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Lawmakers discuss juvenile justice trends, solutions

by Jordan Hensley - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Teen mental health and staffing issues at detention facilities were discussed during a presentation on juvenile justice issues given to lawmakers on July 18.

The Interim Joint Committee on Judiciary heard from Nina Salomon, deputy division director for the Corrections and Reentry Justice Center with The Council for State Governments (CSG).

CSG's national data shows the number of incarcerated youth declined by 70% from 2000 to 2022, and youth arrests for violent offenses remain historically low, she said. However, there has been a post-pandemic increase in youth arrests for homicide and weapons, resulting in a concurrent increase in youth victimization.

"We've definitely heard a concern around youth violence and youth gun violence in particular," Salomon said. "While youth gun violence remains historically low – a decline of about 54% from 2000 to 2022 – it's still a long-standing problem, and one that we know deserves further attention and more targeted attention."

In Kentucky, Salomon said the data shows behavioral health needs are a significant driver of justice involvement.

Students in Kentucky report various ways of



Rep. Steven Doan, R-Erlanger, asks a question about youth mental health and crime trends during the Interim Joint Committee on Judiciary meeting on July 18.

experiencing trauma, she said, adding that "23% of Kentucky high school students reported ever seeing someone get physically attacked, beaten, stabbed or shot in their neighborhood."

Although the current data is alarming, Salomon said it also shows arrests have declined significantly since 2010.

"This is a testament to the great work that folks in

Kentucky across the board have done over the last several years to reform the front end of the juvenile justice system, and keep kids out of the juvenile justice system who don't need to be there, especially since the passage of that reform bill about a decade ago," Salomon said.

CSG's national data also showed more female students reported feeling "sad or hopeless" in the last year than male students. Rep. Steven Doan, R-Erlanger, asked how the youth crime data reflects those statistics.

"Are we seeing a proportional increase based on that and offenses related to young women as opposed to young men? And if so, how are facilities changing or moving towards addressing young women, particularly with respect to housing as opposed to young men?" Doan asked.

Salomon said males tend to commit more serious offenses than females, who are more likely to commit non-person offenses that are rooted in experiencing behavioral health issues and abuse. She suggested looking deeper at the system as a whole and how it addresses the different needs of females and males experiencing trauma and behavioral health problems.

Rep. Keturah Herron, D-Louisville, said the

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Juvenile justice trends, from page 1

presentation showed 62% of committed youth are status offenders or committed a non-person or technical violation. She asked Salomon what are some solutions to those issues.

Salomon said some states have passed laws that say youth cannot be detained or incarcerated for certain technical violations or they have created graduated response matrices.

Staffing issues at juvenile justice centers was another issue lawmakers wanted to discuss with Salomon. Rep. Nima Kulkarni, D-Louisville, asked what the top reasons were for retention issues.

COVID-19 changing the way younger people experience the workforce, pay, training, and safety were among the top reasons, Salomon said.

Rep. Kimberly Poore Moser, R-Taylor Mill, said prevention and programming are topics the legislature has discussed before.

“I think we need to look into things like better training and mobile crisis response, early assessment, as for that sort of thing upon intake and really see what it is kids need,” she said.

Education committee discusses DEI efforts at universities

by Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Legislators on the Interim Joint Committee on Education offered a variety of viewpoints on July 16 about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in Kentucky higher education.

Committee Co-Chair Sen. Stephen West, R-Paris, said bills related to DEI programs were filed in both the House and Senate during the 2024 legislative session.

“We felt that if we were going to broach the subject, if this subject was going to be addressed again, that we should have all the information available to us, and we should have a thorough understanding of what all our postsecondary institutions were doing as it pertains to DEI,” he said.

Presidents of two state universities, a representative from a constitutional advocacy center, and two officials from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) were on hand to testify and answer lawmakers’ questions.

Travis Powell, vice president and general counsel for CPE, said the Office for Civil Rights found Kentucky in violation of the Civil Rights Act in 1982 due to racial segregation in higher education. CPE was tasked at that time with responding to the U.S. Department of Education’s desegregation plan.

Kentucky was released from the plan in 2008, “which was a great accomplishment for the state.” Powell said. “But we still had this legislation in place in order to set equal educational opportunity goals. So, in 2010, the council created a new diversity plan, and then in 2016, we created a DEI policy that was integrated into our strategic agenda.”

Powell said CPE sets targets for supporting low-income and underrepresented minority students and evaluates campuses based on their progress toward those targets. However, he said, CPE does not set quotas.

“No one student is discriminated against based on any of our policies that we have in place,” he said, adding that state universities maintain high admis-



Senate Minority Caucus Chair Reginald Thomas, D-Lexington, speaks during the Interim Joint Committee on Education meeting on July 16.

sion rates. “We are not about turning anybody away on our campuses at all.”

