

RECORD A SUMMARY OF INTERIM ACTIVITIES

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Lawmakers hear from youth suicide prevention advocates

by Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

COVINGTON — Jaimee Kelley Seitz is one of several parents in Kentucky who have lost their children to suicide. She, and other youth suicide prevention advocates, testified on June 18 before the Interim Joint Committee on Health Services.

The committee met at The Madison Event Center in Covington as part of a full day of committee hearings in Northern Kentucky.

Seitz's daughter, Audree Heine, committed suicide when she was 13 years old, and Seitz said her goal moving forward is to raise awareness so no other mother will have to go through the same grief.

"Thank you for giving me the opportunity to tell Audree's story because it's important to know that this is not an isolated situation, and it's a situation that needs our attention and a plan and action to protect our children," she said.

Seitz said parents often think they know how their children are feeling and what they are thinking, but she was not aware her daughter suffered from mental illness.

Others testified about ongoing efforts to address youth mental health and prevent suicide.

Beck Whipple, suicide prevention coordinator for the state Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities and a suicide attempt survivor, said his department uses



Sen. Karen Berg, D-Louisville, speaks about youth suicide during the June 18 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Health Services, which was held at The Madison Event Center in Covington

data to drive decisions on prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies.

Whipple testified that suicide deaths happen more often with males, but young female deaths

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Youth suicide prevention,

from page 1

are on the rise.

"As we look these numbers, we must never forget that each of those numbers represent a Kentucky child who is still loved and deeply, deeply missed. As we hold on to those numbers, we hold those families, those communities and their friends as well," he said.

Whipple shared information from Kentucky Vital Statistics' death certification files from 2018-2023.

In 2018, 25 children ages 8-17 committed suicide, and the number rose to 30 by 2023.

Whipple said the usage of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline has been increasing, but some people – especially young people – might not trust 988 for calls, texts and chats due to tracking.

But he added that "those call takers will not ask you identifiable information. They will not ask you your age, your race, your gender. What you share is what they track."

Committee Co-Chair Rep. Kimberly Poore Moser, R-Taylor Mill, said the topic of youth suicide is difficult to discuss, but it is necessary. She said the goal of the meeting was to focus on hope that community-led suicide prevention works, that recovery is possible and that support is available.

"It's necessary to ensure that families with children receive the protection and the resources that they need to keep their kids safe," she said.

Sen. Keturah Herron, D-Louisville, said not talking about suicide has contributed to today's crisis. She said legislators need to see more data about who those who commit suicide are and their modes and methods to better understand the issues. She expressed concern about the role firearms play in some cases.

Sen. Karen Berg, D-Louisville, asked what legislators could do to this upcoming session to significantly impact the suicide-by-firearms rate in Kentucky.

Marcie Timmerman, education and outreach liaison for Mental Health America of Kentucky, testified that she isn't sure there's one law, or that law would always be the way. She said Kentucky ranks 36th in youth mental health as measured by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

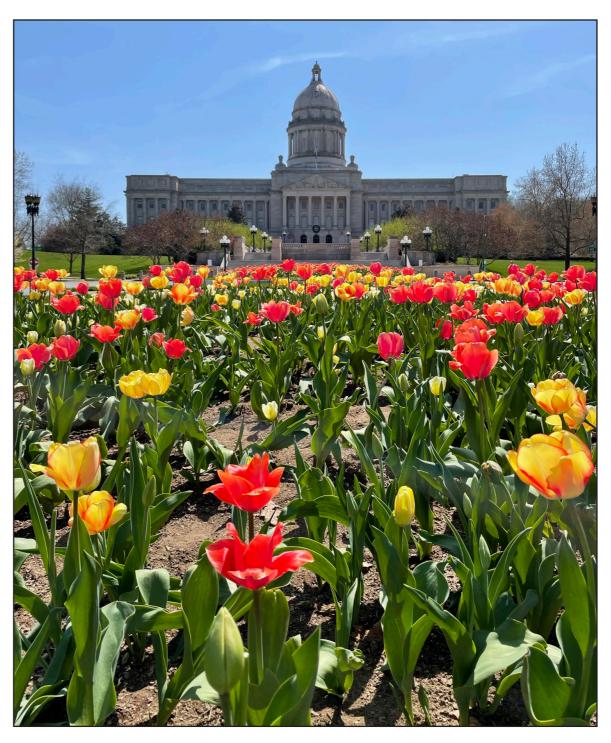
"So, working on folks to just be able to understand

how important that (firearms) storage is, and how important putting time between someone's decision to direct suicide and their access to the most lethal means. That's what CALM (Counseling on Access to Lethal Means) really focuses on," she said.

