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Legislative committee hears from rural health experts

By Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Several experts offered overviews on the state of rural health care during an Interim Joint Committee on Health Services meeting on Aug. 18.

Zil Joyce Dixon Romero, senior manager of state government for the National Rural Health Association, testified that 62 million Americans live in rural areas, and Medicaid, Medicare and the government-run health insurance marketplace are disproportionately covering rural residents.

“Notably, across all states, we are starting to see some really damaging trends beginning to emerge. When looking at the rural health landscape, we see over 190-plus rural hospitals have closed since 2010, with 430 rural hospitals vulnerable to closure in the United States currently,” he said.

Kentucky’s numbers are not that disproportionate to national trends in terms of vulnerability and negative operations margins, he said. But Romero explained that Kentucky has disproportionate challenges related to shortage area designations for physicians.

The national shortage totals around 15,000



Committee co-chair, Rep. Kimberly Poore Moser, R-Taylor Mill, speaks during the Aug. 18 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Health Services.

physicians, while Kentucky needs to fill about 388 positions to bridge the gap in rural areas, he said.

Romero said the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act could impact Kentucky facilities, and that

about 16-20% of state hospitals are considered financially vulnerable.

Committee co-chair, Sen. Stephen Meredith, R-Leitchfield, asked Romero if he is optimistic about the future of rural health care.

Romero said he is optimistic for two reasons: It’s a highly innovative space in which people genuinely care about their neighbors. Also, when people go to rural facilities, they want to help each other and figure out solutions to maintain their coverage and care.

Meredith said he has concerns, and cited almost 40 years of health care experience.

“In this space, I’ve always prided myself on being an optimist,” he said. “I’m that little boy in the room with manure that’s looking for the pony. But I can tell you for this particular issue, I’m not optimistic because looking back over the last 40 years, a lot of problems we’re seeing today we saw 40 years ago, just magnified.”

Three representatives from the Center of Excellence in Rural Health at the University of

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Kentucky also testified. The center was established by the general assembly in 1990 to address rural health disparities and challenges Kentucky communities face.

CERH programs include community health through Kentucky Homeplace workers, statewide rural health support, education and outreach, research and workforce innovation, and community technology and support services.

Committee co-chair, Rep. Kimberly Poore Moser, R-Taylor Mill, asked about the Healthcare Worker Loan Relief Program of the Commonwealth.

“Who are the health care workers who are primarily using the loan forgiveness program,” she asked.

Matthew R. Coleman, director of the Kentucky Office of Rural Health at the CERH, said varying health care workers benefit from the program, including mental health professionals. He said the types of workers who use the program change throughout the years.

House Minority Caucus Chair Lindsey Burke, D-Lexington, said she has been asked recently about noncompete clauses in provider contracts.

“Doctors and other folks in the field are telling me that that’s a hinderance to them being able to continue practicing medicine, especially in rural areas,” she said.

Coleman said he will take down the question and reach out to his counterparts and those in other states to gather information to share with Burke.

Meredith asked those from the CERH what the legislature can do to make them more successful and impact the entire state. Additionally, he said he wants to hear from CERH staff if they need more

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Interim committee receives update on state budget revenues

By Jordan Hensley - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Kentucky saw a higher than predicted increase in general fund revenue at the end of the 2025-26 fiscal year, while the state’s road fund did not.

State Budget Director John Hicks gave the Interim Joint Committee on Appropriations and Revenue an update on the numbers on Aug. 5.

At the conclusion of the 2025-26 fiscal year, Hicks said the state general fund received \$476 million more in revenue than the official estimated total. The budget reserve trust fund also now sits at \$2.9 billion.

Sales and use tax, individual income tax and major business tax receipts were major contributors to the general fund revenue in the last fiscal year, according to Hicks.

“The headliner is sales and use (tax) at 6.4% (growth),” he said. “... Having 6.4 is a really good year. It shows, again, that nationally, consumption drives the U.S. economy.”

The individual income tax receipts also grew by 4.6%, despite the individual tax rate dropping from 4% to 3.5% in January.



Sen. Christian McDaniel, R-Ryland Heights, shares his concerns about the road fund revenue shortfall during the Aug. 5 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Appropriations and Revenue Committee. McDaniel also serves as co-chair of the committee.

“That’s always a good statement about wages and salaries,” Hicks said about the growth.

During the presentation, Hicks noted that lottery receipts grew by 5.5%.

“We continue to find that interesting given we have sports wagering in Kentucky,” Hicks added.

Sen. Amanda Mays Bledsoe, R-Lexington, said the lottery receipts caught her attention as well.

