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County jail funding reform topic of interim committee

By Jordan Hensley - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — County jail funding in Kentucky is at a crisis point, according to testimony to a legislative committee on Nov. 17.

Rep. Michael Meredith, R-Oakland, shared his proposal on how to reshape the shared responsibility of county jails with the Interim Joint Committee on Local Government. He was joined by representatives from the Kentucky Magistrates and Commissioners Association and the Kentucky County Judge/Executive Association in his presentation.

Since 2019, incarceration costs and county general fund support for jails has increased from $96.5 million to $169.7 million, Meredith said.

Meredith's proposed legislation was originally filed as House Bill 557 in the 2026 legislative session. It would have taken a comprehensive approach at addressing this issue, he said, by incentivizing regional jails, clarifying responsibility for pre-trial felony detainees and redefining the state inmate housing model.

The estimated fiscal impact of the legislation is approximately $200 million, which excludes the one-time funding incentives and construction costs, Meredith said.

"It is a big ask, frankly, and we know that," he said. "But it's also an area where we see a real crisis, and is probably, if not the most important and pressing issue for local governments in the state, certainly one of the top two or three."



Rep. Michael Meredith, R-Oakland, shares his proposal to address county jail funding issues during the Interim Joint Committee on Local Government meeting on Nov. 17.

On the incentivizing regional jails component, HB 557 would have established a construction fund to allow regional jail authorities to apply for funding for a new facility or renovations of an existing one.

Meredith said his legislation would also address pretrial felony detainees.

"This is something that I think is probably the most expensive and most important part of this bill as we go forward," he said.

Currently, an inmate charged with a felony does not become the state's responsibility until they are sentenced following a trial or plea agreement. The state then pays the jail a per diem rate of $35.34 per day to house the inmate.

"If they're housing them in a county jail, that is about half of what it costs on the average to house an inmate, and it's certainly less than what it costs in our state prison facilities," he said. "… So the state is actually receiving a benefit at the cost of the county in those situations."

County jails do not currently receive any funding from the state for inmates that received a time-served credit upon sentencing. Meredith said his bill would change that.

Meredith said his legislation could help alleviate the county property tax burden for Kentuckians.

Jacqalynn Riley, a Grant County magistrate and KMCA board member, told the committee that

Continued on page 2

County Jail,

from page 1

Grant County's property tax-funded general fund could no longer afford to subsidize the local county jail in 2019. As a result, the county implemented a county-wide occupational tax.

"A significant amount of those occupational tax dollars directly goes to running our county jail," she said. "Those funds don't have the opportunity of upgrading our local roadways, increasing law enforcement or other quality of life initiatives."

Meredith told the committee he has spent much of the 2026 interim period workshopping his bill with other legislators. One piece of feedback he's received is to include statutory "tweaks" to allow counties to pay for home incarceration.

Committee co-chair Rep. Patrick Flannery, R-Olive Hill, asked Meredith about the current

Continued on page 4

Housing reform highlighted during committee meeting

By Jenni Glendenning - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT – An effort to improve access to housing in Kentucky was under the spotlight during the Nov. 18 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Tourism, Small Business and Information Technology.

Legislators heard testimony on housing reform from representatives of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, the Home Builders Association of Kentucky and Kentucky Realtors.

According to the presentations, Kentuckians are continuing to face affordability challenges and additional housing supply is needed to support job growth in the commonwealth.

Sen. Scott Madon, R-Pineville, said lawmakers have had a lot of discussions around housing during the interim period and "I will be extremely surprised if housing is not one of our priority… bills this session."



Rep. Nima Kulkarni, D-Louisville, speaks about housing during the Nov. 18 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Tourism, Small Business and Information Technology.

Kate Shanks, chief external affairs officer for the chamber, said government regulations and infrastructure costs are making building more expensive in Kentucky.

Presenters also noted that, in areas such as Bowling Green, Hopkinsville and Clarksville, the median home sale price is now more than four times the median household income.

Rep. Mary Lou Marzian, D-Louisville, said interest rates are one of the biggest obstacles effecting homebuyers. She asked if anything can be done to address that issue.

Shanks said, although interest rates are associated with the national economy, Kentucky can prepare for when the economy shifts and interest rates come back down. "Let's make sure we have the homes," Shanks said.

Anetha Sanford, CEO for the Home Builders Association said that every $1,000 increase in construction cost prices about 2,000 Kentuckians out of the opportunity to own a home.

Speakers said that cutting red tape, giving builders more flexibility and allowing third-party inspections to speed up timelines would help reduce costs along with public-private partnerships for residential infrastructure.

Rep. Nima Kulkarni, D-Louisville, said a lot of development on the east side of Louisville involves houses starting at $400,000 or $500,000. "That is not something that someone who is in their twenties or thirties is going to be able to just have amassed," she said.

Continued on page 4

Legislators hear about dual credit, career and technical education

By Nancy Royden - LRC Public Information

FRANKFORT — Legislators on Nov. 9 learned more about career and technical education and dual credit opportunities in Kentucky.

