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Task force learns about housing shortage

by Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — The Kentucky Housing Task Force, a new legislative panel focused on solutions to housing shortages, heard from several state officials on June 24 about efforts to address the problem.

Sen. Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, was among those who had questions for officials from the Kentucky Housing Corp., the Kentucky Center for Statistics and the state's Department of Housing, Buildings and Construction.

"There's a lot of different spokes to this. It's no certain, no one thing can solve this problem. It's going to take a lot of different folks – like I said, a lot of partnerships and the private sector really has to step up and start working on this," he said.

Wendy K. Smith, deputy executive director of Housing Programs for the Frankfort-based Kentucky Housing Corp., said it's vital for the housing supply in Kentucky to be a main focus instead of niche or secondary housing issues.

She and others presented information from the first phase of the Housing Supply Gap Analysis, a study commissioned by the KHC and released in April.

"In our view, the housing supply shortage is Kentucky's most urgent issue," she said. "What we're seeing is while Kentucky Housing for 50-plus years has been investing in affordable housing, because there's not enough supply in the overall



Sen. Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, speaks during the Kentucky Housing Task Force meeting on June 24.

marketplace, we're losing ground in serving the folks we try to serve."

Smith said all of Kentucky's counties need housing, and if enough supply existed, the state would have lower average housing costs.

"Supply will bring down costs. That's just, that's economics, right? We would have higher ownership rates. We would have more workforce housing if we just had more supply. We would have lower addiction rates. We would have fewer homeless Kentuckians, and we'd have increased household

stability," she said.

Smith said if there is more housing for higher income people and they can get what they want, people with fewer means will have more options open to them because it is a marketplace. Housing is also closely connected to economic development, she said.

"If you want jobs, you need homes," Smith said.

Senate Majority Caucus Chair Julie Raque Adams, R-Louisville, said Detroit has added housing to the city by using sites that were conducive to construction.

"They looked at sites that were already ready to go. They already had the infrastructure there. They already had all of the sewer lines, everything, and they rebuilt those areas, part of the metropolitan area," she said. "And everything that I've read, they've done it block by block, and they've really stabilized a huge portion of their metropolitan area."

Senate Minority Whip David Yates, D-Louisville, asked Smith about possible KHC gap incentives for construction companies and developers to spur construction.

"I mean we can, but we don't have any more to work with than we did before. Some of our

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resources could do that, and are doing that in some communities, but there's not any more to go around. Who are we going to take from I guess is where we're left," Smith said.

Rep. Mike Clines, R-Alexandria, asked Smith if there's a good housing program in another state that KHC favors more than others.

Smith said she would like more time to research the issue, but mentioned Oklahoma's is interesting to her.

Committee Co-Chair Rep. Susan Witten, R-Louisville, said the task force was established after House Concurrent Resolution 68 was adopted during this year's legislative session. The task force is charged with studying and reviewing current and future policy needs to address access and availability of housing for the state's citizens.

Witten said this includes a demographic analysis of housing costs, population and employment opportunities statewide and regionally; a comprehensive review of state and local laws, regulations, policies and procedures that affect housing; analysis of the availability and accessibility of housing; and evaluation of land use, zoning, infrastructure and community planning to identify barriers to attainable and affordable housing.

The task force will also examine efforts in other areas of the United States to address housing shortages and boost home ownership, she said.

Phase 2 of the Housing Supply Gap Analysis will be a 5-year projection of future supply gaps in Kentucky, Smith said. This report is expected to be released Aug. 21 during the Kentucky Affordable Housing Conference in Louisville, she said.

The task force's next meeting is scheduled for Monday, July 29 at 1 p.m.

Interim committee discusses implementation of Senate Bill 151

by Jordan Hensley - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — The Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children discussed the future of Senate Bill 151 on June 19.

The general assembly unanimously passed SB 151 earlier this year, which will allow family members who take temporary custody of a relative's child to become certified as a "child-specific foster home." The bill will give those caregivers more access to state resources. SB 151 officially becomes law on July 15.

The bill's primary sponsor, Senate Majority Caucus Chair Julie Raque Adams, R-Louisville, asked Lesa Dennis, commissioner for the Department of Community Based Services, how the Cabinet plans to implement the legislation.

Dennis said the Cabinet needs additional funding to implement SB 151.

"The Cabinet is supportive of Senate Bill 151, but during those conversations we also identified there would be additional funding needed to implement, and that funding was not made available," Dennis said. "So at this time, we are still hopeful in the near future that there will be an additional pathway for funding of Senate Bill 151. But without that support, the Cabinet will have difficulty moving forward with implementation."



Senate Majority Caucus Chair Julie Raque Adams, R-Louisville, asks a question about the implementation of Senate Bill 151 during the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children meeting on June 19.

Adams said since SB 151 will be law, she isn't sure if the Cabinet can opt not to implement it. She also questioned whether additional funding was requested from the legislature.

"I can also show you documentation from the Cabinet that says that the cost can be absorbed within your current budgetary framework," Adams said, adding that she would like to hear more from the Cabinet on the issue in July.