Rep. Ken Fleming, R-Louisville, said he has not seen enough information getting out to students and parents through a cooperative and collaborative approach.

"I've been in mental health services for 10 years, and we've been trying to put more information to not only the kids, but also the parents," he said.

He said he wants to follow up with Jon Akers, executive director of the Kentucky Center for School Safety, about using digital methods and applications to provide students with resources on mental health and suicide prevention.



Task force discusses disaster relief funding needs

by Jordan Hensley - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Kentucky is no stranger to natural disasters. Within in the first six months of 2025, the commonwealth has endured several significant flooding events and deadly tornadoes.

Kentucky lawmakers gathered on June 27 to discuss disaster relief funding needs during the inaugural meeting of the Disaster Prevention and Resiliency Task Force.

Sen. Robin L. Webb, R-Grayson, co-chairs the new task force with Rep. Chris Freeland, R-Benton. Webb said the goal of the task force is to focus on how to recover and mitigate risk, and that will require the Kentucky General Assembly's budgetary support.

"We can't prevent (natural disasters), but we can be ready and then mitigate them, and that includes housing, quality of life, infrastructure impacts and rebuilding and prioritization of that and housing," Webb said. "In East Kentucky, West Kentucky we've seen devastation for communities, and people want to live where they live and they should be able to do that."

Eric Gibson, the director of Kentucky's Division of Emergency Management, said Kentucky is experiencing disasters of "increasing frequency and intensity."

Reflecting on the last six months, Sen. Scott Madon, R-Pineville, mentioned how the general assembly appropriated funds during the 2025 legislative session for the February storms, but adjourned for the year before the April flooding and May tornado events.

"We keep hearing about the having to possibly come back for a special session," Madon said. "Where are we on the money that we allocated? Are we blowing through that pretty quick?"



Sen. Robin L. Webb, R-Grayson, co-chairs the newly formed Disaster Prevention and Resiliency Task Force, which held its inaugural meeting on June 27.

If you compare Kentucky's rate of federally declared natural disasters to Florida in the last 20 years, Kentucky has had 33, which is two more than Florida, Gibson said. The frequency of natural disasters may not be entirely new, but the cost is.

"There has been a high level of disasters across the commonwealth for this entire period of time. The intensity of the expense is what's changing," Gibson said.

A major issue facing some communities impacted by the more recent storms is public assistance funding, Gibson added.

"I do think that the public assistance being pending is a very important issue to your local officials, as those counties are going to be paying those expenses out of those county dollars without public assistance or state funds or a state disaster relief fund." Gibson said.

Gibson said the funds allocated for the February storms has been used to help those communities. Possible federal public assistance for the more recent flooding and tornados is still pending as the state and Kentucky's congressional delegation works to secure a declaration from the president, he added.

"It's hard to come before you and say we need 'x' amount of dollars, because we don't even have all the projects estimated," Gibson said. "But I can tell you that it's hundreds of millions of dollars that is going to be needed in our state to recover across that 83-county area."

Federal funding, if approved, will cover 75% of the cost, Gibson added.

Another project the state is working to secure funding for is an update to the state's IFLOWS system, which is a network of water level

gauges, Gibson said. The estimated cost to replace the existing 270 monitors across the state is around \$1 million.

Webb said she "thinks it's important for the committee to note the reliability and accuracy" of the system. Gibson said IFLOWS is crucial in monitoring rising water levels and alerting officials who then can communicate risk to the public.

Rep. Mark Hart, R-Falmouth, said the IFLOWS system helped his district position local resources in the right places as river levels rose during April's flooding event.

"They're so valuable to preparation and pre-planning," Hart said. "I cannot emphasize them enough... Moving forward, we need to make sure these systems are not only maintained but enhanced to where we get more gauges out there."

Mental health facility discussed for incarcerated youth

by Jordan Hensley - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Kentucky's incarcerated youth often need mental health treatment. The Department of Juvenile Justice wants to build a \$35 million high acuity mental health facility to care for them.

Commissioner Randy White told the Budget Review Subcommittee on Justice and Judiciary on June 4 there is a "high need" for this type of facility, which is in the early planning phases.

Incarcerated children in Kentucky are currently receiving treatment in detention centers, which delays care and is often unsafe for the youth and staff, White said.

