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Legislators receive literacy outcomes update

By Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — The Interim Joint Committee on Education received an update on literacy outcomes from officials with the Kentucky Department of Education on June 2.

Chief Academic Officer Micki Marinelli and Director of Early Literacy Christie Biggerstaff gave lawmakers an overview of “investment to impact.” Both speakers serve in the department’s Office of Teaching and Learning.

“Our purpose today in this presentation is to share how your investment of literacy – and the Read to Succeed Fund specifically – is leading to increased outcomes for Kentucky students,” Marinelli said.

Marinelli shared the most recent findings from the Education Scorecard study, a collaboration between Harvard University, Stanford University and Dartmouth College. It looked at how well students have recovered in key academic areas since COVID-19.

According to the study, Kentucky’s students rank fifth in reading recovery and eighth in math recovery among other states. Not all states were included in the study due to data quality issues in one or more years.

“It does put us as a top performer across the nation,” Marinelli said. “After the pandemic, most



Rep. Kevin Jackson, R-Bowling Green, speaks June 2 about literacy during the Interim Joint Committee on Education meeting.

states saw an improvement or a rebound in math achievement relatively quickly. But we are just now beginning to see in 2025 the turnaround for reading.”

The recovery in reading appears to be related to state early literacy reforms, she said, adding that all the states that improved in reading between 2022 and 2025 were implementing comprehensive ‘science of reading’ reforms.

Kentucky’s Read to Succeed Act – which became

law in 2022 – advanced several initiatives to enhance literacy outcomes, including academies for teaching reading, such as LETRS. Other initiatives include the Kentucky Early Literacy Leadership Network, partnership schools for the literacy coaching model and the Kentucky Reads to Succeed Annual Conference.

Marinelli said LETRS reading training has helped move students toward the “proficient” level and reduce the number of “novice” level students. She also pointed to courses from the AIM Institute for Learning & Research Pathways as evidence-based professional learning for educators.

The next steps designed to help boost literacy include sharing success stories and encouraging high-performing schools to inform statewide best practices. Additionally, launching the high-quality instructional resources repository per 2025’s Senate Bill 207 to reduce cost variability and increase the use of approved K-12 reading and writing resources across districts will be beneficial, Marinelli said.

Rep. Kevin Jackson, R-Bowling Green, who worked in education for approximately 40 years, said he is pleased about the collaboration to improve literacy in Kentucky.

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"I don't think I've ever seen any other initiative that's had the collaboration between the legislature, KDE, the school systems, the whole nine yards, parents, everybody," Jackson said. "So, it's amazing to see that collaboration and to think what we can do when we all work for the same goal, pulling the same direction."

Rep. Steve Bratcher, R-Elizabethtown, thanked Marinelli and others from KDE for sharing information, but he pointed out that Kentucky needed improvements before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"You said we were fifth in the nation, but that's fifth in the nation of recovery. That's not fifth in the nation of math. So out of the 35 different states that after COVID went into a recovery, because we were so low in reading, we rank fifth

in the improvement," he said. "Based on some of those other numbers, we still are not at the levels we were before COVID."

Biggerstaff said that the statewide improvements are "amazing," but it will take "a little while" to get to the desired data outcomes.

Committee Co-Chair Rep. James Tipton, R-Taylorsville, said he agrees with Biggerstaff about the time needed to see more improvements.

He said when Senate Bill 9 passed in 2022, he acknowledged that "this was going to be a process. It's going to take some time to implement."

Rural health effort highlighted during committee meeting

By Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — An effort to improve health care in rural Kentucky was under the spotlight during the June 16 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Health Services.

The federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) awarded the state close to \$213 million in December to support a rural health transformation plan. The cooperative agreement aims to improve health outcomes and access to health care in rural areas across the state over the next five years.

Dr. Steven Stack, secretary of the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, and Tom Walton, director of CHFS's Rural Health Transformation Program, told lawmakers that the state is facing tight deadlines to demonstrate that funds have been deployed or else Kentucky could risk losing the money.

"This is a big project, obviously," Stack said. "We appreciate your interest related to it. We may dream big and fall a little short, but if we don't dream big, we're never going to reach high."

According to the June presentation, CMS emphasizes rural health through workforce development, innovative care, technical innovation and sustainable access.

Among other areas, funds may be deployed toward prevention and chronic disease, provider payments, consumer tech solutions, training, workforce,



Rep. Ken Fleming, R-Louisville, asks questions and offers comments June 16 during an Interim Joint Committee on Health Services meeting.

advances in information technology and behavioral health. However, CMS is limiting funds for efforts such as new construction or clinician salaries.