Sen. Robin L. Webb, D-Grayson, also had questions about the funding issues for SB 151. Dennis said the estimated cost is \$20 million.

"Is there any federal relief or anything we could apply for that would ease the burden of that?" Webb asked.

Dennis said no, because general funds would support additional staffing and pay for the cost of care for the children.

Under SB 151, Dennis also said the process the Cabinet will have to use to transition children from a temporary custody situation to relative/fictive kin foster care situation makes the child ineligible for federal reimbursement.

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Lawmakers hear from first responder families seeking workers' compensation

by Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Family members of those dealing with psychological injuries offered impassioned testimony during June 19 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs and Public Protection.

Rep. Lindsey Burke, D-Lexington, credited Rep. John Blanton, R-Salyersville, with, “a fabulous bill that’s been around for many years” and has had bipartisan support.

“Kentucky’s workers’ comp system was created in 1914 with a goal of placing responsibility for workplace injuries on the industry in which such injuries occur as opposed to putting that on the general public,” she said.

Burke said only physical injuries or physical illnesses are covered under current law, and the measure – House Bill 363 – would create a carve-out for psychological injuries experienced as first responders, who are defined as firefighters, EMTs, police, National Guard and front-line social workers.

“Our first responders take great risks to provide services to the public when we’re in crisis. They come to us at our worst moments,” she said. “They see the absolute, most awful things that any of us can imagine. They do it willingly, courageously...”

Caleen Treadway of Sharpsburg, cried while testifying about witnessing seizures her father, Bobby Treadway, had that she said were due to PTSD stemming from his EMS employment.

“And my dad has dedicated his life to saving others and sacrificing his own life and his time with his family so others would get the opportunity to make it back to their loved ones,” she said. “No one will ever really know what my dad has seen on these runs or calls or what any of these first responders see



Rep. Lindsey Burke, D-Lexington, speaks June 19 about first responder workers' compensation during a meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs and Public Protection.

on a daily basis.”

Like Treadway, Wendy Johnson spoke about how her husband, Kyle Johnson, was affected by things he saw during period of civil unrest in Louisville. He had been serving in the Kentucky National Guard for eight years when he received orders to go to Louisville.

“We are here today to address the gap in coverage and benefits for those who find themselves struggling with PTSD. As all of you know, this is mostly an invisible injury, an injury that affects the most important organ in your body...It is a real and devastating injury to receive,” she said.

Rep. Bill Wesley, R-Ravenna, thanked Burke for presenting the bill, and said National Guard personnel serve the governor and take the same oath as anybody else who has served in the military.

“If a national guardsman that has taken that same oath, if they’re not deployed, they’re not considered a veteran, and I think that’s wrong. They served in so many different ways...We have

people serving all over the world that are from the Commonwealth of Kentucky as a national guardsman,” he said.

Rep. Mark Hart, R-Falmouth, said he served for nine years in the National Guard, and more than 30 years as a fire officer and a paramedic. He said there are 23 states with some type of presumption for workers’ compensation for mental health for firefighters. He said he wasn’t sure if this includes police and EMS in those states. He asked Burke if there are other states with laws providing for workers’ compensation for National Guard personnel.

“I do believe it’s a similar number. Kentucky is an outlier that we’re not

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Rep. Sarah Stalker, D-Louisville, asked Dennis if there is a different way the Cabinet can implement SB 151 in order to be eligible for federal support.

Dennis said no.

“We have asked our federal partners, and we have worked with our consultants and others in various ways to try to find a solution that would enable us to receive federal funding for this popu-

lation of children and have not found any work-arounds or other options available,” she added.

Toward the end of the discussion on the issue, committee co-chair Rep. Samara Heavrin, R-Leitchfield, said she wants the Cabinet to come back in July to continue to discuss the implementation of SB 151.

“To hear that (SB 151) is not going to be imple-

mented because there aren’t enough funds when it was stated that the Cabinet could absorb the funds is a major problem,” she said.

The next Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children is currently scheduled for 1 p.m. on July 30. For more information, visit legislature.ky.gov.

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providing care for our national guardsmen who are on state deployment,” she said.

Rep. Daniel Grossberg, D-Louisville, said those in the National Guard should be treated as a veteran whether they are deployed or not.

“I want it stated in the record that 23 states already have the presumptions for first responders for mental health...I hope that this bill is expanded to include those who work in the call centers, either the 911 dispatchers or in the cases of 988, I think a 988 dispatcher or person should be included as well,” he said.

Sen. Matthew Deneen, R-Elizabethtown, said it’s the legislature’s job to

reduce red tape that holds back services for those who have provided invaluable assistance. He said he’s grateful to the General Assembly for funding USA Cares, which addresses possible lapses in policies.

Rep. Sarah Stalker, D-Louisville, thanked the families for their testimony and said they were brave for sharing their stories.

“I do not think that vulnerability is a sign or weakness. I do not think that individuals should be humiliated by their circumstances,” she said.