“Especially since we consistently hear how much it’s dropping and the impact that has on some of our higher education dollars,” she said. “Any indication on why that raised? ... Are you tracking the impact of both moving forward to see if there’s any trends related to the lottery or sports gambling?”

Hicks said that, according to a member of his staff, revenues increase in a year with high Powerball jackpots.

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State budget revenues,

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“Scratch-off tickets are a major component of their revenue streams,” Hicks said. “Both of those did well. The thing that is kind of hard to guess is those Powerball jackpots rising ... They did pretty well on scratch-offs. We did really well on high Powerball.”

Hicks said his office is also tracking the impact of sports wagering, and described the revenues as “healthy and exceeding expectations.”

The second half of Hicks’s presentation focused on the 2025-26 fiscal year road fund receipts. Hicks told the committee the road fund saw a \$72.4 million revenue shortfall primarily due to lower motor fuel revenues.

Committee co-chair, Sen. Christian McDaniel, R-Ryland Heights, noted the governor suspended the state’s gas tax for six weeks at the end of the fiscal year.

“If you look at the official estimate versus the actuals, but for the action of the governor, we would have met the official estimate?” McDaniel asked.

Hicks said “yes.”

While gas tax revenues were down, Hicks noted motor vehicle usage taxes were higher than estimated. He said \$734 million in revenue is another record high.

“We’ve had like three straight years of record high, at least, of motor vehicle usage tax,” he said. “So that offsets the gas tax and the other elements that are much smaller pieces of the road fund.”

Hicks also told the committee there were several steps taken to address the shortfall. There was an adjustment in the revenue sharing appropriation for cities and counties. Unexpended appropriations in other areas of the transportation budget were transferred to the road fund and overall budget reductions were made.

McDaniel expressed concern over the shortfall’s impact on cities and counties.

“They’re certainly bearing a fairly disproportionate burden of the shortfall,” he said.

Legislators receive update on national education assessment numbers

By Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — The Interim Joint Committee on Education heard testimony Aug. 4 about the latest numbers from the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Jennifer Stafford, associate commissioner of the KDE’s Office of Assessment and Accountability, offered a NAEP overview. She said it’s often referred to as the nation’s report card, first administered in 1969. It provides states benchmarks for comparison and benchmarks for each state to compare its prior data.

“The NAEP is given to a sample of students, so not all students nor all schools participate,” she said.

Stafford reported on the 2024 NAEP math and reading results from grades 4 and 8. The 2026 assessment was administered during the winter, and the results are not available yet.

From 2022 to 2024, Kentucky’s grade 4 reading score increased from 217 to 218, and the grade 4 math score increased from 234 to 238.



Sen. Stephen West, R-Paris, speaks Aug. 4 during a meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Education. Legislators received an overview of the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Both increases outpaced national averages.

Stafford said the improvement in reading marked a “statistically significant change, and that’s to be celebrated because that’s a meaningful difference.” Nationally, the number fell 2 points to 214.

In grade 8, Kentucky’s scores did not change in reading but increased from 269 to 271 in math while national scores fell in both categories.

Committee co-chair, Sen. Stephen West, R-Paris, said it appears funding to improve scores is being used in an efficient manner.

“I want to give you some positive feedback,” he said. “I think your implementation on Read to Succeed and numeracy has been very effective. When we first did that, honestly, I didn’t expect much results for four of five years, and I think you’re way ahead of schedule.”

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Lawmakers on transportation committee discuss delivery robots

By Jordan Hensley - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Robots are here – and sometimes they bring dinner directly to your door.

The Interim Joint Committee on Transportation discussed potential legislation to regulate those robots, also known as personal delivery devices, in the commonwealth on Aug. 4.

Rep. Chris Lewis, R-Louisville, filed House Bill 741 this year, but the bill did not become law.

The legislation would have defined a personal delivery device as a device intended primarily to transport cargo on sidewalks, crosswalks, bicycle lanes or paths; shoulders, sides of streets or roadways or highways; parking lots or similar areas.

Most personal delivery devices operate autonomously.

HB 741 would have also restricted the speed of the devices and required \$100,000 in liability insurance for the companies deploying the devices.

DoorDash has been advocating for legislation like HB 741 across the country in recent years, according to Jake Holmgreen, senior associate of southeast government relations for the delivery company.

"This year alone, especially in the south, we've had a lot of success passing legislation," he said. "We just last month passed legislation allowing this in North Carolina."

DoorDash has developed its own personal delivery device called Dot. The red robot weighs 350 pounds, can carry up to 30 pounds of cargo and can travel up to 20 mph. Holmgreen said the devices are autonomous and are for deliveries within 3 to 5 miles.

Currently, Dot is only operating in California and Arizona.