For an individual with severe needs, the department tries to have them placed into a private mental health facility. White said this means the youth is often sent out of state. He shared a recent example of a child who was placed in a treatment facility in Pennsylvania.

"When we require or seek placement for these violent individuals – if we're fortunate enough to obtain a bed and position and treatment for these individuals – we have to send them far away from their support base and far away from their homes," White said. "It could be somewhat traumatic for them to move that distance."

White said the incarcerated children who need in-patient, high acuity treatment are often violent, which makes them difficult to place. State law does not require a mental health facility to accept these patients, he said. Sometimes youth sent to other states for treatment are returned due to the safety risk.

Rebecca Norton, who serves as the budget director for the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, said the \$35 million figure is a "preliminary estimate" based on a preliminary investigation into the project. The cabinet currently doesn't have the funding to complete the design phase of the project, she said.

"The costs listed here are based on discussions that have been had as far as what would be requirements for square footage, and that's based on the number of beds," Norton said.



Subcommittee Co-Chair Stephanie Dietz, R-Edgewood, listens to a presentation on June 4 about the need for a high acuity mental health facility for incarcerated youth.

The proposed facility would have 24 beds, with 16 beds for clinical patients and eight beds for assessment and stabilization needs. The facility would have to be separated by gender and high-and low-risk offenders, as per statute, Norton told the committee.

The estimated annual operating budget for the facility is \$12.1 million, she added.

Subcommittee Co-Chair Stephanie Dietz, R-Edgewood, asked White and Norton if there is a need for that many beds.

"Do you believe that we have that many youths that would qualify under the criteria for this type of facility?" Dietz asked.

White said the need for beds fluctuates.

"We see surges. We may go through five or 10 or we may see one or two," he said. "... We have to have flexibility, and it's not going to involve filling 24 or 18 beds consistently. We have to have the degrees of separation operationally to make sure that they're safe. I can get you an exact number, but we

do have individuals right now that could be placed in a high acuity facility."

Norton said there is a "multitude" of youth within Kentucky's juvenile justice system who have a mental health diagnosis and would benefit from an in-state facility dedicated to incarcerated youth.

Rep. Josh Bray, R-Mount Vernon, said he'd like to know if it is cost-effective to build this type of facility.

"I would be curious to see what the contract rate out of state is, because if that can be accommodated some other way, it seems like the numbers are just a little off from where I'm sitting," he said, after learning one to five individuals are sent out of state per year due to needing intensive, specialized care.

Dietz asked if renovating some of the current juvenile justice detention centers to accommodate the mental health needs is an option.

White said renovations often cost more than building a new, standalone facility. Norton agreed it is not possible for some of the current facilities to be expanded due to space and financial reasons.

Rep. Daniel Elliott, R-Danville, asked if the department has discussed letting other states send incarcerated youth to Kentucky's facility if the state decides to build one.

White said he isn't aware of any internal discussions, but there are legal and logistical things to consider.

"We would just have to see what the bed space looked like and review the legal challenges associated with that," White said, adding Kentucky sends youth to private, out-of-state facilities, not publicly-funded facilities.

The Kentucky General Assembly cannot act on legislation until the 2026 legislative session begins on Jan. 6. The next Budget Review Subcommittee on Justice and Judiciary meeting is scheduled for July 15 at 9 a.m.

Agriculture committee hears about efforts to curtail farmland loss

by Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Kentucky is known for its rich and vital farmland, but members of the Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture heard testimony on June 5 about how much is being lost and efforts to prevent the trend.

Eddie Melton, president of Kentucky Farm Bureau, and Aleta Botts, coordinator of the Kentucky Farmland Transition Initiative, testified that many organizations are working to stop farmland loss through the initiative.

The KFTI network includes 28 members, connecting attorneys, certified public accountants, estate planners, business advisers and others. Members include businesses, organizations and universities.

"In 20 years, we've lost 1.4 million acres of farmland in the Commonwealth of Kentucky," Melton said.



Rep. David Hale, R-Wellington, speaks during the June 5 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture. Legislators heard from those who are working to stop farmland loss in Kentucky.

But what really jumped out to stakeholders was that from 2017 to 2022, more than 500,000 acres of farmland were lost, he said.

"We also lost about 6,500 farmers in Kentucky in those five years. And if that continues on with the loss of the farmland and the loss of farmers, in 60 years, we'll lose over half of the farmers that we've got left in the Commonwealth of Kentucky," Melton said.

Melton said updating a tax credit program aimed at farmer retention has been good. He thanked Committee Co-Chair Myron Dossett, R-Pembroke, for introducing the legislation during the 2025 regular session. It was ultimately enacted as part of House Bill 775, he said.

