows landowners to extend those privileges to others through written or electronic permission, while maintaining safeguards to prevent misuse and protect public waters. The measure clarifies stocking rules, including for largemouth bass, and clearly defines what qualifies as a private lake or pond.

SB 47 expands state death benefits and tuition waivers to include search and rescue personnel who lose their lives while performing official emergency operations. This measure ensures families of these dedicated volunteers and professionals receive the same support as other emergency responders, recognizing their service and sacrifice.

SB 69 establishes an autism spectrum disorder trust fund and allows taxpayers to voluntarily contribute a portion of their state income tax refund to support autism research, services and workforce development. This effort will help strengthen resources for individuals and families across the autism spectrum and expand access to meaningful support statewide.

SB 104 establishes a 25-foot safety zone around first responders while they are performing official duties and creates penalties for individuals who intentionally interfere, threaten or harass emergency personnel. The measure, known as the HALO Act, is designed to protect those who serve on the front lines while preserving constitutional rights to observe and record.

SB 85 allows retirement benefits from Kentucky's public pension systems to be directed into a special needs trust for a disabled beneficiary. This change gives families greater peace of mind by protecting long-term care needs while preserving eligibility for Medicaid and other support services.

SB 141 modernizes Kentucky's public notice laws by clarifying publication requirements, updating timelines, expanding digital access and helping control taxpayer costs. The bill strengthens transparency while making it easier for citizens to stay informed about decisions that affect their communities.

SB 152 strengthens

school leadership and accountability by clarifying that principals have final decision-making authority while maintaining structured input from teachers and parents through advisory councils. The goal is to support strong, effective leadership that helps schools better serve students and families.

SB 154 strengthens Kentucky's voter ID law by updating the list of documents that may be used to verify identity when casting a ballot. The measure focuses on ensuring secure and reliable identification while maintaining confidence in the election process.

SB 159 strengthens Kentucky's response to missing persons cases by requiring timely reporting and improved coordination between state and federal databases. The bill helps ensure information is shared quickly, increasing the likelihood that missing individuals are located and families receive answers.

Senate Joint Resolution 74 directs the development of a statewide fiscal map of substance use disorder programs and funding. This effort will improve transparency, coordination and accountability as Kentucky continues investing in prevention, treatment and recovery services to support individuals, families and communities.

Each of these bills now advances to the House for further consideration.

As we enter the second half of the session, our focus remains on steady progress and responsible governance. Legislative deadlines are approaching, committees continue to meet daily, and collaboration between chambers will intensify.

Your engagement in this process matters. Good-faith communication strengthens public policy, and I encourage you to continue sharing your thoughts as the legislation advances.

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.



Photo submitted

## New Spencer County Sheriff's Office deputy sworn in

SUBMITTED

Everyone please join us in welcoming Deputy Brian Marchesseault to the Spencer County Sheriff's Office!

He was officially sworn in last week by Spencer County Judge Executive Scott Travis.

Deputy Marchesseault recently retired from the

Louisville Metro Police Department and resides in Spencer County. Prior to his law enforcement career, he proudly served our community for several years with Spencer County EMS.

We are honored to have his experience, dedication, and commitment to service joining our team.



Photo submitted

## 2026-2027 Kentucky fishing and hunting licenses available

BY KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES

The 2026-2027 Kentucky license year for fishing, hunting, boating and more began on Sunday, March 1. Outdoor enthusiasts are able to purchase all the licenses, tags and permits they need to enjoy Kentucky's outdoors through the end of February 2027.

Licenses and permits are sold online through the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resource's License Sales portal and the My Profile app, both searchable on the department's website at fw.ky.gov. Licenses and permits also are sold at agent locations across the state. A list of license agent locations by county is available on the department's website.

The 2026-2027 license and permit fees will remain the same as the current license year ending Saturday, Feb. 28, 2026. License and permit fees for the 2025-2026 license year were increased slightly across the board in January 2026 following a new, inflation-based pricing system measured on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the national measure of inflation calculated by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Federal Duck Stamp and application fees were exempt from CPI adjustments.

In Kentucky, a license covers basic hunting or fishing for many species, whereas additional state permits are required when pursuing specific species, such as

fishing for trout or hunting for migratory birds, deer, wild turkey or black bear. Sportsmen's-type licenses include multiple species permits as well as basic hunting and fishing privileges.

For newcomers to all the great outdoor opportunities that Kentucky has to offer, a reduced-cost sportsman's license is now available for resident first-time buyers. Only individuals who have not purchased an annual Kentucky hunting or fishing license - or a combination license that includes an annual license - since 1996 are eligible. The \$37 license includes a resident hunting and fishing license, spring turkey permit, fall turkey permit, trout permit, state migratory bird and waterfowl permit and statewide deer permit.

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife provides a number of resources to assist avid outdoor enthusiasts and newcomers alike with information on waterbodies, public lands, fishing and hunting education and all the regulations to help anglers and hunters make the most of their time outdoors via its website and the hunting and fishing guides it produces annually. This includes the new Fishing and Boating Guide available online and in print.

Another great resource is the Fish Boat KY app. Available free from the Apple App Store and Google Play, the app helps anglers find waterbodies, boat ramps and

SEE FISHING/PAGE A6

The Spencer Magnet  
Your Community. Your Newspaper.

**DROP BOX**

For your convenience, a locked drop box is located inside:



SPENCER COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Spencer County Public Library  
168 Taylorsville Rd.  
You can drop off news releases or other items for The Spencer Magnet.

Questions?  
Contact The Magnet at 502-633-4987

Library Hours:  
Mon & Wed 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.; Tue & Thur 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.;  
Fri - 10 a.m. - 4; Sat. 10 a.m. - 3

### LEGAL NOTICE

#### The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

In accordance with KRS 176.051, Kentucky's noxious weed law, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet will control noxious weeds on state-owned right of way at the request of the adjoining property owner. The noxious weeds named in this law are Johnson grass (Sorghum halepense), Canada thistle (Cirsium arvense), Cutleaf Teasel (Dipsacus laciniatus) Nodding thistle (Carduus nutans), Common teasel (Dipsacus fullonum), Poison hemlock (Conium maculatum), Marehail (Conyza canadensis), Amur Honeysuckle (Lonicera mackii), Multiflora Rose (Rose multiflora) Japanese knotweed, (Polygonum cuspidatum), Spotted Knapweed (Centaurea stoebe) and Kudzu (Pueraria montana).

Persons who own property adjacent to state right of way and who are involved in eradication efforts on their property can submit a written application to the highway district office in their area. Contact information can be found at transportation.ky.gov/DistrictPages