Cady Short-Thompson, president of Northern Kentucky University, and Jay Morgan, president of Morehead State University, also testified about DEI policies on campus.

Short-Thompson said NKU spent 0.34% of its budget on programs and activities related to DEI in fiscal year 2024.

Morgan testified that MSU does not require diversity statements from job applicants, require DEI training or use race-based admissions for students.

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Interim committee hears update on electric vehicle charging program

by Jordan Hensley - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — In 2022, the federal government granted Kentucky \$69.5 million to install electric vehicle charging stations across the state by 2027.

On July 16, the Interim Joint Committee on Transportation heard testimony from John Moore, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet assistant state highway engineer, on the project's progress.

The National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program (NEVI) is funded by the federal 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Moore said the program is focused on building out the alternative fuels corridor, which includes all interstates and parkways.

In order to receive funding, charging stations are required to be within 50 miles of each other, within a mile of the corridor and publicly available 24/7. The charging stations must also be able to support four simultaneously charging vehicles at 150 kilowatts.

To date, Moore said the state has awarded two RFPs and \$27.2 million to build 42 charging sites.

"Once these are completely built out, travelers will have access to 168 chargers conveniently located along Kentucky's primary corridors," Moore said.

Committee co-chair Sen. Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, asked if a match is required to receive a grant from the program. Moore said it is a reimbursement program.



Rep. Tom Smith, R-Corbin, asks if a reduction in electric vehicle production is going to slow down the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program rollout. The discussion was part of the Interim Joint Committee on Transportation meeting on July 16.

"Whatever expenditures they have that qualify for the NEVI program, we will reimburse 80% of that," he added.

Some of the new charging stations will be operational soon. Eleven charging sites should become operational this year with another 21 operational next calendar year, Moore said.

"We're optimistic that we'll be able to achieve build out certification in 2026," Moore said, adding once the federal requirements are met along the corridor, the program will be able to expand beyond the corridor.

Rep. Tom Smith, R-Corbin, asked if the Transportation Cabinet is planning to slow down the rollout of the program due to reports of manufacturers cutting back on production of electric vehicles.

"Are you aware of any downtrend in the electric vehicle use? I've heard manufacturers say they're going back to the hybrid system and not fully electric," he said.

Moore said the cabinet does not plan on scaling back the rollout of the charging stations. He also said although he's not fully "dialed-in" to what is going on in the electric vehicle industry, he knows dependable infrastructure is important for vehicle production.

"Part of the suppression of demand is the lack of dependability traveling long-distances," Moore added. "Right now, you almost have to plot your course out on a map to figure out if you can make it ... This is ideally going to break the logjam and provide that dependable infrastructure."

DEI efforts, from page 2

Lawmakers asked the presenters about several DEI-related issues, including campus pronoun policies, affinity groups and how DEI has impacted academic standing.

Sen. Lindsey Tichenor, R-Smithfield, noted that, even though Morehead serves a high-number of low-income students, it has not always met CPE's targets for DEI. She asked if the campus has been affected by CPE's scoring process.

Morgan said MSU did not meet the diversity goals one time out of the past seven years. However, he added that it can be hard for MSU to meet the diversity goals while supporting the region. Half of the institution's students qualify as low-income, placing serious demands on funding and resources, he said.

"We do not let diversity take a back seat with respect to the CPE state plan," he said. "However,

there have been some times when we have gently disagreed with some of the metrics that were in there."

Timothy K. Minella, senior constitutionalism fellow at the Goldwater Institute's Van Sittert Center for Constitutional Advocacy, testified that CPE annually scores institutions based on DEI metrics.

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DEI efforts, from page 3

“Through this annual process, CPE essentially threatens public institutions, get on board with racial discrimination and DEI practices or lose the ability to expand your academic offerings to serve students,” he said.

Senate Minority Caucus Chair Reginald Thomas, D-Lexington, said his grandmother once told him that there were only three or four other Black students when she attended the University of Kentucky in 1955.

He asked Minella if he wanted to return UK to the 1950s or if he had something else in mind that wasn't included in the report Minella shared with committee members.

Minella said the intent is to prohibit racial discrimination in public institu-

tions of higher education, both in admissions and hiring

House Majority Whip Jason Nemes, R-Middletown, said conservatives do themselves a disservice in conflating efforts to help people who have been harmed historically, whether it be redlining, poverty or something else.

“What I think we should be hyper focused on is making sure we have intellectual diversity, and making sure that we attack the places in our university that are going after the institutions of western civilization and trying to change our culture like we've seen all over the country this past year,” he said.

West said the committee will continue to discuss DEI and hear from state universities in September.

Committee hears how farm alliance helps bring healthy food to Kentuckians

by Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Members of the Tobacco Settlement Agreement Fund Oversight Committee learned on July 11 how the Community Farm Alliance helps bring healthy food to Kentuckians.