The next committee meeting is scheduled for July 30 at 11 a.m.

Lawmakers learn about companies' power needs, receive an energy outlook

by Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Ensuring Kentucky possesses enough energy to attract and retain businesses was only one facet of the June 6 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Energy.

Committee members heard from the chairman of the Kentucky Public Service Commission, two executives from two major industries in the commonwealth and a representative of an energy-related state association.

Committee Co-Chair Sen. Brandon Smith, R-Hazard, said a business person from Indiana recently showed him a power bill from that state. The energy provider was the same, but the cost per kilowatt was much lower – in some cases almost half – and the firm determined that it was cost prohibitive to come to Kentucky.

Years ago, businesses interested in locating here were focused on building specifications, he said. “Now, I’d say that the No. 1 question that they all ask is what is your power rate.”

Kent A. Chandler, chairman of the Kentucky Public Service Commission, said system growth is happening primarily as a result of data center expansion in the Columbus, Ohio and Northern Virginia areas. He expressed concern about replacing current power-generating units.

“I’m still concerned with our ability to reliably and cost effectively replace energy that is lost from a significant number of retirements of current resources,” he said. “One or two here and there I think would be fine. A wholesale replacement of our generating fleet, I don’t know what we would



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

build to replace it. I’m being very honest.”

Chandler said in 2023, Kentucky ranked 14th nationwide for residential electricity rates and second east of the Mississippi River behind only Tennessee. The state ranks No. 11 nationwide for industrial rates.

“On average, our rates across the entire state are very competitive, at least for our entire region,” he said, citing state profiles by the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Rep. DJ Johnson, R-Owensboro, asked Chandler why transmission costs are increasing.

“I would say that the primary cause of it is the replacement of older transmission with similar or like-kind new transmission,” Chandler said.

Committee Co-Chair Rep. Jim Gooch Jr., R-Providence, said the committee is looking for ways to ensure Kentucky has reliability and the availability of power at an affordable cost. However, he said he’s not in favor of large corporations that “blindly follow some of the policies in Washington.”

Gooch said that capturing carbon emissions at a high rate is not feasible and can’t be done.

One of those who testified during the meeting was Cathy Waddell, controller of Ghent-based Nucor Steel Gallatin. She said the company produces sheet steel, which has hundreds of everyday uses. For example, the steel goes into parts for automobiles, solar farms, lawnmowers, appliances and office furniture.

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Energy outlook, from page 4

Additionally, Nucor opened a second steel mill in Brandenburg last year.

Waddell said with many manufacturing facilities in Kentucky, Nucor is one of the largest electricity consumers in the state.

"For industrial operations like ours, access to reliable and affordable electricity is one of the most important factors to our success," she said.

Nucor is investing in next-generation nuclear technology, she said.

"We're working with NuScale Power, a start-up company that is developing small, modular nuclear reactors. They were the first company to have their new reactor design approved by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission," she said. "Besides a financial investment, we're also evaluating with NuScale the possibility to co-locate their small modular reactors at one of our steel mills as well as supplying them with the steel to build the reactor."

Kim Allen Menke, regional director of Government Affairs for Toyota Motor North America, said severe weather can create a brief power outage that can shut down manufacturing equipment such as spray booths, curing ovens and paint systems.

"There's no question energy curtailment or brownouts would have a negative impact on our ability to run production and operate our building systems for our team members," Menke said.

Michael L. Kurtz, general counsel for Kentucky Industrial Utility Customers, said utility companies in Kentucky are challenging federal rules regarding coal-fired plants.

"So really, if this federal rule survives, all the coal plants effectively will have to shut down by 2038," he said.

Smith said the important issue is what would the closure of the coal-fired plants mean to companies such as Nucor and Toyota.

"We realize that we're going to have to do something because we want you to know we're going to fight for you, and we're going to fight to keep that industry and those jobs here," he said.



Committee Meetings

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

Administrative Regulation Review Subcommittee:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/statutory/Admin_Regs/minutes_all.html

Capital Projects and Bond Oversight Committee:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/statutory/Cap_Proj/minutes_all.html

Commission on Race & Access to Opportunity:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/statutory/CORAATO/minutes_all.html

Government Contract Review Committee:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/statutory/GovContr/minutes_all.html

Investments in Information Technology Improvement & Modernization Projects Oversight Board:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/statutory/IITIMPOB/minutes_all.html

Juvenile Justice Oversight Council:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/statutory/JJOC/minutes_all.html

Legislative Research Commission:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/statutory/LRC/minutes_all.html

Public Pension Oversight Board:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/statutory/PP_Ov_Bd/minutes_all.html

Tobacco Settlement Agreement Fund Oversight Committee:

https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/statutory/Tob_Settle/minutes_all.html



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Acts of the General Assembly (2023)

Regular Session: \$80 (2 volumes)

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Journals

House and Senate Complete Set,

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2024 Interim

LEGISLATIVE RECORD

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2024 Interim

LEGISLATIVE RECORD

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