The tax credit was increased to \$50,000 for land sold to a beginning farmer. Credits can be approved prior to a sale, and all active farmers can benefit from the incentive to keep farmland in production, according to KFB.

Rep. David Hale, R-Wellington, said he's excited about the process and the effort behind the Kentucky Farmland Transition Initiative. He said he hopes it's successful because something needs to be done to retain farmland.

"I'm concerned. I'm very concerned as we move forward. Even in my rural district...we are seeing such a loss of farmland right there in the three counties that I represent – Menifee, Bath and Montgomery County," he said.

Sen. Robin L. Webb, R-Grayson, said she supports the initiative. She discussed a recent instance in which a family sold a portion of their hayfield for commercial purposes. The tax valuation increased to the point of a commercial site for the remaining land, she said.

"I think that's unconscionable. I think we've got to address that because it's going to negate the initiatives that we do, if that's the case," Webb said.

Rep. Anne Gay Donworth, D-Lexington, said the information she garnered was great, and asked about the tax credit for new farmers.

"It seems like a lot of it is having to do with transitioning from older generations to the next generation. Is there any aspect of it that is helping first-time farm owners, especially when you're talking about only 20% coming in – only 20% making it through the second generation," she said. "How are we supporting people who don't come from farming families but are interested in going into it?"

Botts said she thinks they are getting more inquiries from those interested in

becoming first-generation farmers. She mentioned it can be a challenging process, but options are possible.

"That selling farmer tax credit – a non-generational or a first-generational farmer would be eligible as this purchaser, as the buyer, for that selling farmer," she said.

Jessie Hancock, executive director of nonprofit Bluegrass Land Conservancy, and Ashley Greathouse, counsel and director of conservation for BLC, also testified.

"I think that it's really heartening to hear this conversation happening on a state level. I think that there's a lot of different angles to the conversation and people are really speaking about this a lot. So, it's wonderful that we've got different organizations that are working on the same effort," Hancock said.

"We use a tool called conservation easement to do that. We work with working farmers and working land to ensure that that land stays available for farming in the future," she said.

According to BLC, Kentucky has lost 17,000 farms during the last 20 years and loses 12 acres per day of forest land.

Dossett thanked Hancock and Greathouse for testifying and said it's tremendously beneficial to pass on important information to his constituents.

Except for a special session, the Kentucky General Assembly can't act on legislation until the regular session begins in January 2026. The next IJC on Agriculture meeting is scheduled for July 10 at 9 a.m.

Interim committee discusses child fatality prevention methods

by Jordan Hensley - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Safer storage methods for firearms and medication and expanded access to child care were some of the proposals that surfaced among lawmakers on June 25 to help prevent child fatalities in Kentucky.

The Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children discussed these ideas following a presentation on the 2024 Annual Report from the state's External Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Panel.

The panel is comprised of 22 experts who have backgrounds in social work, law, law enforcement, health care, state government, policy and more. Interim committee co-chairs Rep. Samara Heavrin, R-Leitchfield, and Sen. Danny Carroll, R-Paducah, are members.

Panel Chairman Benjamin Harrison, who is also the Lewis County Attorney, said the panel is required to meet quarterly, but has been meeting monthly due to the caseload.

The 2024 Annual Report includes data from 219 cases, Harrison said, with 70 fatalities and 149 near fatalities.

"From our 2024 report, it shows that since 2014, 75% of all cases reviewed by the panel were children aged four years or younger," Harrison said. "The panel has continuously found children in this age group are at a higher risk for a fatal or near fatal event due to maltreatment."

Overdose/ingestion cases are the most common types of cases the panel sees, Harrison added. According to the report, 95% of all overdose/ingestion cases involved environmental neglect, or unsafe access.

Harrison said firearm incidents involving children in Kentucky have declined post the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, but they're still a cause of concern. The panel has reviewed 79 firearm incidents in the last five years, which is a small subset of the overall pediatric firearm injuries in Kentucky, he said.

"In fiscal year '23, the panel reviewed 12 cases involving injuries by firearms. All but one resulted in



Sen. Danny Carroll, R-Paducah, shares his ideas on preventing child fatalities in Kentucky during the June 25 Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children meeting

a death," Harrison added. "58% of all firearm cases involved a handgun. And a handgun, we found, was used in every child suicide case reviewed by the panel, and the panel has identified 75% of these cases were noted to be potentially preventable."

