

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Health care, child protection, and road safety measure clear committee

One of the first things I learned my first session was how important legislative committees are to the work we do. Committees give lawmakers the chance to take a closer look at bills and better understand what they would do before they become law. Instead of rushing decisions, committees create space for thoughtful discussion and questions.

Committees also allow lawmakers to hear from many different people. This includes those who support a bill, those who have concerns, and people who have firsthand experience with the issue. Hearing these different viewpoints helps lawmakers understand how a bill might affect real people and communities, not just ideas on paper.

Another key role of committees is talking through possible changes to a bill. Lawmakers can fix unclear language, suggest improvements, and think about unintended consequences—problems that might happen even if they were not planned. By carefully reviewing bills and listening to others, committees help ensure laws are fair, effective, and work as

intended for the people they serve.

Committee meetings are held in the Capitol Annex and are open to the public. They are also livestreamed on the legislature's YouTube Channel, @LRCCCommitteeMeetings. Here are a few examples of the bills that cleared legislative committees during the last week of January:

- HB 4 would define and criminalize behavior commonly referred to as "grooming." Under provisions of HB 4, grooming refers to the manipulative and deceptive process by which a predator builds a relationship with a vulnerable person, such as a child, to gain their trust and access for abuse or exploitation.

- HB 139 would update and strengthen Kentucky's election laws to improve voter list accuracy, election security, and transparency while preserving voter access. The bill would refine voter registration maintenance procedures by using reliable data sources, clarify rules for inactive voters, and enhance record-keeping and

public inspection requirements.

- HB 140 would require the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) to conduct a quality assurance check six months after the completion of each highway marking project or other highway paint application.

- HB 164 would modernize how state law defines hearing aids and increases the amount covered by both public and private health insurance plans from \$1,400 to \$2,500. The measure also includes standards for services offered in a network required by an insurer or plan administrator.

- HB 169 would remove BMI, more commonly known as body mass index, from treatment standards used by health insurance plans marketed in Kentucky, ensuring that care decisions are based on clinical need rather than an arbitrary numerical threshold. Instead, the bill outlines factors such as eating behaviors and need for support interventions that should be used to determine the medical necessity of treatment.

- HB 189 would prohibit a person from sitting, kneeling, reclining, standing, or remaining physically stationary in any portion of a state-maintained right-of-way that is not designated for pedestrian use, with a few exceptions. Violators would be fined between \$20 and \$100 for each offense as outlined in Kentucky law.

- HB 276 would ensure that local governments cannot outright prohibit residents from keeping a small number of backyard chickens on residential property. The measure would allow individuals to keep up to six hens for personal egg production or educational purposes while continuing to give local governments authority to adopt reasonable health and safety regulations.

- HB 398 would clarify existing law to ensure the costs of decommissioning coal-fired plants can be recovered throughout the life of the plant, rather than at the end of the facility's life after misinterpretation by the Public Service Commission.



Before I finish, I would like to take a moment to recognize the road crews, first responders, emergency management, and all who helped in the days after Winter Storm Fern hit Kentucky. While we fared better than other states, it was a massive hit of ice, sleet, snow, freezing rain, and dangerously low temperatures. Winter is far from over, but it does look like we are getting back on our feet after this storm.

As always, I can be reached anytime through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via email at Mitchum.Whitaker@kylegislature.gov and keep track through the Kentucky legislature's website at legislature.ky.gov.

SENATE WEEK IN REVIEW: Regular Session Moves Into Full Stride



By Sen. Scott Madon

The Kentucky General Assembly continued its work this week as the 2026 Regular Session moved further into full stride. Committees met to review legislation, hear testimony, and advance bills, while the full Senate considered measures that had cleared the committee process. As week three concluded, the Senate is still awaiting the budget and road plan proposals from the House of Representatives. Once those are received, the Senate will begin its review of Kentucky's next two-year spending plan. In the meantime, I remain focused on sound policy and in close contact with local leaders and stakeholders across our district as we work together to address the needs of our communities.

This stage of the session is where much of the foundational work takes place. Lawmakers are asking tough questions, refining proposals, and working to ensure legislation is practical, responsible, and reflective of the needs of Kentuckians across the commonwealth.

Two Senate priority measures were filed this week as part of our broader effort to strengthen transparency, ac-

countability, and long-term stability in Kentucky's education system. Senate Bill (SB) 1 focuses on modernizing governance in Kentucky's largest and most complex school districts by clarifying roles, strengthening oversight, and aligning authority with accountability. The goal is to support long-term planning and operational stability without imposing a one-size-fits-all solution or a state takeover approach.

Another priority bill, SB 3, is aimed at improving accountability in local school district budgeting. The bill would establish clearer timelines, strengthen public review, and ensure school boards and taxpayers have better insight into how education dollars are being spent.

I also filed SB 106 to update the Kentucky Education Excellence Scholarship (KEES) program and ensure it keeps pace with today's post-secondary pathways, including students who choose to attend one of our nation's U.S. service academies. The bill modernizes scholarship definitions while preserving KEES' academic standards, helping ensure Kentucky students are supported whether they pursue traditional college options or a path of military service.

These bills are still early in the legislative process, and additional priority legislation will continue to move forward as the session progresses.

Floor activity in the Senate increased this week, with several measures passing the chamber and moving to the House of Representatives for further consideration. Among them were:

- SCR 9, which directs the state to commission an indepen-

dent study examining whether a community-based Medicaid pilot program could improve health outcomes, access to care, and cost efficiency.

- SB 10, proposing a constitutional amendment to prohibit governors from issuing pardons or commutations during the period leading up to a gubernatorial election and through the inauguration of the next governor.

- SB 13, known as the Military Installation Protection Act, which improves communication between military installations and local governments on land-use decisions that could impact national security.

- SB 22, which strengthens Kentucky's teacher pipeline by allowing students in approved teacher apprenticeship programs to access additional no-cost dual credit courses.

- SB 28, establishing the

"Phone Down Kentucky Act" to reduce distracted driving and improve roadway safety.

- SB 29, preventing duplicative local fees on out-of-district solid waste facilities and promoting more efficient waste management.

- SB 38, ensuring pharmacists are fairly reimbursed under Medicaid and KCHIP for services within their scope of practice.

- SB 46, providing school districts added flexibility in student transportation options while maintaining safety standards.

- SB 49, creating a statewide battery stewardship program to improve safe disposal and prevent fires at no cost to consumers.

- SB 51, proposing a constitutional amendment to provide additional property tax re-

lief for homeowners age 65 and older.

- SB 90, extending Kentucky's Behavioral Health Conditional Dismissal Program through 2031 to support recovery-focused alternatives to prosecution while maintaining accountability and public safety.

Despite ongoing construction at the Capitol, it was encouraging to see a strong turnout of visitors this week. Hearing directly from constituents, students, community leaders, and advocates, whether in formal meetings or brief hallway conversations, helps ensure the work remains grounded in real-world experiences.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you, and I look forward to keeping you updated as the work of the 2026 Regular Session continues.

Harlan Animal Hospital

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