

# KENTUCKY YOUTH ASSEMBLY 2020

## YOUTH GOVERNOR'S AGENDA

To help facilitate broader understanding of policy issues facing our Commonwealth, our KYA Governors and their Presiding Officer teams have published the Youth Governor's Agenda.

The Youth Governor's Agenda is a list of policy issues organized into 6 policy areas:

- **Environmental Health**  
Developing and managing the economy and resources of our Commonwealth
- **Education and Educators**  
Reforming K-12 education systems and rights of educators in our Commonwealth
- **Institutional Reform**  
Improving community development and civic and cultural engagement
- **Labor and Economics**  
Ensuring the health and well-being of all Kentuckians and Kentucky families
- **Public Health and Safety**  
Developing public policy to better protect Kentucky Youth
- **Social Equity**  
Reforming and improving the criminal justice system

There are 3-4 issues per policy area on the agenda (20-24 total). Each issue includes a one-page briefing:

- **Background on Issue**  
Summary and background information on the issue
- **Questions to Address in Bills**  
Guiding questions/problems that any BILLS on the issue should look to answer/solve
- **Sources for Research**  
Links to research, articles, and other resources for your delegations

### HOW TO USE THE AGENDA

- The best way to use the Agenda is to have bill sponsors review each issue and consider how they would best answer/solve the "Questions to Address".
- While multiple bills may address the same issue, each bill will likely have a different answer or solution to the problems that must be addressed.

### YOUTH GOVERNOR'S AGENDA FAQ

#### Do we have to write bills on these topics?

These topics are not mandatory (only recommended by your KYA Presiding Officers), nor are they tied to awards, but these topics will be taken into account by each Youth Governor when determining which Commonwealth bills they choose to sign into law.

#### Does the Agenda take a position on an issue?

The agenda does not take positions on issues (or endorse any issue or solution), but rather provides "Questions to Address in Bills" so delegates can research their own positions when drafting their BILLS.

# 2020 AGENDA ISSUES

## Policy Area | Environment Health

Electric Vehicles  
Surface Mining  
Clean Energy Workforce

## Policy Area | Education and Educators

Mental Health Education  
Teacher Pensions  
Alternative Education

## Policy Area | Institutional Reform

Voting Accessibility  
Voting Reform  
Voter Oppression

## Policy Area | Labor and Economics

Slow Growing Wages  
Economic Equity  
Poverty in Kentucky

## Policy Area | Public Health and Safety

Vaccination Reform  
State Confinement Facilities  
Childhood Nutrition

## Policy Area | Social Equity

Unemployment Benefits  
Child Maltreatment  
Foster Care

Prepared by your **2020 KYA Presiding Officers**

<b>Position</b>	<b>HS KYA 1</b>	<b>HS KYA 2</b>	<b>HS KYA 3</b>	<b>HS KYA 4</b>
<b>Governor</b>	Parker Stewart	Darby Greenwell	Omar Abd-Elhamid	Jacob Grant
<b>Speaker of CW House</b>	Marilyn Buente	Ben Dalton	Chloe Jones	Natalie Schory
<b>Pres. of CW Senate</b>	Landin Stadnyk	Karenna Chaudoin	Justin Mink	Nick Bentley
<b>Secretary of State</b>	Sophie Holtzman	Grant Manion	Ian Simpson	Callie Aitken
<b>Chief Justice</b>	Preeti Tanwani	Taylor-Beth Huff	Bobby Lowther	Will Vonhandorf
<b>Attorney General</b>	Sophia Olivia	Sanjana Nasta		Andrew Davis
<b>Sec. of Exec. Cabinet</b>	Mandala Gupta-VerWiebe	Jonathan Antonelli	Kellen Blandford	Blair Fraley
<b>Editor-in-Chief</b>	Kirby Ballard	Brett Phelps	Darrell Liwanag	Bella Cowen
<b>Lt. Governor</b>	Lauren Wood	Ella Lester	Bailey Bullock	Hunter Coady
<b>Speaker of BG House</b>	Will Schindler	Emma Ahmed	Caden Lucas	Coral Ghrist
<b>Pres. of BG Senate</b>	Emerson Harned	Emily Hardeman-Erbar	Ashley Armstrong	Peyton Burnham

# Policy Area 1 | Environmental Reform

## Electric Vehicles

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Nick Bentley, President of CW Senate | HS KYA 4  
Bobby Lowther, Chief Justice | HS KYA 3

### **BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:**

Greenhouse gases occur naturally, and are necessary for the survival of life on Earth. They help trap and reflect the sun's heat, regulating the planet and making it habitable. However, since the Industrial Revolution, humans have released incredible amounts of greenhouse gases that were previously trapped in the fuels used to power industrialization. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a preeminent resource in its field, has assessed that climate change poses a remarkable threat to humans, as well as all other life. Diverse ecosystems such as the Amazon rainforests and the Arctic tundra, which hold significant numbers of small, endangered communities are already going through changes that have led to mass extinction. Furthermore, sea levels are expected to rise between 1.5 to 2 feet by the year 2100. Rising sea levels and warming oceans, besides the threat they pose to wildlife, are considerable dangers to humanity. 40% of people (2.4 billion) live within about 60 miles of coastlines and about 10% (600 million) live only 32 feet above sea level. 127 million people live near a coast in the United States alone. As water rises, stronger and more frequent storms, flooding, and the destruction of essential service frameworks such as power and water grids will create trillions of dollars in damages. Without a doubt, something must be done by everyday citizens in order to reduce greenhouse emissions and mitigate the damage already being caused by climate change.