Stack said a brand-new team was assembled from scratch for the undertaking and partners have been identified. Contracting is happening now.

"It's really just the beginning and it'll ramp up. They'll be a lot more richness of detail as we go forward," he said, adding that getting results quickly is part of the undertaking.

The speakers highlighted five areas that are included in Kentucky's transformation plan: maternal and infant health, integrated EMS and trauma response, behavioral health that spans from crisis care to long-term support, dental access and community hubs that unite interventions and resources for chronic care.

Walton said state officials have focused on hiring a team from rural Kentucky with both medical experience and experience operating in rural communities. The state is launching early pilot programs and looking at ways to measure progress, he said.

Rep. Emily Callaway, R-Louisville, asked about reaching incarcerated individuals for prenatal and maternal care, and Walton and Stack said the issue

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will be considered.

“That population has additional constraints or considerations, but there’s nothing in the design of these things that would preclude inclusion,” Stack said. “It really just comes down to who’s fulfilling it and if the community of service providers or clinicians are those who also individuals who provide the care to the incarcerated population.”

Sen. Donald Douglas, R-Nicholasville, said there must be program baseline expectations for it to be successful. He also acknowledged the plan is a complicated process and an “enormous task.”

“When we take a look at access to health care, are we going to try to make a distinction between access to health care and lack of utilization, because often

we lump lack of utilization into access, and I think that really, really distorts the numbers,” he said.

Rep. Ken Fleming, R-Louisville, asked about the number of contracts that have been awarded so far.

Stack said there is a whole host of awarded contracts.

Walton said one important factor is the partnerships.

“When we meet with our CMS officer every other week, the first thing they say is basically, ‘You guys are doing great.’ We’re way ahead of most other states. But the thing that they really like is when we say we’re being locally led – that really is the focus of CMS,” he said.

Lawmakers hear from autism experts, express concern for constituents

By Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — From Fulton to Elkhorn City, many Kentucky families face the daily challenges of loved ones with autism, according to testimony on June 17 to the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children.

A large contingent of stakeholders came to Frankfort to share information about their services, and legislators posed several questions and comments about ways to improve the lives of those with autism and those who live and work with them.

Rep. Sarah Stalker, D-Louisville, said she has constituents who have reached out to her during their search for services.

“Just on my way up to Frankfort today, I took a call with somebody who has reached out to 349 – she’s contacted on her own 349 facilities – to try and get help for her son who’s about in the sixth grade,” she said.

Stalker and other legislators said they would like to help make life better for their constituents with autism and their families. She said she is extremely concerned about children with profound autism, which often means they are nonverbal and could display aggressive behaviors.

“I am probably in conversations with about five



Rep. Sarah Stalker, D-Louisville, describes challenges parents sometimes face when seeking care for children with autism. The discussion was part of the June 17 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children.

families right now who have children with profound autism, and they have found themselves in a situation where they’ve probably been in a crisis for several years. But they have reached a breaking point where they can no longer keep their child safe,” she said.

Stalker said placement in a specialized facility is not always seamless because a child’s behaviors are too severe, and she asked how this situation

could be rectified. She also cited costs associated with services could be difficult or prohibitive.

Rep. Emily Callaway, R-Louisville, suggested more cooperation between stakeholders could be beneficial.

“It seems like there should be more streamlining. There should be more cooperation between agencies and more of these types of discussions, including the private sector in this. We should not be king of the yard with this,” she said. “We need all of the stakeholders at the table. We need to have serious discussions about what are we doing that is duplicative and ultimately not giving us any kind of benefit for the kids and the individuals within our communities that are suffering,” she said.

Several groups testified during the meeting, including representatives from the Human Development Institute at the University of Kentucky, the Kentucky Association for Behavior Analysis, the Kentucky Department of Education, the Kentucky Autism Training Center at the University of Louisville and the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

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Legislators receive an update on work zone enforcement cameras

By Jenni Glendenning - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Legislators on the Interim Joint Committee on Transportation heard an update on June 3 about a pilot program that uses cameras to help combat speeding in work zones.

John Moore, deputy state highway engineer for the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC), presented data on the Camera Assisted Speed Enforcement (CASE) pilot program. The initiative used automated cameras to reduce speeding in work zones in Shelby, Lawrence, Whitley, Martin and Fayette counties in fall 2025.

The program is the result of House Bill 664, which the Kentucky General Assembly passed last year. It allows police to issue citations when automated cameras detect that a driver is traveling 10 mph over a posted speed limit in a work zone.

