

Kentucky Voters to Decide Limits on Governors’ Pardon Powers

The proposed constitutional amendment would create a 95-day blackout period around gubernatorial elections.

Kentucky voters will decide Nov. 3 whether to amend the state Constitution to temporarily block a governor from granting pardons or commuting criminal sentences around the time of a gubernatorial election. The legislatively referred measure, placed on the ballot through Senate Bill 10, would amend Section 77 of the Kentucky Constitution. It would prohibit pardons and sentence commutations beginning 60 days before the election for governor and ending on the fifth Tuesday after the election, when the governor elected for the new term is sworn in. Under current law, Kentucky’s governor may remit fines and forfeitures, commute sentences and grant reprieves and pardons, except in impeachment cases. The proposed amendment would leave those powers intact during most of a governor’s term but suspend pardons and commutations during the election-period window. The proposal also updates constitutional references to the governor with gender-neutral wording.

What a vote would mean

A “yes” vote would add the blackout period to the Constitution.

A “no” vote would keep the governor’s existing authority during that period.

Because the measure changes the Constitution, it takes effect only if a majority of voters approve it. The General Assembly approved the proposal with broad bipartisan support. The Senate passed it 36-0 in January. After the House approved an amended version 82-12 on April 1, the Senate concurred 36-1, and the measure was delivered to the secretary of state as Acts Chapter 12. Debate centers on accountability and flexibility

Supporters argue that the restriction would prevent outgoing governors from using clemency after voters have chosen a successor, when political accountability may be at its weakest. The proposal follows scrutiny of end-of-term pardons issued by previous Kentucky governors, including a large number granted by former Gov. Matt Bevin after he lost reelection in 2019.

Opponents may view the change as an unnecessary restraint on a constitutional power intended to correct injustice, show mercy or respond to urgent circumstances. Because the prohibition would be absolute during the covered period, a governor could not issue a pardon or commute a sentence even if new evidence or other time-sensitive considerations emerged.

The amendment would not transfer clemency authority to another offi-

cial during the restricted period, and it would not prevent the governor from remitting fines and forfeitures. Existing constitutional requirements that pardon applications and the governor’s reasons be open to public inspection would remain in place.

Decision rests with voters

The full ballot question and proposed constitutional text will appear for voters statewide. The Kentucky secretary of state’s office provides the official language but does not interpret the proposal or advise voters how to cast their ballots.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Are you in favor of limiting a Governor’s ability to grant pardons or commute sentences by prohibiting him or her from granting pardons or commuting sentences during the time period beginning 60 days prior to the general election at which the Governor is elected, and ending when the Governor is sworn in for that term by amending the Constitution of Kentucky as stated below?

It is proposed that Section 77 of the Constitution of Kentucky be amended to read as follows:

- (1) The Governor shall have power to:
- (a) Remit fines and forfeitures; and
- (b) Commute sentences and grant reprieves and pardons, except:
1. In case of impeachment; or
2. For the period beginning sixty days prior to the date of the gubernatorial election and ending the fifth Tuesday succeeding the election.
- (2) The Governor shall file with each application therefor a statement of the reasons for his or her decision thereon, which application and statement shall always be open to public inspection.
- (3) In cases of treason, the Governor shall have power to grant reprieves until the end of the next session of the General Assembly, in which the power of pardoning shall be vested; but he or she shall have no power to remit the fees of the Clerk, Sheriff or Commonwealth’s Attorney in penal or criminal cases.

YES

NO

Kentucky Youth Death by Suicide Increased 36% in 2024 - 2025

Kentucky Health News, Melissa Patrick

Two new reports from the Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center (KIPRC) provide a look at recent trends in suicide, nonfatal intentional self-harm, behavioral healthcare and nonfatal firearm injuries among Kentuckians. The “Kentucky Resident Behavioral Health Indicators Report, 2021–2025” found that 829 Kentucky residents died by suicide in 2025, while 2,457 were hospitalized for intentional self-harm and 3,435 visited the emergency department for intentional self-harm. Compared with 2024, suicide deaths increased 2%, hospitalizations decreased 1%, and emergency department visits increased 12%.