The most commonly released greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), making up about 75% of all waste emitted in the United States during 2019. Other gases include methane, nitrous oxide, and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). The IPCC assigned Global Warming Potential (GWP) factors to each type of greenhouse gas emitted by humans. The scale measures how much energy each particle absorbs as well as how long, on average, they remain in the atmosphere. Though CO<sub>2</sub> has the lowest GWP (1) because it is used as the base for the rating system, the relationship between a particle's GWP and how much of it is emitted is inversely correlated. Thus, while CFCs have between 265-298 times the GWP of CO<sub>2</sub>, their release made up only 2.7% of the United States' greenhouse gas emissions in 2018. CO<sub>2</sub> can be released in a variety of ways, but the most significant is through the refinement and burning of fossil fuels. These energy sources release so much carbon dioxide because they are carbon-based (having once been living things). However, some fossil fuels contribute more to greenhouse emissions than others. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, transportation (powered primarily by petroleum-based gasoline) alone contributed to 28% of the United States' emissions. Indeed, petroleum is responsible for 46% of CO<sub>2</sub> released, followed by natural gas (33%) and coal (21%).

A significant way for Kentuckians to become involved in the fight against climate change is through the purchase of electric vehicles (EVs). Cities across the United States, including Lexington and Louisville, have already replaced diesel-consuming buses with all-electric or hybrid vehicles for their public transit systems. A transition to all-electric vehicles could lead to significantly reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emission rates. In the two general categories used to measure vehicle emissions, direct emission and life cycle emission, EVs outperform conventional gasoline vehicles, particularly in Kentucky. This is because the refinement and release of gasoline using petroleum contribute far more to greenhouse emissions as opposed to charging electric vehicles, despite government regulation requiring cleaner fuel. Kentucky gets electricity primarily from coal and natural gas (93%), which means that the life cycle emissions of an electric vehicle will still be lower than a conventional vehicle. However, because of the relative youth of the EV industry, the cost of purchasing one is still beyond most Kentuckians' means. This has slowed the growth of EV and related research. Moving forward, it is imperative that Kentucky acknowledges the promise of electric vehicles to dramatically reduce carbon emissions, and starts contributing to a fight that can save millions of lives and trillions of dollars.

### **QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS**

1. How would a transition from conventional vehicles to electric vehicles affect Kentucky's economy (for better or worse)?
2. How does climate change affect Kentucky, or does it at all?
3. Should sustainable energy sources be sought after to power electric vehicles considering Kentucky's coal tradition and the effect it would have on mining communities?
4. Should conventional vehicles continue to work at reducing emissions, or should research instead focus on making electric vehicles more affordable?

## **SOURCES FOR RESEARCH**

Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet. (2019). Kentucky Energy Profile 7th Edition. Retrieved from: <https://eec.ky.gov/Energy/KY%20Energy%20Profile/Kentucky%20Energy%20Profile%202019.pdf>

Lindsey, R. (2020, August 14). Climate Change: Global Sea Level. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Retrieved from: <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level>

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U.S. Energy Information Administration. (2020, August 11). Where Greenhouse Gases Come From. Retrieved from: <https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/energy-and-the-environment/where-greenhouse-gases-come-from.php>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2017, February 14). Understanding Global Warming Potentials. Retrieved from: <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/understanding-global-warming-potentials>

## Policy Area 1 | Environmental Reform

# Surface Mining Environmental Degradation

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Parker Stewart, Governor| HS KYA 1  
Taylor-Beth Huff, Chief Justice| HS KYA 2

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Surface mining is the removal of soil and rock to expose minerals for extraction. This practice began in the mid 20th century and now makes up almost 63% of coal collection in America and 38% in Kentucky. This practice began because of the advantages of a safer work environment for miners and greater cost efficiency. However, the environmental consequences of this practice are much more devastating than other methods of extraction. Surface mining increases erosion substantially, deteriorating aquatic ecosystems and, due to the removal of impurities in the coal, creates slurry ponds that further degrade waterways and groundwater. The removal of the topsoil also degrades the land, consequently creating habitat loss for humans and wildlife.

Although the Federal Government has enacted laws for this, these restrictions do not go far enough. Due to an increasing amount of surface mining, Congress passed the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977. This Act sets environmental standards, requires permits and bonds for surface mining, prohibits certain lands from being strip-mined, and allows government regulators to inspect mining operations for their adherence to the law. Many of this Act's shortcomings stem from the lack of funding directed towards land reclamation. Coal companies in Kentucky that cannot provide a full cost bond (cost coming directly from one company) must participate in a pool bond fund (funds coming from multiple investors or companies). These pool bond funds are often grossly underfunded, which leads to long-term environmental degradation because the land isn't reclaimed properly. Full cost bonds are a much more reliable way of ensuring proper reclamation. Another fault with this Act is that inspections cease only a few years after the mine is closed. This means that mining companies are often not held accountable for their negative externalities that take years to develop. Although this is a federal law, states are allowed to make changes as long as their updates go beyond the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act's restrictions.

