

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON LICENSING, OCCUPATIONS, AND ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the 2026 Interim

June 18, 2026

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 1st meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations was held on June 18, 2026, at 11:00 AM ET/10:00 AM CT in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Julie Raque Adams, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Matthew Koch, Co-Chair; Senator Julie Raque Adams, Co-Chair; Senators Cassie Chambers Armstrong, Karen Berg, Donald Douglas, Jimmy Higdon, Jason Howell, Stephen Meredith, and Michael J. Nemes; and Representatives Emily Callaway, Mike Clines, Stephanie Dietz, Anne Gay Donworth, Daniel Fister, Al Gentry, Samara Heavrin, Thomas Huff, Nima Kulkarni, Michael Meredith, Amy Neighbors, Rebecca Raymer, Tom Smith, and Nick Wilson.

Guests: Joni Upchurch, Executive Director, Kentucky Board of Cosmetology (KBC); Eden D. Stephens, General Counsel, KBC; Mason McNulty, Administrator, Kentucky Board of Barbering (KBB); Wesley Whistle, Board Member, KBB; Liam Gallagher, Deputy State & Government Affairs Director, Americans for Prosperity-Kentucky; Michael Frazier, State Affairs Manager, Goldwater Institute; Chad Reese, Senior Policy Advisor, Institute for Justice; and Sean Ralston, Kentucky barber.

LRC Staff: Bryce Amburgey, Wendy Craig, CaraBell Preece, and Angela Rhodes.

Cosmetologists

Joni Upchurch, Executive Director, KBC, said the KBC protects the health, safety, and welfare of the public by regulating the practice of cosmetology and related professions. The board establishes and enforces standards for sanitation, education, licensure, and professional conduct while ensuring compliance with Kentucky law and supporting a safe and professional beauty industry. As of June 1, 2026, KBC oversees 35,840 active licensees across 13 license types, 5,910 licensed facilities, and 56 licensed schools.

Ms. Upchurch discussed agency challenges identified in 2024. An internal comprehensive review and Legislative Oversight and Investigations Committee (LOIC) report identified several operational and administrative challenges requiring corrective action. Staffing issues and vacancies contributed to service delays and inconsistent customer support. Daily operational responsibilities have improved with full staffing and enhanced employee training. She also noted the KBC website was extensively updated to improve transparency and public access. Areas requiring additional structure and consistency included: inspection procedures; gift reporting protocols; appeals and hearing processes; and fine assessment and payment procedures.

In response to Representative Smith, Eden Stephens, General Counsel, KBC, said several cases are in litigation, or still pending. She said attorney fees for board members are not being paid by the general fund or taxpayer dollars.

Co-Chair Koch thanked Ms. Upchurch and her staff for addressing the issues and finding solutions. Ms. Upchurch said the KBC has made significant progress in addressing operational, fiscal, regulatory, and customer service challenges. Through strengthened governance, enhanced training, improved transparency, and strategic modernization efforts, the agency is positioned to continue protecting Kentucky consumers while supporting a professional, accountable, and well-regulated cosmetology industry.

Barbers

Mason McNulty, Administrator, Kentucky Board of Barbering, explained the board is an independent state agency responsible for protecting the public from misrepresentation, deceit, or fraud in barbering practices and education. The board oversees barber shops, barber schools, instructors, and individual barbers, ensuring compliance with laws and regulations. It consists of 4 licensed, practicing barbers and one consumer member.

Mr. McNulty discussed the proposed impact of 2026 RS HB 273 on the community and its attempt to reduce Kentucky's required barbering education hours, currently at 1,500 hours for licensure. The national average is 1,200 hours, and many states require between 500 and 1,000 hours. Kentucky only has a few licensed barbering schools serving more than 4.5 million residents. This creates significant geographic and financial barriers for many prospective barbers, particularly in rural communities. A revised draft of 2026 RS HB 273 will be available for committee members to review in November in preparation for 2027.

Chair Raque Adams said the interim is the appropriate time to vet cosmetology and barbering issues. She referred members to the copy of 2026 RS HB 885, relating to cosmetology, in the members' packets for review and input.