Myrissa K. Christy, executive director of the alliance, and two others offered committee members an overview of the Kentucky Double Dollars and Farmers Market Support Program. Through Kentucky Double Dollars, spending power is increased on Kentucky-grown fruits and vegetables, she said.

The program is designed to increase sales and income for the state's farmers, develop new farm customers by introducing local food for low-income populations and leverage federal food and nutrition program funds, she said.

“I think it's important to have farmers markets participating in the program and taking ownership, because that's how they're going to end up supporting it long-term and developing the community around it,” Christy said.

Sen. Amanda Mays Bledsoe, R-Lexington, also committee co-chair, said the program is good because it brings healthy food to more people.

“The dollar program is fantastic, and I know in my county, the farmers



Sen. Brandon Smith, R-Hazard, speaks June 6 about Kentucky's energy needs to meet demands of companies interested in locating in the commonwealth.

markets are critical to providing accessibility to what you need – fresh food,” she said.

Rep. Shawn McPherson, R-Scottsville, said he thinks Allen County leads the state in vegetable production, and he supports the local farmers market on the downtown square and other efforts to put producers' goods in front of potential customers.

“It's a big thing, and we do a lot with our local square there. We have First Fridays. We do a lot of things so everybody's familiar with and they come to,” he said.

McPherson said it's a good thing when farmers can take risks and plant more crops annually knowing the demand is there; that the food won't go to waste.

“And so, we're always looking to see where we can expand that market,” he said.

Rep. Rachel Roarx, D-Louisville, said her interest was piqued after learning about the program's expansion at Save A Lot stores in Louisville. She asked which locations will participate.

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healthy food to Kentuckians, from page 4

Jamie Fitzwater, director of Kentucky Double Dollars, said the group will be at the stores on Portland Avenue and Taylor Boulevard.

Rep. Myron Dossett, R-Pembroke, also committee co-chair, expressed concern about inflation.

“As we have seen for the last three, four years, inflation has impacted every family whether they be low income or going up the economic ladder. We’re all experiencing increased costs. We’re seeing it within agriculture as well,” he said.

He asked if there has been an increase in shoppers at farmers markets.

Christy said food service benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic might not be topped. However, there is an increase in awareness of other places to get resources.

She explained that multiple point surveys are expected to be implemented this year to find out who is being served and how their shopping and eating behaviors change over the long term.

Fitzwater said that social media has been a great way to get the word out about Kentucky Double Dollars.

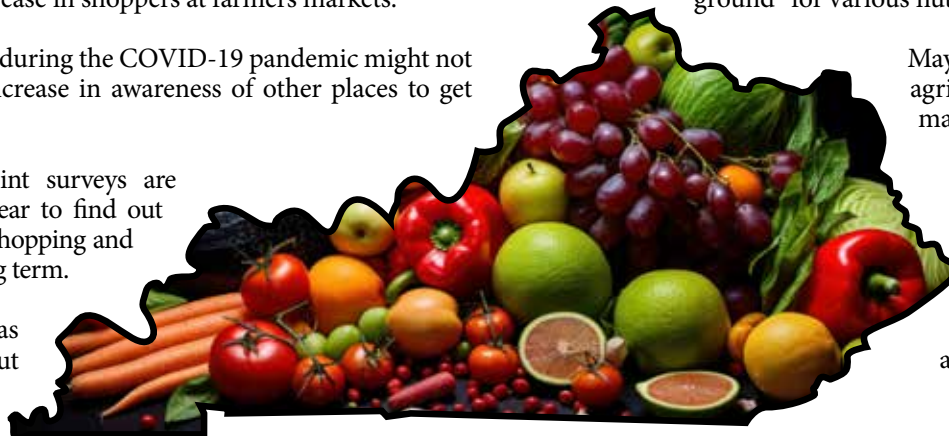
Sen. Robin L. Webb, D-Grayson, said promoting a healthy lifestyle will cut down on medical costs and decrease cancer rates and diabetes. She said she would like to see more counties participate in the program.

“I’d like to see SNAP benefits going to promote healthy lifestyles because when you’re experiencing cheap foods, carbs, wasted calories and all that, I mean, health is a lifestyle. You talk about dollars in funding, but you can’t really quantify reaching those children and the life choices that they make,” she said.

Webb said school family resource centers are the “boots on the ground” for various nutrition issues.

Mays Bledsoe said cooperation between agriculture-related groups will benefit many Kentuckians.

“What’s so interesting, I think about this committee, is that you do get to see all different partners working together and leveraging funds and resources, because we do want a better and a healthier Kentucky, and that’s the goal,” she said.



Committee Meetings

Minutes for Statutory 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 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 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 Transportation:

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



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2024 Interim

LEGISLATIVE RECORD

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KENTUCKY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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