Due to surface mining's removal of the top layer of the Earth, rock and soil are loosened enough to be easily washed away with rainwater. This loosened material ends up in our waterways, which can clog fish gills, affect the growth and reproduction of fish, and create odor and taste problems in the water. After extraction, impurities (soil, rock, etc.) must be cleaned from the coal. The fewer impurities coal has, the higher its value is. This creates liquid waste containing, according to coal companies, mostly water, rocks, and mud. However, this waste can also contain carcinogenic chemicals and toxic heavy metals such as arsenic and mercury. The liquid waste is contained in ponds that got the name slurry ponds due to their appearance of a sludgy material. Though they are supposed to be contained, the unlined ponds can easily leach into groundwater and nearby waterways creating unsafe drinking water. These toxic materials have overtaken our aquatic environments and have led to mercury poisoning after eating an abundance of fish. Not only has our aquatic environment been affected, but our land has also been overtaken by surface mining. One in fourteen acres of Kentucky's land has been altered due to surface mining; that is three times the area of Smoky Mountains National Park. This area has been taken from both human and wildlife usage. Habitat loss is the most significant reason for the extinction and endangerment of wildlife all around the world. Surface mining is endangering wildlife, both from the land and the sea, and is affecting human health. With the technology and resources we have today, there must be a solution for better mining practices.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What state-level updates to the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act would decrease surface mining's negative environmental effects?
2. Should full bond funds be required for surface mining?
3. Should surface mining be allowed in Kentucky?

4. Should coal companies be forced to change their coal cleaning process?
5. For how long should coal companies be held accountable for their negative externalities?

## **SOURCES FOR RESEARCH**

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Press, A. (2015, March 27). Toxic coal sludge pollutes Ky. town 10 years later. Retrieved August 17, 2020, from <https://www.foxnews.com/us/toxic-coal-sludge-pollutes-ky-town-10-years-later.amp>

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## Policy Area | Environmental Reform

# Investing in a Clean Energy Workforce

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Ella Lester, Lieutenant Governor | HS KYA #2  
Sophie Holtzman, Secretary of State | HS KYA #1  
Lauren Wood, Lieutenant Governor | HS KYA #1

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Traditionally, coal mining has been a huge source of jobs for Kentucky residents. However, coal production and employment are declining rapidly due to decreasing prices of natural gas, wind turbines, and solar panels. According to the 2016 Kentucky Solar Jobs Census, there are about 1,200 solar workers in Kentucky. The Kentucky solar industry grew 20% from 2015-2016, and shows no signs of slowing down. This growth in renewable energy industries comes as an article from the Environmental Working Group reports that coal-mining-related jobs in Kentucky fell by 20% just last year. Furthermore, according to this same article, two Kentucky coal plants, which supply roughly a fourth of our state's coal-fired power, will shut down this year as a result of complications from the COVID-19 pandemic and the decline in the coal industry. With these closures come dramatic losses in jobs affecting many Kentuckians employed by the coal industry.

As Kentucky attempts to rebound economically from the effects of the pandemic, investing in a renewable energy workforce is one way that our state can create new, secure jobs for Kentuckians. More Americans are employed by renewable energy than coal, oil, and gas combined, despite wind and solar energy only making up 5% of the total U.S. energy mix. According to a study from the University of California, Berkeley, solar energy creates over 7 times more jobs than coal or oil per MWh produced. The employment estimates for wind power differ from source to source, but most agree that it also produces more jobs than fossil fuels. For guidance as to how we can spur job growth in our renewable sector, we need look no further than our neighboring states. Since passing state clean energy policies a few years ago, Ohio has gained 9,000 new jobs in renewable energy services and more than 70,000 jobs in solar and wind manufacturing, while North Carolina has added 12,500 jobs. If Kentucky implements similar clean energy policies to Ohio and North Carolina, it is estimated that we would create at least 28,000 jobs in urban and rural communities.

As we look to the renewable energy sector for job growth, it is crucial that we keep our coal workers in mind. A transition to renewables cannot come at their expense, and effective policies surrounding renewable energy jobs will account for how we can transition our coal workers to the renewable field. Past state legislation that was on the table addressing this issue included the Clean Energy Opportunity Act which would have taken major steps in renewable energy investment in Kentucky, but the legislation has not passed.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How can new jobs be created by investing in clean energy sources?
2. How can wind and solar energy plants help rebuild and support the economy?
3. Should Kentucky invest in more solar energy plants in order to supply more jobs to coal miners?

### SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

Kentucky Renewable Energy. (n.d.). Retrieved August 18, 2020, from <https://blog.arcadia.com/kentucky-renewable-energy/>

Smith, G. (2020, April 24). After the Pandemic, Kentucky Can Rebuild the Economy and Create Jobs by Investing in Clean Energy. Retrieved August 17, 2020, from <https://www.ewg.org/energy/23138/after-pandemic-kentucky-can-rebuild-economy-and-create-jobs-investing-clean-energy>

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## Policy Area | Education and Educators

# Mental Health Education

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Emerson Harned, President of BG Senate | HS KYA 1  
Peyton Burnham, President of BG Senate | HS KYA 4

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Mental health in teens is important in teenagers today more than ever before. In the 2015 children's mental health report, it says one in five teens have or will have a serious mental illness. Between the years of 2012 to 2017, major depressive episodes increased from 8.66% to 13.01% of youth ages 12-17. Right now, suicide is the third leading cause of death in teens in the U.S. and the second leading cause in Kentucky. That can be caused by a number of mental health disorders including depression, bipolar disorder, PTSD, etc.

