LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT & INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes

October 8, 2026

Call to Order and Roll Call

The seventh meeting of the Legislative Oversight and Investigations Committee was held on Thursday, October 8, 2026, at 1 p.m. ET/12 p.m. CT in Room 129 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Greg Elkins, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Greg Elkins, Co-Chair; Senator Jason Howell, Vice-Chair; Senators Danny Carroll, Gerald A. Neal, and Reginald L. Thomas; Representatives John Blanton, Lindsey Burke, Adrielle Camuel, Matt Lockett, Steve Riley, Tom Smith, and Wade Williams.

Guests: Lesa Dennis, commissioner, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health and Family Services; Melanie Taylor, director, Division of Protection and Permanency, Cabinet for Health and Family Services; Wes Duke, general counsel, Cabinet for Health and Family Services; Juan A. Renaud, deputy commissioner, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs; LaDonna Scott, deputy executive director, Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs; and Lily Patteson, executive director and general counsel, Office of Veteran Legal Services, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs.

LRC Staff: Jacob Blevins, Austin Fraley, Christopher T. Hall, Taylor Johnston, Maegan Mohr, Jonathan Rickett, William Spears, Austin Sprinkles, Shane Stevens, Joel S. Thomas, Holly Tracy, and Olivia Walton.

Approve Minutes from September 10, 2026

Upon motion by Representative Williams and second by Representative Lockett the minutes for the September 10, 2026, meeting were approved without objection.

Staff Report on Child Abuse Intake

Committee staff analysts Christopher T. Hall, Jacob Blevins, and Taylor Johnston presented the committee memorandum *Screening Of Child Maltreatment Claims In Kentucky*. Staff provided an overview of Department of Community Based Services (DCBS) intake procedures, from the time a claim is submitted until DCBS determines if further investigation is needed. The memorandum and presentation are available on the LOIC website.

In response to Representative Lockett, Mr. Hall said all reports must be completed by end of shift and once it is approved by a supervisor, the determined response time clock starts.

In response to Senator Carroll, Mr. Hall said he did not know how the system reacts if an incident was reported some time after the fact nor was he aware of cases that involve referrals from other states, but the cabinet would likely be able to answer those questions.

In response to Senator Howell, Mr. Hall said the Structured Decision Making tool (SDM) was implemented in 2022 as part of an initiative toward federal standardization.

In response to Representative Camuel, Mr. Hall said staff did not identify a rise in certain types of maltreatment since it was out of the memorandum's scope. Mr. Blevins said custodial responsibility is described in KRS 620.040.

In response to Chair Elkins, Mr. Hall said staff did not track how often report response times were upgraded or downgraded by DCBS during supervisor consultation. Mr. Blevins said staff asked about incidents screened out during supervisor consultation, but were given no specific examples of that happening.

Agency Response to Intake Research Memorandum

Lesa Dennis, commissioner, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS); Melanie Taylor, director, Division of Protection and Permanency, CHFS; and Wes Duke, general counsel, CHFS, were available to answer questions about the LOIC memorandum.

In response to Senator Carroll, Commissioner Dennis said DCBS will pass along reports to other states if they are referred or happen out of state. Ms. Taylor said reporting delays do not affect response time; it would be handled the same as if it had been reported immediately. Commissioner Dennis said Kentucky does not currently use an AI tool to judge cases. A case worker and supervisor still make a clinical judgment on response times.

In response to Representative Smith, Mr. Duke said he did not have information on the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, but Mr. Duke would get the information for him.

In response to Senator Howell, Commissioner Dennis said the SDM tool analyzes information to determine if DCBS needs to be involved. If DCBS involvement is required, then they will respond. If an incident occurred 2 weeks prior and evidence is gone, that would impact the fact-finding, but it is not part of the criteria for DCBS to be involved. Under federal law, every state must have a safety model in place, but there are many models from which to choose. If a worker responds to a report, they can apply their knowledge of the family to guide how quickly they respond. Additionally, all screened-out cases are still reviewed by county supervisors who can submit it for reevaluation if appropriate. Once a case worker responds to a report, they meet with their supervisor to discuss next steps. Workers cannot initiate removal themselves and must contact the county attorney to begin that process. Private citizens can also report to the county attorney or law enforcement themselves.

In response to Chair Elkins, Commissioner Dennis said when a case worker receives a report with suspected abuse, they interview the child and observe for injuries. Next, the case worker consults with a supervisor, then goes to the home and meets with the parents to see if risks can be mitigated. Since each case is different, there is not a typical timeline between initial contact with the child and the time of potential child removal. In some instances, placing the child with a relative is enough to warrant DCBS not taking custody of the child.

Representative Blanton reiterated that DCBS workers do not have the same authority to remove a child as law enforcement.

In response to Senator Howell, Commissioner Dennis said it is possible for a social worker to call law enforcement to remove a child, but they are not expected to be knowledgeable of law enforcement's authority. Staff are trained to know what their options are in those situations. If law enforcement is there with a social worker in the situation, law enforcement can intervene if needed. Social workers provide information to judges regarding living conditions and home life. Social workers have the ability to call law enforcement if the situation becomes volatile. Mr. Duke said they cannot comment on specifics of an ongoing case. DCBS learns from reviewing difficult cases. Commissioner Dennis said they gather information and review incidents to determine what disciplinary action should be taken. Mr. Duke said for the case identified by Senator Howell, the report was screened in and the contact was the initial contact between DCBS and the family. Commissioner Dennis said she would consider if any statutes hindered DCBS workers from making decisions in the moment to protect children. Ms. Taylor said "substantiated" or "unsubstantiated" are not the only pathways for family cases and there are other options that allow for more flexibility with moderate cases.

In response to Senator Thomas, Mr. Duke said there is no standard metric for a target number of cases but DCBS strives for the best. Commissioner Dennis cautioned against putting a goal on the number of cases because many factors impact an increase or decrease in the number of reports.

Chair Elkins suggested an equivalent to a corporate "near miss" review, wherein the cabinet reviews incidents where processes almost failed but did not reach a failure point.

After a roll call vote, the staff report *Screening Of Child Maltreatment Claims In Kentucky* was adopted without objection.

State Veterans' Centers Update

Juan A. Renaud, deputy commissioner, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA); LaDonna Scott, deputy executive director, Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers, KDVA; and Lily Patteson, executive director and general counsel, Office of Veteran Legal Services, KDVA, gave an overview of their agency update to the 2025 LOIC report *Kentucky Veterans' Centers.* The Thomson-Hood modernization project began in February 2026 and is currently in Phase C design with the Division of Engineering and Contract Administration. Upon completion, the number of beds will change from 285 to 154. KDVA plans to open the closed unit at the Western

Kentucky Veterans Center which will add 23 single occupancy rooms. KDVA has revised its customer relationship management program to include acceptance, denial, and deferral updates as well as an appeals process.

In response to Chair Elkins, Ms. Scott said KDVA has 10 business days to review additional records provided and respond to appeals. Ms. Scott and the center administrator will review the appeal and decide whether to accept the application. The Bowling Green Veterans' Center is still under construction but they hope to admit their first veterans soon.

In response to Representative Lockett, Ms. Scott said she does not believe KDVA veteran center care costs twice as much as private facilities. The prices are comparable when considering additional services at KDVA veteran centers, like laundry. Private sector facilities seek specific insurance types to cover cost of care.

Adjournment

Upon motion by Representative Lockett and second by Senator Howell, the meeting was adjourned at 2:23 p.m. ET/1:23 p.m. CT.