Changes among Kentucky youth

The report identifies larger year-to-year changes among youth. From 2024 to 2025, youth deaths by suicide increased by 36%, nonfatal intentional self-harm hospitalizations increased by 2% and intentional self-harm emergency department visits increased by 20%.

“What stands out the most is that while most statistics remain somewhat stable from 2024 to 2025, the most recent changes among youth are concerning,” said Alaina Murphy, KIPRC epidemiologist and co-author of the behavioral health report.

Murphy said year-to-year changes should be viewed within the context of longer-term patterns. She also noted that surveillance data describe what is occurring but do not establish the reasons behind the changes.

“This is why continued monitoring and a better understanding of the factors behind these trends are so important,” Murphy said.

From 2021 through 2025, 14- to 17-year-olds accounted for 3,949 of Kentucky’s 5,542 non-fatal intentional self-harm emergency department visits among youth. Youth ages 10 to 13 accounted for another 1,505 visits.

Girls represented 76.7% of youth intentional self-harm emergency department visits and 79.7% of related hospitalizations during the five-year period.

According to Murphy, the findings can help identify populations for which additional research, services, outreach and early intervention may be warranted. She emphasized, however, that prevention should not focus only on those groups.

Mental health involvement

The report cites 357 self-harm emergency department visits among youth ages 10 to 13 in 2025, compared with 285 in 2024, a 25% increase.

Anxiety disorders and depression or mood disorders were the two leading diagnoses for youth inpatient hospitalizations and emergency department visits from 2021 through 2025. The number of hospitalizations and emergency department visits for both diagnoses increased from 2024 to 2025.

Murphy said the findings may be relevant to families, schools, health care providers and community organizations because they demonstrate that self-harm is not limited to older adolescents.



During the five-year reporting period, Kentucky recorded 148,427 emergency department visits with a primary mental or behavioral health diagnosis (for all ages). The state also recorded 73,881 inpatient hospitalizations with a primary mental or behavioral health diagnosis.

Firearm injury findings

The report “Nonfatal Firearm Injuries in Kentucky, 2021–2025” shows 995 firearm-related emergency department visits and inpatient hospitalizations in 2025. That represents an 8.4% decrease from 1,086 visits in 2024. The annual number declined by approximately 45% over the reporting period, from 1,809 visits in 2021 to 995 in 2025. Firearm-related assault injuries declined from 266 in 2024 to 185 in 2025.

Residents ages 15 to 24 had the largest number of firearm-related emergency department visits and hospitalizations in 2025, with 306. Although visits declined among most age groups, increases were reported among adults ages 55 to 64 and those age 65 and older.

The firearm injuries report identifies 50 non-fatal self-harm firearm injury visits or hospitalizations in 2025, compared with 44 in 2024. The behavioral health report recorded 548 firearm-related suicide deaths in Kentucky in

2025.

Jacqueline Seals, principal investigator of “Kentucky Advancing Violence Epidemiology in Real Time” and co-author of the firearm injury report, said the relatively low number of non-fatal self-inflicted firearm injuries compared with suicide deaths underscores the lethality of firearms.

“Because firearms are highly lethal, many self-inflicted firearm injuries result in death rather than hospitalization,” Seals said. Seals also noted that determining the intent of a nonfatal firearm injury can sometimes be difficult, meaning the full burden of intentional self-inflicted firearm injuries may not be captured in medical records.

Connecting the findings

According to Seals, firearm injury surveillance can help identify populations and communities experiencing an elevated burden of suicide attempts and firearm-related harm. The information can then be used by communities when considering prevention strategies.

The authors described several approaches currently used in Kentucky, including behavioral health services, early intervention, safety planning, awareness of risk factors, crisis-response training and safe firearm storage.

“Taken together, these reports show that injury prevention, behavioral health and suicide prevention are deeply interconnected,” Seals said. Murphy said the findings represent more than statistical trends.

“These data are not just numbers,” Murphy said. “They represent people and families in Kentucky communities whose lives have been impacted by suicide and self-harm.”

People seeking crisis support may call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. In an immediate emergency, call 911. To find mental health treatment with availability near you, visit Find-HelpNow.org.

“It’s important to remember that there is hope if you or a loved one is dealing with a mental health-related distress or crisis.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Hotline is a resource available to you.”