We need to inform the students of the commonwealth on the importance of getting help. We want to help teach teens that asking for help is acceptable. In February of 2020, a new law of putting crisis numbers on student school ID cards. Those numbers would include domestic violence, sexual assault, and depression. Schools across the commonwealth should be teaching the proper use of these numbers and educating teens on the importance of mental health. Not only should educators be taught what to look for as warning signs in students, but students themselves need to be informed on the options he or she has to get help such as mental health crisis numbers, therapy, and other coping mechanisms.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What topics should be talked about in mental health education?
2. Who would be teaching students about these topics?
3. What are other ways teens can be taught about getting help with a mental illness?

### SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

Institute, C. (n.d.). What's the tie between mental health and juvenile justice? Retrieved August 14, 2020, from <https://childmind.org/2015-childrens-mental-health-report/>

Facts and Tips about Teen Mental Health. (2016, March 24). Retrieved August 14, 2020, from <https://paradigm-treatment.com/facts-and-tips-about-teen-mental-health/>

For Educators. (n.d.). Retrieved August 14, 2020, from <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/educators>

# Teacher Pensions

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Sanjana Nasta, Attorney General | HS KYA 2  
Jonathan Antonelli, Secretary of the Executive Cabinet | HS KYA 2

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE

While discussing the Kentucky state budget in 2020, the idea for a \$1.13 billion cut in teacher pensions was introduced by the Senate. Senators are claiming the budget cuts are necessary with their reasoning being the downfall of revenue from state businesses and low employment rates due to COVID-19. The Teachers' Retirement System of Kentucky (TRS) pays for the benefits and health insurance of retired educators who do not receive Medicare, and the severe cut in pension funds would deprive them of basic necessities. With pensions being withheld, the TRS is claiming that people will have to sell their assets, which would prove to be a great loss in the future especially considering the state of the economy during the pandemic.

Employer salary/payments were supposed to be based on the payroll percentage of the worker, but the increase of the payroll grew exponentially, causing the underfunding. In the past years, the teacher pensions have been seriously disendowed, with the fund only being 58.5% to what the expected TRS payout is supposed to be since June 30th. With the increase in the cost of living, the pensions teachers receive is crucial, allowing them to settle during retirement as well as receive necessary health benefits.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How will the government compensate for the loss in health insurance to retirees considering TRS will not have the money to provide them benefits?
2. What other alternatives or benefits could replace the pensions that retired educators would not be receiving?
3. How will the funding being withdrawn from teacher pensions be utilized to address other higher priority issues that require more money?

### SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

Cheves, J. (2020, March 23). Taking \$1.13 billion from teacher pensions a 'very serious problem,' official warns. Retrieved from <https://www.kentucky.com/news/politics-government/article241433321.html>

Loftus, T. (2018, December 17). Kentucky is in a \$43 billion pension hole. Here are some reasons why. Retrieved from <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/politics/2018/12/17/kentucky-pension-crisis-reasons-how-we-got-here/2317233002/>

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## Policy Area | Education and Educators

# Alternative Education

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Blair Fraley, Secretary of the Executive Cabinet| HS KYA 4  
Emma Ahmed, Speaker of the Bluegrass House| HS KYA 2

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

In recent years, forms of alternative education have started to evolve and become used more within the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Alternative education is defined by the Kentucky Administrative Regulations as “a district-operated and district-controlled facility with no definable attendance boundaries that is designed to provide services to at-risk populations with unique needs. Its population composition and characteristics change frequently and are controlled by the school district student assignment practices and policies”. The majority of students who attend these alternative schools are in need of “intervention services” which tend to individuals who receive preventative, developmental, corrective, or supportive services due to their risk of school failure, violent behavior, juvenile crime, or expulsion from their previous school. In addition to students with behavioral challenges, students with disabilities are also served at many alternative schools and programs. While this form of education has been used more frequently to address personal issues students may face, there are also problems that must be resolved.

There are currently 185 alternative public schools in Kentucky which serve around 9,000 students. For every 9 students, there is 1 teacher. While this ratio is lower than the Kentucky public school average, a 16:1 ratio, the education seems to be poorer. The Kentucky alternative public schools have drastically lower proficiency scores sitting at 22% for math and 29% for reading while the proficiency scores for Kentucky public schools are 47% for math and 56% for reading. While the academic performance of alternative school students is falling behind, the dropout rates soar in comparison to public schools therefore increasing their risk of receiving little to no education. It is clear that there is a critical concern for the academic expectations and standards of learning in these environments to improve in order to prepare the students who attend alternative schools for possible secondary education opportunities and/or professional jobs.

Alternative schools offer pupils a way to tailor their education to their needs. Many of the students who attend these schools need a different approach to learning, not only for educational purposes but for social as well. It is crucial to offer students the same quality of education no matter where their attendance may be. Though alternative schools are quite different from traditional schools, it is our responsibility as the Commonwealth of Kentucky to allow these students to thrive and grow in an environment where they can succeed.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What are possible ways that academic standards in alternative schools can be improved?
2. How could alternative schools work to decrease the dropout rate of their students?
3. In what ways could funding be increased for alternative schools to upturn the quality of their environment?

### SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

703 Ky. Admin. Regs. 5:140. (n.d.). Casetext. Retrieved August 17, 2020, from

<https://casetext.com/regulation/kentucky-administrative-regulations/title-703-education-and-work-force-development-cabinet-kentucky-board-of-education-department-of-education-bureau-of-learn>

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Swarts, L. (2002). *Alternative Education Accountability: Kentucky's Approach*. Impact.