Members of the Interim Joint Committee on Education and the Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee heard from state and district officials about career pathways and how students can gain credentials and education to turn goals into livelihoods.

Beth Hargis, associate commissioner of state Office of Career and Technical Education, told legislators about dual credit for students who are working toward postsecondary degrees while they're still in high school.

"We support the attainment of dual credit and appreciate the Kentucky students that have the opportunity to utilize dual-credit scholarships, which encourages students to pursue postsecondary credentials," she said.

Travis Muncie, assistant vice president of data and advanced analytics for the state Council on Postsecondary Education, said part of the dual-credit policy is the dual credit attainment goal.

"Basically, this is looking to get at least 50% of high school graduates to attempt and pass a dual-credit course before they graduate," he said. "And we've made huge progress since 2016, going from 22.8% all the way to 47.5%, so it looks like we are well on our way to that goal."

Sen. Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, said career and technical education (CTE) is the future of the workforce in Kentucky.

"We see huge improvements and growth in that area, especially with the work ready scholarships. Of course, those are funded by lottery funds," he said.

He asked about dual credit and the Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship.

Becky Gilpatrick, director of student aid services for the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, said if any funding is available, there is still room for significant growth.



The Interim Joint Committee on Education and the Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee met jointly on Nov. 9 to hear about dual credit and other topics.

Rep. Sarah Stalker, D-Louisville, said allowing students to take dual-credit courses during the summer would be good to consider to help counteract learning loss.

"I'm sure there are some kinks to be worked out to make it happen, but that might encourage more students to take advantage of that when they don't have as much pressure as you typically do during the school year," she said.

Rep. Kevin Jackson, R-Bowling Green, said costs can hinder students from taking as many dual-credit courses as they'd like. He shared some information he was given by the superintendent of the Bowling Green Independent School District.

"Since we cut it from 2-to-1 dual credit classes, 21.5% fewer students taking a second dual-credit course because of cost. So that's 1-in-5 that didn't get to take that second course," he said.

Committee co-chair, Rep. James Tipton, R-Taylorsville, said the dual-credit program has been successful and has benefitted students.

"Our dual-credit scholarships are funded through our lottery program, and this is an issue that I have been concerned about for two or three years now going back before the 2024 budget was passed. Even though our lottery revenues are increasing, the demand for all the scholarships and grant programs that the lottery funded has outpaced the availability of the lottery funds," he said.

However, Rep. Daniel Grossberg, D-Louisville, warned that the focus on CTE and dual credit could come at the cost of learning about liberal arts, world languages and fine arts.

"There has certainly been a shift in thinking over the last several years and acknowledgement that not everyone should go to college just because we are told growing up, at least our generation, that everyone who wants a successful career goes to college. And in fact, there are many paths for success and happiness that don't go through college," he said.

County Jail,
from page 2

limitations on home incarceration and if opioid settlement funds could be used to cover the cost.

Currently, inmates sentenced to home incarceration are responsible for the cost of an ankle monitor, which is $8 to $10 a day compared to the $63.44 average daily cost to house an inmate. If the inmate is indigent, the county can pick up the cost. Meredith said he was uncertain if opioid settlement funds could be used instead.

Rep. Savannah Maddox, R-Dry Ridge, said she has heard Meredith speak on this proposal three times, and she believes it is the Kentucky General Assembly's responsibility to fix the county jail funding issue.

"I think we can clearly see that this is a problem that doesn't just affect a few of us, it affects all of us," she said.

The Kentucky General Assembly cannot take action on legislation until the 2027 legislative session begins on Jan. 5. For more information, visit legislature.ky.gov.

Housing Reform,
from page 2

Kulkarni asked the speakers what they are seeing in terms of that kind of development.

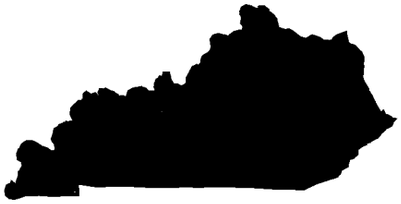
Sanford said that builders are building 1,200 square foot starter homes with no garage, but even then, it is difficult to get the price under $250,000. She said regulations and government agencies requiring specific building elements within a development are ultimately driving up costs.

Rep. Shawn McPherson, R-Scottsville, who is also a real estate appraiser, said that when interest rates are back up around 7%, it's a lot harder for people to make a house payment.

"As much as we've got the economy working and holding us back, we've got to get confidence back in our bond market and our interest rates, and we've got to see lower interest rates for these houses to be moving," he said.







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2026 Kentucky General Assembly

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Committee Meetings

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

Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Ag/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Appropriations and Revenue:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/A&R/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Banking and Insurance:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/B&I/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Economic Development and Workforce Investment:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/EDWI/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Education:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Education/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/IJCF&C/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Health Services:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/IJCHS/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Judiciary:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Judiciary/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/LO&AR/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Local Government:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Loc_Gov/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Energy:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/NR_&_E/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on State Government:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/St_Gov/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Tourism, Small Business, and Information Technology:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/TSBIT/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Transportation:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Trans/minutes_all.html

Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection:
https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/committees/interim/Vets/minutes_all.html







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