Holmgreen said safety is a priority for DoorDash. While every Dot is autonomous, the company has humans on standby that can take over operating the robot remotely and can communicate with humans on-site through its built-in two-way radio.

The robots are also equipped with lights and cameras, and the company carries \$100,000 in liability insurance.

"It will also make sounds," Holmgreen said. "And it's designed to behave as a cautious bicyclist, so deferring to pedestrians, vehicles, other cyclists, that



Sen. Gary Clemons, D-Louisville, expresses concern about job losses in relation to personal delivery robots during the Aug. 4 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Transportation.

sort of thing."

The purpose of Dot and other personal delivery devices is to meet the increasing demand for delivery across Kentucky and the country, Holmgreen said.

"The robot would take priority of kind of smaller orders to allow those dashers, those human drivers, to complete larger, more financially rewarding, lucrative deliveries," he said. "We're not looking to replace drivers, right? We're looking to supplement their work and keep up with the increase of demand and also give them better earning opportunities."

During discussion, Sen. Gex Williams, R-Verona, asked Holmgreen to provide more information on the data the company has on the mileage and safety of these devices.

"You're collecting data. Do you have any data on the safety, the amount of mileage, that sort of thing?" Williams asked.

Holmgreen said DoorDash has around 200,000 miles on the road with its personal delivery devices so far with no reported major safety incidents or injuries.

Safety was also on the mind of Rep. Anne Gay Donworth, D-Lexington. She said she's almost hit one of these types of devices with her car in Lexington. She believes any potential legislation regulating these robots should have a higher liability insurance requirement.

"I would encourage an increased amount of liability coverage. If you're talking about an accident and it involves multiple cars or pedestrians, additional health emergencies come out of it," she said.

On the topic of the human impact of the devices, Donworth also advocated for better pay for human delivery drivers.

Sen. Gary Clemons, D-Louisville, wanted to know more about the humans monitoring the devices remotely for issues.

Holmgreen said he did not have an exact number to share, but he knows there are humans monitoring the devices 24 hours a day, seven days a week and each person has a group of robots assigned to them.

Clemons said the potential job loss for humans is a concern for him.

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funding to improve rural health.

“You need to be more aggressive. You need to be more assertive and be more specific about what can we do to address these issues that have been here for ages, it seems like,” Meredith said.

William Mace Baker, interim director of the CERH and director of Kentucky Homeplace, said he’s confident if his organization had not produced community health workers, physical therapists and medical providers, the current health situation would be worse.

Baker said he would welcome expanding programs such as Kentucky Homeplace – a program that pairs rural residents with health and social services via community health workers – statewide.

“We’d love to,” he said.

National education assessment numbers, from page 3

Committee Co-Chair Rep. James Tipton, R-Taylorsville, said lawmakers can pass bills but progress also depends on implementation. He said he has attended conferences this summer, hearing discussion about the “Mississippi miracle.”

“There is a new term out there. It’s called the ‘southern surge’ because states in the South have followed Mississippi, and we’re seeing the benefit of that,” he said.

Robots, from page 3

“I’m concerned any time we do something autonomous that we’re losing jobs, and that’s one thing I’m definitely not interested in,” he said.

The Kentucky General Assembly cannot take action on legislation until the 2027 legislative session begins on Jan. 5.



Committee Meetings

Minutes for committees that met recently may be found at the following sites:

Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Ag/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Appropriations and Revenue:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/A&R/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Banking and Insurance:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/B&I/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Economic Development and Workforce Investment:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/EDWI/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Education:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Education/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/IJCF&C/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Health Services:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/IJCHS/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Judiciary:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Judiciary/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/LO&AR/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Local Government:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Loc_Gov/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Energy:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/NR_&_E/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on State Government:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/St_Gov/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Tourism, Small Business, and Information Technology:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/TSBIT/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Transportation:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Trans/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Vets/minutes_all.html



2026 Interim

**LEGISLATIVE
RECORD**

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The Commission and its staff, by law and by practice, perform numerous fact-finding and service functions for members of the Legislature, employing professional, clerical and other employees required when the General Assembly is in session and during the interim period between sessions. These employees, in turn, assist committees and individual legislators in preparing legislation. Other services include conducting studies and investigations, organizing and staffing committee meetings and public hearings, maintaining official legislative records and other reference materials, providing information about the Legislature to the public, compiling and publishing administrative regulations, administering a legislative intern program, conducting orientation programs for new legislators, and publishing a daily index and summary of legislative actions during sessions.

The LRC is also responsible for statute revision, publishing and distributing the Acts and Journals following sessions, and for maintaining furnishings, equipment and supplies for the Legislature. It also functions as Kentucky's Commission on Interstate Cooperation in carrying out the program of The Council of State Governments as it relates to Kentucky.