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## Policy Area | Institutional Reform

# Voting Accessibility

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Mandala Gupta VerWiebe, Sec. Exec. of the Cabinet | KYA 1  
Andrew Davis, Attorney General | KYA 4

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Across the nation, many communities' voices are either not heard or severely underrepresented when it comes to one of the core features of democracy— elections. One of the causes of this is a lack of access to polling stations, which disproportionately affects both rural communities and communities of color. Throughout several national primary election days of 2020, 15% of African Americans and 14% of Hispanic identifying people stated having trouble finding polling locations, compared to only 5% of white respondents. Much of this is rooted in the fact that great discretion is given to election officials so they may rearrange or remove polling stations. Further, voters in majority black neighborhoods on average wait 29% longer to vote, and 74% are likely to wait more than half an hour. This has profound effects, as the ACLU has estimated that long wait times deterred 500,000-700,000 voters in the 2012 election.

In Kentucky this issue has been of recent concern in the wake of the recent primary election. Shortly before the primary, the majority of the polling locations were shuttered, leaving only 170 stations for 120 counties. Jefferson County, which includes both Kentucky's largest city and half of the state's African American population, received only 1 polling station. As well, Kentucky has one of the earliest poll closing times in the nation- 6 PM EST, which deters voters even further. Although the single station was a precaution against the pandemic, and there was hope that mail-in votes would be enough to offset this, the statistics tell a different story.

Voter turnout, counting mail-in ballots was only 29%, compared with 2018's 23% turnout, and the record primary turnout of 32% in 2008, even with the usual higher turnout in presidential elections year primaries. Kentucky's Secretary of State promoted mail-in ballots across the state, hoping to draw in a higher voter turnout. However, Adams worried that rural communities didn't get reached by the messaging. UK political science professor Steve Voss has stated that the current system wherein voters must request mail-in ballots not only depressed voter turnout but lead to unnecessary hiccups with counting and receiving the ballots, as well as disproportionately disenfranchised poorer, and thus more likely minority and rural, voters.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How can the government play a role in expanding voting accessibility to minority/rural communities?
2. How can the government expand polling access while also ensuring the safety of voters in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What reform methods will balance voting accessibility while also preventing voter fraud?

### SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

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- Vij, S. (2020, June 26). Why Minority Voters Have a Lower Voter Turnout: An Analysis of Current Restrictions. Retrieved August 16, 2020, from [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human\\_rights\\_magazine\\_home/voting-in-2020/why-minority-voters-have-a-lower-voter-turnout/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/voting-in-2020/why-minority-voters-have-a-lower-voter-turnout/)

## Policy Area | Institutional Reform

# Voting Reform

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Preeti Tanwani, Chief Justice | HS KYA 1  
Natalie Schory | Speaker of the House | HS KYA 4

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Kentucky is known for being one of the more difficult states in America to vote in. According to the 2016 Elections Performance Index, taking into account the data provided by Alison Lundergan Grimes, Kentucky is ranked 44th in voting accessibility and participation. One reason for this is because Kentucky does not provide automatic voter registration for its citizens. According to a 2019 article published by the Brennan Center for Justice, "Sixteen states and the District of Columbia have already approved automatic voter registration...These common-sense reforms increase registration rates, clean up the voter rolls, and save states money." It is likely that more people will vote if they are automatically registered. Joshua Douglas explained in his 2018 article published in the Herald Leader that a state can use information it already has for its citizens, through sources like DMV offices, to register voters when they meet legal voting requirements.

Another reason why Kentucky is not an easy state to vote in is because absentee ballots are very challenging to obtain. An absentee ballot is a way to vote before election day, if a person knows they can not be present at the poles. The Kentucky State Board of Elections official website contains the updated, 2020 qualifications for absentee voting. Although some requirements have shifted recently due to the global pandemic, there have been no mandates to permanently alter absentee ballot requirements post-COVID. This will make voting more challenging for a wide variety of people who may not be able to access the poles in the future.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the effects of increasing the voting time frame. Regularly, voting is open from 6 a.m. - 6 p.m. It is difficult to vote on this day for numerous workers, since the polls are open through the usual business hours. During the Kentucky primary in June, election officials closed the doors shortly after 6 p.m. in Louisville. But, since the Kentucky Expo Center was the only voting site in the county, many voters were still parking or running from their cars to the Kentucky Expo Center. People banged on the doors, insisting that they should be able to vote. A judge finally granted that polls be open for at least 30 more minutes. This incident goes to prove that the extension of the voting time frame will allow for more citizens to vote, especially during a global pandemic that decreases accessibility.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

- 1) What problems could arise with automatic voter registration?
- 2) How would creating "no excuse" voting legislation impact turnout?
- 3) How can voter turnout be increased?
- 4) How would increasing absentee ballots affect Kentucky economically?
- 5) How would increasing the voting time window affect voter turnout?