The Kentucky bill was modeled after a program in Arkansas and does not use a mail-in ticketing system. Instead, encrypted data is sent to a law enforcement officer stationed near the work zone. Then, the “law officer is required to pull you over and cite you on the side of the road,” Moore said.

The cabinet worked closely with the Kentucky State Police and the Association of Highway Contractors to implement the CASE pilot program and to determine the best technology solutions to fit the needs of the state, according to the presentation.

Moore said the cabinet received feedback from transportation officials in 20 different states, which helped identify five potential vendors.

The solar-powered cameras are mounted 13 feet up and can track multiple lanes simultaneously. Moore said signs advise motorists that cameras are in use and beacons denote when bona fide workers are present on the site.

“No personal information is gathered or retained within the system. Only a picture of the vehicle and the license plate is sent downstream to the officer,” Moore said.



Sen. Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, comments on a pilot program that uses cameras to help curb speeding in work zones. The Interim Joint Committee on Transportation received an update on the program on June 3.

KSP is currently the only law enforcement entity participating in the program, but other local police agencies have expressed future interest.

Over the past nine months, the cabinet has been collecting speed data in the work zones, and an initial review demonstrates that drivers are slowing down, Moore said.

In Shelby, Whitley and Martin counties, data showed a 20% decrease in the number of vehicles traveling more than 10 mph above the speed limit.

Data was not collected in Lawrence County since cameras were not yet installed, and construction was wrapping up during the time of data collection in Fayette County.

Lead sponsor of the bill, Rep. John Blanton, R-Salyersville, said “when we’re reducing those speeds — which obviously

it’s doing in those zones — we know for a fact it’s going to reduce accidents. We know for a fact that will reduce injuries. We know for a fact that will reduce fatalities.”

Moore said less than one year of safety data has been collected to date, and it will likely be June 2027 before any definitive safety metrics and crash analyses can be reported.

Blanton requested that when officials are collecting data over the course of the next year, they compare accidents, injuries and fatalities between work zones with cameras and those without cameras.

Sen. Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, said “no doubt this piece of legislation will save lives, and I commend Chairman Blanton for his work.”

The state is currently working on adding 12 more camera units, “with the potential to grow that to a total of 24 within the contract life,” Moore said.





2026 Kentucky General Assembly

Senate

Julie Raque Adams (36)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 283
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Cassie Chambers Armstrong (19)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 255
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Karen Berg (26)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 255
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Gary Boswell (8)

3130 Reid Road
Owensboro, KY 42303
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Jared Carpenter (34)

PO Box 100
Berea, KY 40403
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Danny Carroll (2)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 228
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Gary Clemons (37)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 242
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-2450

Matthew Deneen (10)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 209A
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Donald Douglas (22)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 204
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Greg Elkins (28)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 298
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Shelley Funke Frommeyer (24)

PO Box 511
Alexandria, KY 41001
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Rick Girdler (15)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 252
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

David P. Givens (9)

PO Box 12
Greensburg, KY 42743
(LRC) 502-564-3120

Keturah Herron (35)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 255
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Jimmy Higdon (14)

344 N Spalding
Lebanon, KY 40033
(LRC) 502-564-8100
Home: 270-692-6945

Jason Howell (1)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 290
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Scott Madon (29)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 215
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Amanda Mays Bledsoe (12)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 203
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Christian McDaniel (23)

PO Box 15231
Latonia, KY 41015
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Stephen Meredith (5)

1424 Byrtle Grove Rd
Leitchfield, KY 42754
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Robby Mills (4)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 242
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-3120

Gerald A. Neal (33)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 254
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-2470

Michael J. Nemes (38)

209 Sandy Dr
Shepherdsville, KY 40165
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Matt Nunn (17)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 298
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Steve Rawlings (11)

3350 Easton Lane
Burlington, KY 41005
(LRC) 502-564-8100
(Work) 859-757-7037

Aaron Reed (7)

1016 Mt Vernon Dr Ste 3
Shelbyville, KY 40065
(LRC) 502-564-8100
(Work) 502-233-3689

Craig Richardson (3)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 228
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Brandon Smith (30)

PO Box 846
Hazard, KY 41702
(LRC) 502-564-8100
(Home) 606-436-4526
(Home FAX) 606-436-4526

Robert Stivers (25)

207 Main St
Manchester, KY 40962
(LRC) 502-564-3120
(Capitol) 502-564-3120
(Work) 606-598-2322
(Work FAX) 606-598-2357

Brandon J. Storm (21)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 204
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Reginald L. Thomas (13)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 254
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-2470
(Capitol) 502-564-2470

Lindsey Tichenor (6)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 298
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Robin L. Webb (18)

102 S Hord St
Grayson, KY 41143
(LRC) 502-564-8100
(Home) 606-474-5380

Stephen West (27)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 228
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Phillip Wheeler (31)

702 Capital Ave.
Annex Room 215
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Gex Williams (20)

702 Capital Ave.
Annex Room 284
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Mike Wilson (32)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 242
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-2450

Max Wise (16)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 242
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-2450

* Members of the Kentucky General Assembly may also be contacted by calling 502-564-8100.