Rep. Rachel Roarx, D-Louisville, said she wanted to know how Kentucky's laws "stack up" with parental accountability in child firearm cases.

"Do you think that the recommendations around safer storage and locks is kind of where we're headed at this moment in time?" she asked.

Panel member Steve Shannon, who is the executive director of the Kentucky Association of Regional Programs, said safe storage is a high priority.

"Of my opinion, the adult who has the gun has a cavalier attitude to the gun in the home," he said, giving an example of one adult in a case who said they kept their gun stored behind a television.

As for parental accountability in relation to over-dose/ingestion cases, Carroll said he's found no consistency with how law enforcement investigates these types of cases in Kentucky along with a lack of "statutory authority."

"That is on my list for the (2026) session to maybe

address that, because these numbers are alarming the way that they're growing, and there does not seem to be any accountability for those who are responsible for those kids in these cases," he said. "And in a lot of cases, there's not being thorough investigations conducted."

Prevention was also discussed by the committee. Sen. Keturah Herron, D-Louisville, and Heavrin both shared their thoughts on the importance of examining the root cause of the events leading up to the child's death or near death.

"To me, it's just very alarming that it's financial issues, then criminal history – which typically if people have financial issues they get into criminal behavior – and then that leads to the mental health, the trauma and then the domestic violence," Herron said, adding she hopes every committee in the legislature is

examining the root causes of these issues moving forward.

Heavrin said the panel examines the root causes of each case.

"Most of these have prior (Department of Community Based Services) cases and issues that are going on," Heavrin said. "So what can we do for prevention?"

Heavrin also mentioned how children under the age of four are more likely victims since they're not in school. Carroll, who works in the child care industry, said fixing Kentucky's child care issues could help.

"Last week within our facility, we had three different reports to DCBS," he said. "What are we preventing by reporting those things? What else could we prevent? What else could all the other centers throughout the state prevent if more kids were within their facilities?"

Lawmakers cannot take action on legislation until the 2026 legislative session begins on Jan. 6.

The next Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children Committee is scheduled to meet on July 30 at 1 p.m.



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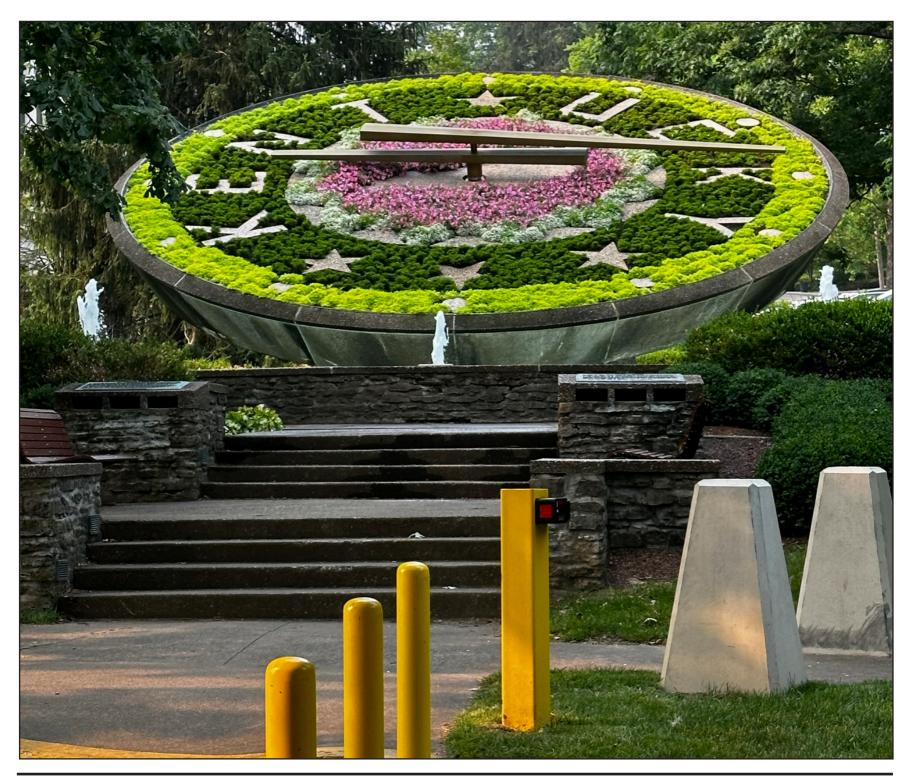
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Committee Meetings

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

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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:

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Interim Joint Committee on Judiciary:

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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

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