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## Policy Area 1 | Institutional Reform

# Voting Accessibility

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Darby Greenwell, Governor | HS KYA 2  
Will Schindler, Speaker of the BG House | HS KYA 1  
Kirby Ballard, Editor in Chief | HS KYA 1

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

It is vital for citizens to have their voices represented by those in office. A higher voter turnout keeps our leaders accountable to their constituent's needs and ensures that they are representing the people first. Kentucky's election process is clouded by obstacles that stop individuals from participating in their civic duty. In the 2016 election, 59.1% of eligible voters voted, while the primary election only saw a 20.1% turnout. Some obstacles that stop individuals from voting include differences with the candidates, scheduling conflicts, transportation to polling locations, confusion regarding how or when to register, and issues with absentee ballots. Additionally, Kentucky's primary elections are classified as "closed primaries," meaning that those registered as independents are unable to vote unless they choose to register to one of the main parties. This discourages moderates when it comes to determining who will be on the ballot in November. With the systems in place that make elections too complex, the voices of Kentuckians are not being heard.

Voter Registration is the core of broadening the turnout in Kentucky elections. In the 2019 general election, Kentucky saw its highest turnout in 16 years, with 1.4 million individuals voting. In 2019, it came down to a margin of 2,000 votes in determining the outcome of the Governor election, emphasizing the importance of turnout in determining the leadership in the state. There are different ways to keep the current momentum of voter turnout up, such as automatic voter registration. This type of registration renews a voter's registration through the paperwork being available at the time when renewing a driving license. Automatic voter registration has not been implemented in Kentucky, but has caused an average increase in voter registration by 37.9% in the states that do. Voter education is critical to Kentuckians to ensure that all information is accessible and easily understood. With the recent increase in voter turnout, the elections have become closer and more dependent on individual votes. Kentucky needs to have long term solutions in place to keep people voting and registering for years to come.

This current election is also paved with even more obstacles in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. While many are being encouraged to stay home, absentee and mail-in ballots have become difficult to obtain. Kentucky has only just recently allowed Covid-19 to be used as an excuse to not vote in person. Overall, Mail in voting provides voters with a safer and more convenient alternative. With the current evolving world, access and information regarding absentee and mail in voting is crucial to Kentucky in determining who represents their voice in their government.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What is the most effective way to maximize turnout?
2. Why are Kentuckians less motivated to vote in the Primaries than they are in the General Election?
3. What are ways to increase voter registration while making it more accessible?

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## Policy Area | Labor and Economics

# Slow Growing Wages

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Grant Manion, Secretary of State | HS KYA 2  
Marilyn Buente, Speaker of the House | HS KYA 1

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

For most people in the middle-class, their main source of income is from their job. For years the cost of living has slowly increased while wages for a lot of jobs have not. When wages stagnate and don't keep up with the cost of living, middle-class families often feel the impacts hard. Slow growing wages is one of the biggest issues faced by the middle-class today. Income growth for the middle class has been slower than those of the classes above and below. Since around 1980, the household incomes of that middle-class group has grown by 40%, as opposed to about double that for those above and below. Essentially, middle-class families have to work harder, or more hours, to stay in the same place financially, while upper and lower-class families simply don't in order to stay in the same place financially.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, unemployment has drastically risen in the past four months. However, consumers haven't slowed down, so wage growth should be kicking into high gear, but it isn't. There are a few supposed factors that economists say are the reason as to why wages are still not growing. One of these factors is the trade war with China. The trade war has caused imports to the U.S. to rise in prices. However, the economy has still stood strong throughout. Average earnings for supervisor type workers has dropped annually at a rate of around 1.8% while factory type workers have increased annually at a rate of around 3.5%. Even with a growth of 3.5% per year, most economists say it should be at 4% or higher to stay in line with the cost of living.

As bill sponsors, your goal should be to find a way to balance the annual increase in wages for middle-class workers in comparison to the upper and lower classes. Try to find feasible ways to quicken the pace for wage growth for middle-class employees. This issue affects a lot of households throughout Kentucky, as we are a poorer state than many others. Try to drive home the point that this is to better the lives of the majority of Kentuckians.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How could supervisor wages be increased, or at least become stagnant, while maintaining the growth of factory worker wages?
2. Why are upper and lower-class wages increasing more parallel to the cost of living while middle-class wages aren't?
3. What reforms could be made to decrease unemployment while also continuing the growth of all wages?

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## Policy Area | Labor and Economics

# Economic Equity

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Coral Ghrist, Speaker of BG House | HS KYA 4  
Kellen Blanford, Secretary of Exec. Cabinet | HS KYA 3

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

In the Commonwealth of Kentucky, there is a lack of economic equity as well as economic growth. Kentucky has large agricultural and manufacturing sectors, with a particular focus on automobiles, tobacco, and bourbon. While Kentucky once had a very large coal mining industry, coal mining has declined in recent decades as cheaper energy sources have become more available. Coal has become to be viewed unfavorably due to its environmental impact, although coal still affects a lot of Kentuckians, with approximately 30% of Kentucky's homes being powered by coal. Kentucky has close to 80,000 farms, with an economic impact of 5 billion dollars a year. Agriculture continues to be a mainstay in the Kentucky economy, and among the nation Kentucky is the 8th largest producer of cattle, 2nd largest producer of tobacco, and produces 95% of the world's bourbon. In the service sector, state and local governments are major employers, with other companies like UPS and Amazon having a smaller yet significant impact on employment. Especially among more rural counties, government employment is the main alternative to agriculture or small business. Kentucky is one of the poorest states in the US, with a poverty rate of 16.9% in 2018, which is much higher than the US rate of 10.3%. Additionally, Kentucky GDP per capita is \$38,985, ranked 43rd among the US states.