2026 Kentucky General Assembly

House

Chad Aull (79)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 457E
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Shane Baker (85)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 357E
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Kim Banta (63)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 329F
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Jared Bauman (28)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 383
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100
(Home) 502-544-1846

Ryan Bivens (24)

4109 Sonora Rd
Hodgenville, KY 42748
(LRC) 502-564-8100

John Blanton (92)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 307A
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Tina Bojanowski (32)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 451A
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Adam Bowling (87)

PO Box 2928
Middlesboro, KY 40965
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Josh Branscum (83)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 357B
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Steve Bratcher (25)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 424G
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Josh Bray (71)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 392
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Randy Bridges (3)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 395
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

George Brown Jr. (77)

424 E Fourth St
Lexington, KY 40508
(LRC) 502-564-8100
(Home) 859-312-7513

Lindsey Burke (75)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 472
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Emily Callaway (37)

4621 Outerloop #234
Louisville, KY 40219
(Work) 502-797-0606
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Josh Calloway (10)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 413
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Adrielle Camuel (93)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 429F
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Beverly Chester-Burton (44)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 467
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Mike Clines (68)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 357C
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Jennifer Decker (58)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 357D
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Stephanie Dietz (65)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 316D
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Steven Doan (69)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 432A
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Ann Gay Donworth (76)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 457C
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Myron Dossett (9)

491 E Nashville St
Pembroke, KY 42266
(LRC) 502-564-8100
(Home) 270-475-9503

Ryan Dotson (73)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 316
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Robert Duvall (17)

PO Box 1297
Bowling Green, KY 42102
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Daniel Elliott (54)

PO Box 2082
Danville, KY 40423
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Daniel Fister (56)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 432C
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Patrick Flannery (96)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 373B
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Ken Fleming (48)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 358B
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Chris Freeland (6)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 373C
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Chris Fugate (84)

PO Box 202
Chavies, KY 41727
(LRC) 502-564-8100
(Home) 606-233-5660

Al Gentry (46)

8406 Cloverport Dr
Louisville, KY 40228
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Jim Gooch Jr. (12)

806 Princeton St
Providence, KY 42450
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Deanna Gordon (81)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 367
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Peyton Griffiee (26)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 424G
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Daniel Grossberg (30)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 413C
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Vanessa Grossl (88)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 413
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

David Hale (74)

11 Hales Ln
Wellington, KY 40387
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Tony Hampton (62)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 424
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Erika Hancock (57)

PO Box 4311
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Mark Hart (78)

202 W 4th St
Falmouth, KY 41040
(LRC) 502-564-8100
(Home) 859-654-4278

Samara Heavrin (18)

474 Mulberry St., Apt. B
Leitchfield, KY 42754
(LRC) 502-564-8100

John Hodgson (36)

PO Box 74
Fischerville, KY 40023
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Kim Holloway (2)