In response to Senator Meredith, Mr. McNulty said his job is to protect the public and follow the laws established by the General Assembly. As a licensee, he also relates to protecting the barbering profession. Senator Meredith said some boards and commissions have become problematic because of a lack of transparency and accountability. The Cabinet for Public Protection does not encompass all boards that have public protection functions and this issue needs to be reviewed.

In response to Senator Nemes, Mr. McNulty said sanitation is the most important public protection factor in barbering. Tools and facilities must be sanitized to avoid cross contamination. Senator Nemes said health departments are responsible for checking sanitation and it seems the board may be protecting the profession.

In response to Senator Berg, Mr. McNulty said there is an open inspector position in Jefferson County that should be filled in the next fiscal year. All other inspections across the state are up-to-date. The board meetings and minutes are current. Board minutes are not posted online, but he will send them to her.

In response to Senator Meredith, Mr. McNulty said the board administers the licensing exams, including a written and practical exam. Senator Meredith said the legislative and executive branches have responsibilities even if the board acts independently.

In response to Representative Donworth, Mr. McNulty said the barbering license includes haircuts, perms, shampoos, shaving, massage, waxing, color, and chemical straightening. Representative Donworth said more extensive services, like hair coloring, involve more public protection issues than hair trimming.

Michael Frazier, State Affairs Manager, Goldwater Institute, supports expanding pathways into barbering by reducing unnecessary barriers to work, creating new apprenticeship opportunities, developing additional credentialing pathways through higher education, and allowing more Kentuckians to earn a living through supervised, skills-based training.

Mr. Frazier said barbering is a skilled trade and workforce credential. Kentucky has successfully pursued occupational-licensing reforms in other professions, and he recommended adopting the Goldwater Institute's Breaking Down Barriers to Work Act.

Chad Reese, Senior Policy Advisor, Institute for Justice, said state regulatory agencies too often apply onerous restrictions to business activities outside their statutory control, preventing employment.

Mr. Reese said The Right to Earn a Living Act requires state regulatory agencies to show some legitimate public harm before an occupational regulation can prevent someone from working in a given profession. The Institute for Justice is working with states across the country on barbering issues. It has found Kentucky to be the 3rd most burdensome state for obtaining a barbering license.

Sean Ralston, barbershop owner in Owensboro, testified about the need to train and hire new barbers. He said Kentucky regulations are outdated and he supports apprenticeship ideas.

Mr. Frazier said the General Assembly could build upon Kentucky's existing workforce development infrastructure. The Kentucky Board of Barbering would continue to oversee licensure, examinations, sanitation standards, inspections, and enforcement.

Co-Chair Koch asked Mr. McNulty to provide him a copy of the school curriculum and tuition rates. He reiterated the need to protect consumer safety if board regulations are modified.

In response to Senator Meredith, Mr. Frazier said they gave KCTCS a proposal showing how states such as Virginia, Louisiana, Wisconsin, and North Carolina have partnered with their community colleges to provide barbering certificates. In response to Senator Nemes, Mr. Frazier said there are options to expand workforce opportunities and reduce licensure barriers, while maintaining strong public protection.

Senator Douglas supports apprenticeships, but cautioned of the need for litigation reform when discussing the differences in skills versus standards.

Representative Clines supports the Kentucky Board of Barbering and looks forward to seeing their proposals in November.

In response to Senator Meredith, Mr. Frazier said breaking down barriers and universal recognition licensing has been passed in multiple states and unleashed \$1.3 billion in the Arizona economy through reciprocity. Mr. Reese said there should be several pathways and models to license new barbers.

In response to Chair Raque Adams, Mr. McNulty said Kentucky has reduced the number of hours required to be a barber from 2,000 to 1,500. Several states have a higher number of required barbering education hours.

In response to Representative Callaway, Mr. McNulty said apprenticeship programs have not been presented to the board, but he supports the idea. Mr. Frazier said the board would need statutory authority to have apprenticeship programs as well.

In response to Senator Nemes, Mr. McNulty will continue to research developing a registered apprenticeship program.

Adjournment

With no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 12:18 p.m.