Furthermore, the state interacts with the economy in a variety of ways. Firstly, the commonwealth Kentucky has a large amount of debt. The organization Ballotpedia found that, "According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Kentucky had a debt of \$13,784,882,000 in fiscal year 2015. The state debt per capita was \$3,116. This ranked Kentucky 24th among the states in debt and 28th in per capita debt." Secondly, in recent events concerning the Covid-19 pandemic, the Kentucky government demonstrated the ability to regulate private economic as well as public economic sectors heavily. This includes preventing physical openings of businesses, and therefore stopping economic transactions in many parts of the business world. Also along these lines, the Kentucky government, especially policy makers, largely determine how the industries in Kentucky function and make money. This includes sales taxes, licenses, and property taxes for businesses. These all relate to how the government interacts with commerce. The state uses information and analysis concerning the economy to determine actions for many facets of government that connect directly with the private sector and public sector economies. In addition, both the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the Kentucky Revised Statutes say little concerning the exact amount of power the state wields over the economy. While both provide for regulation of industries and jobs, they don't explicitly state what the state government can or cannot do with the economy, leading to questions over whether the government's actions are legitimate.

The problems facing Kentucky concerning economics are numerous and complex. Historically, the Kentucky economy has been highly dependent on the coal industry. This caused many regions, specifically Appalachia to have coaldependent and undiversified economies. These regions do not have a structure of specialization or variety of jobs. In recent changes including environmental regulation, lack of further material to mine and cheaper energy sources, regions of Kentucky that relied on coal are impoverished and underdeveloped. Many towns don't have sufficient incomes and businesses to have functioning economies with normal supply and demand. This is seen in the University of Kentucky Capstone project *The Socioeconomic Impact of Coal in the Appalachian Region of Kentucky* which states, "According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, a relationship exists between coaldependent economies and undiversified economies, fewer professional service employment positions and lower educational attainment (Wood, 2005)." Also in Kentucky is a very different type of commerce. Agricultural, mainly privately owned agriculture is one of the two pillars of industry in Kentucky. The agricultural economy provides much of the state's income. These crops include tobacco, soybeans, corn for grain, wheat and more. These

agricultural businesses are critical to the state's economy. But, Kentucky agriculture struggles with "disease, pests, weather, economics, policy, public opinion, growing populations, and more" according to KY Food and Farm. Another struggle Kentucky faces due to the large regions with high numbers of unemployed people living in towns with few job options or low-earning farmers is the income disparity. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the top one percent of Kentucky on average makes \$719,012 while the average income of the bottom ninety-nine percent is \$38,990. The institute states, "The top 1% make 18.4 times more than the bottom 99%." In the commonwealth, there is also a lack of sustainable and environmentally friendly industries that positively affect the economy.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What are the underlying problems concerning historical, geographical, and past legislature that led to Kentucky's underdeveloped and struggling economy?
2. What industries and policies can Kentucky invest in to make Kentucky an attractive place for people and/or businesses?
3. In recent years more people have been advocating for more sustainable practices, from an economic standpoint can sustainability produce more economic benefits than cost?
4. How could the commonwealth's power and duties over the economy be made clearer?

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## Policy Area | Labor and Economics

# Poverty in Kentucky

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Ian Simpson, Secretary of State | HS KYA 3  
Karena Chaudin, President of the CW Senate | HS KYA 2  
Ben Dalton, President of the CW Senate | HS KYA 2

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Many of Kentucky's most common jobs are blue collar (i.e. farmers, mechanics, miners, nurses, etc.). Kentucky is filled with hard working citizens, people who work hard for every penny they have. Even though these people work a hard 9 to 5, and sometimes more, it is barely helping them get by. This is a direct cause of an embarrassing 1 in 4 children in our state living in poverty. 1 in 4 children, on average, have to take home meals from school every Friday so they can have food over the weekend. The parents, the workers, are not having enough income to support their families the way they need to be.

Kentucky used to be a very promising coal state and was very successful, but not all good things are made to last forever. Global Climate Problems and Dangers of coal mining has destroyed a once flourishing industry. Poor political decisions of trying to revive this dying industry has only hurt Kentucky. In our most prominent coal mining area we have 10 Of the top 25 poorest counties in America, the population is very minimally increasing every year. Kentucky needs a new industry, Kentuckians need jobs. We are one of the least educated states in America, we have 239,000 children, 70,000 people over the age of 60, and 290,000 age 18-59 on Food Stamps.

Almost half of Kentucky's children are living in what is considered to be a low income home, and of these children in Kentucky, 12% live in extreme poverty. The amount of children struggling with the poverty problem is outrageous. These high rates of poverty affect the children of the Commonwealth in many ways. This includes putting the children of Kentucky at a disadvantage in health, as well as education.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

What is a safe way we can bring jobs into Kentucky and put more money in citizens' pockets?  
How can we bring in jobs without hurting small business and employers?  
How can we help the most impoverished people get jobs and provide for their families?  
How can we improve skill based learning and improve Kentucky curriculum.

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## Policy Area | Public Health and Safety

# Vaccination Reform

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Caden Lucas, Speaker of the BG House | HS KYA 3  
William VonHandorf, Chief Justice | HS KYA 4

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

In our world today, vaccines are some of the most impressive and paramount scientific advancements. According to the WHO, vaccines save an average of 2-3 million lives per year, making them one of modern medicines greatest successes. The prevention of diseases such as: polio, measles, mumps, etc., were and are vital in the protection of all people around the world. However, more and more parents are looking to not vaccinate their children due to the “non-organic compounds and ingredients” that are used in modern vaccines. Thus, leading to a resurgence in diseases such as measles, and damaging the lives of countless children as well as adults. Despite the major successes vaccines have shown throughout history, an estimated 1.5 million people die from vaccine-preventable diseases per year according to the WHO. This refusal of vaccinations has led to the death of many children and adults because of misinformation spread through media platforms. Vaccine-preventable diseases are currently on the rise, even within the United States.