274 State Route 339 E
Mayfield, KY 42066
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Thomas Huff (49)

PO Box 1331
Shepherdsville, KY 40165
(LRC) 502-564-8100

2026 Kentucky General Assembly

Mary Beth Imes (5)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 376 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Shawn McPherson (22)	801 East Main St Scottsville, KY 42164 (LRC) 502-564-8100	T.J. Roberts (66)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 424 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Kevin Jackson (20)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 351B Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	David Meade (80)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 332C Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-4334	Steven Rudy (1)	350 Peppers Mill Dr Paducah, KY 42001 (LRC) 502-564-8100
DJ Johnson (13)	PO Box 1122 Owensboro, KY 42302 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Michael Meredith (19)	PO Box 292 Brownsville, KY 42210 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Scott Sharp (100)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 432B Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Kim King (55)	250 Bright Leaf Dr Harrodsburg, KY 40330 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Suzanne Miles (7)	PO Box 21592 Owensboro, KY 42304 (LRC) 502-564-2217	Tom Smith (86)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 413G Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Matthew Koch (72)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 384 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Adam Moore (45)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 429C Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Sarah Stalker (34)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 451C Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Nima Kulkarni (40)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 429E Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Kimberly Poore Moser (64)	PO Box 143 Independence, KY 41051 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Pamela Stevenson (43)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 472 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100
William Lawrence (70)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 424E Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Amy Neighbors (21)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 395 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Ashley Tackett Laferty (95)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 460 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Matthew Lehman (67)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 429H Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Jason Nemes (33)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 372 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Nancy Tate (27)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 351A Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Chris Lewis (29)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 329 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	David W. Osborne (59)	PO Box 8 Prospect, KY 40059 (LRC) 502-564-4334 (Work) 502-645-2186	Walker Thomas (8)	4335 Cadiz Rd Hopkinsville, KY 42240 (LRC) 502-564-8100 (Home) 270-889-8091 (Home FAX) 270-885-5335
Derek Lewis (90)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 416 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	J.T. Payne (11)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 424 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Aaron Thompson (98)	PO Box 462 Greenup, KY 41144 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Scott Lewis (14)	PO Box 454 Hartford, KY 42347 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Jason Petrie (16)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 392 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	James Tipton (53)	8151 Little Mount Rd Taylorsville, KY 40071 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Matt Lockett (39)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 329D Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Michael Sarge Pollock (51)	PO Box 164 Campbellsville, KY 42719 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Timmy Truett (89)	4172 HWY 2003 McKee, KY 40447 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Savannah Maddox (61)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 316E Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Marianne Proctor (60)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 329 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Ken Upchurch (52)	PO Box 969 Monticello, KY 42633 (LRC) 502-564-8100 (Home) 606-340-8490
Mary Lou Marzian (41)	2007 Tyler Lane Louisville, KY 40205 (Home) 502-541-1376 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Felicia Rabourn (47)	PO Box 47 Campbellsburg, KY 40011 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Joshua Watkins (42)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 429G Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Candy Massaroni (50)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 413H Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Rebecca Raymer (15)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 329H Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Bill Wesley (91)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 402 Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100
Bobby McCool (97)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 367C Frankfort, KY 40601 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Steve Riley (23)	189 Blue Sky Dr Glasgow, KY 42141 (LRC) 502-564-8100	Mitch Whitaker (94)	702 Capital Ave Annex Room 329 (LRC) 502-564-8100

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Richard White (99)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 329
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Wade Williams (4)

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 416
Frankfort, KY 40601

Lisa Willner (35)

(LRC) 502-564-8100

702 Capital Ave
Annex Room 457
Frankfort, KY 40601
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Nick Wilson (82)

PO Box 573
Williamsburg, KY 40769
(LRC) 502-564-8100

Susan Witten (31)

PO Box 43861
Louisville, KY 40253
(LRC) 502-564-8100

* Members of the Kentucky General Assembly may also be contacted by calling 502-564-8100.

Autism experts, from page 3

According to a presentation from the Human Development Institute, federal health officials estimate that autism rates have increased to 1 in 31 children. That's compared to 1 in 69 in 2012.

Educational classifications of autism have quadrupled since the 2008-09 academic year, officials from the institute said, and about 12% of Kentucky students with disabilities had an autism classification in the 2024-25 school year. Males were significantly more likely to be identified as having autism.

Officials said long wait times and costs were major barriers to diagnosing autism.

Shannon O'Connor, executive director of ABA Advocates, Kentucky Association for Behavior Analysis, testified that network adequacy can present challenges for those with autism, and she thanked Rep. Kimberly Poore Moser, R-Taylor Mill, for legislation designed to help collect accurate data about the clinicians who are client-facing versus those who are not.

She also highlighted legislation to help to enforce compliance among Medicaid managed care organizations, but cautioned that faithful implementation is critical to its success.

Strong cooperation between groups is also necessary to improve services for those with autism and their families, Dr. Steven Stack, secretary of the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, told the panel.

"It's going to require the education community. It's going to require the executive branch. It's going to require impacted families, those who are experiencing and living with these challenges. It's certainly going to involve the legislature because we can't build a facility, even if that was recommended by a multi-stakeholder group without the resources to build it," he said.

Sen. Amanda Mays Bledsoe, R-Lexington, expressed gratitude for the conversation and said there is more that needs to be done.

"There's a lot of empathy in this room from all sides of the room for this issue. I think one of the challenges is that if you've met a kid or a teenager or adult, you've met one person with autism," she said. "How they present the issues that get them above the line is very different in every single situation. So, trying to have standardized care for such a diverse group of people who have very different needs is very, very difficult."



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 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



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702 Capital Avenue
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