In the USA, states such as New York, with 200 confirmed cases, and Washington, with 50 confirmed cases, have seen the vaccine-preventable disease, measles, reappear in school systems. This number may seem miniscule when compared to the entire population of the United States, however, if we continue to tolerate vaccine hesitancy among parents, the number of cases for vaccine preventable disease will only rise in the United States. Much like other countries, such as Brazil who have seen more than 10,000 cases of measles within the past year. Or Europe, which has confirmed nearly 60,000 cases of measles within the past year. Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease, and parents wantonly place many children and families in danger when they refuse their child a potentially life saving vaccine.

Refusing to vaccinate children also damages children in ways that are not necessarily physical. Children, within Kentucky, are required to receive certain vaccinations before they are allowed to enter the school system. If a parent refuses to provide a child with a vaccine, the child will lose some of the most formative years of their young life in a school setting, in turn affecting them for many years to come. Also, vaccines are distributed in the interest of herd immunity. If a person is unable to receive a vaccine due to medical issues, they still have the opportunity to attend school if all other students have received vaccination for that specific disease. By receiving vaccines, people protect themselves and others, and by refusing to receive a vaccine, the action disregards the safety of the individual as well as others.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How, in Kentucky, do we ensure the safety of vaccinations for all people?
2. Is it constitutional for the state to force mandatory vaccinations on all able body students?
3. What specific vaccinations should be mandated and enforced by the state?
4. What qualifies for a vaccination exemption?
5. Will vaccinations be paid for by the State, or will insurance companies be forced to take the financial burden?

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## Policy Area | Public Health and Safety

# State Confinement Facilities

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Callie Aitken, Secretary of State| HS KYA 4  
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### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Across the Commonwealth's twelve adult correctional facilities, 12,437 people are housed in government care. These correctional, penal, and treatment facilities are tasked with reforming the people who have violated the law, and assisting them in becoming productive members of society. Yet, said facilities are forced to operate in unsafe, and unproductive environments. Due to a for-profit prison system, these facilities were created to maximize public safety, hold the most amount of prisoners, and retain prisoners, instead of protecting and rehabilitating them. Consequently, diseases run rampant in these facilities, and Kentucky's recidivism rate is 46.4% (43rd in the United States). Kentucky's State Confinement Facilities are facing many problems such as: PTSD; Officer safety, recruitment, and retention; training; contraband; and cost. But, the most pressing issues are the lack of health care, and lack of rehabilitation and reintroduction programs.

Every day of the year, but especially during a pandemic which has at times seemed to be uncontrollable, the safety of the inmates is paramount. The members of these confinement facilities do not give up their right to safety, and health care when entering the facility. To force them to do so is unconstitutional. To quote Joseph Bick, "Most jails and prisons were constructed to maximize public safety, not to minimize the transmission of disease or to efficiently deliver health care." The United States, including the Commonwealth of Kentucky, has faced the issue of mass incarceration for decades. The unprecedented number of inmates has forced the prisons into a corner, and gave the legislators and administrators two options: reduce inmate services to save money and stay open or reduce the number of incarcerated peoples. But, the political climate at the time ignored the option to reduce incarceration rates, thus creating a snowball effect and rapidly increasing the number of prisoners in Kentucky's state confinement facilities. This forced the facilities to cut or restrict many inmate services. In these prisons, a combination of many factors contributes to the increased transmission rates of preventable and contagious illnesses in the prisons. Under the current Kentucky Revised Statutes (KRS) and Kentucky Administrative Regulations (KAR), the regulations for hand washing areas, isolation rooms, and personal protective equipment and infection-control supplies are scarce. Also, there are oftentimes prohibitions on infection reduction items such as condoms and needle exchange programs. In addition to this, to quote the Clinical Infectious Diseases book, "The high prevalence of mental illness among inmates often complicates the appropriate management of contagious illnesses." Because the spread of disease is complex and multifaceted, the State Correctional Facilities, legislators, and administrators must be innovative in preventing the spread of illnesses in the correctional facilities, and protect their inmates.

While diseases run rampant, inmates are not being rehabilitated during their time in these facilities. The lack of programs available, specifically to youth in these facilities, combined with the extremely punitive culture results in a lack of growth for those who are detained. The Department of Juvenile Justice found that the treatment within these facilities could be classified as infringement of constitutional rights. Up until the 1970s, the goal of State Confinement Facilities was to equip inmates with occupational skills that they could utilize when they re-entered society. However, in the last few decades, this mindset has shifted to a culture of punishment with a heavy hand. This way of thinking puts inmates at a disadvantage and results in second-time offenders. The evidence produced by research on the topic of rehabilitation has shown that access to mental health professionals, employment programs, and educational practices has made the transition back into society significantly easier for inmates. Despite this overwhelming evidence, Kentucky still has a recidivism rate of almost half. Dr. Craig Haney

from the University of California claims that this way of thinking “may do more long-term damage both to the system and to the individuals than it solves.”

### **QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS:**

1. How can the overcrowding be reduced and remedied?
2. How can the Commonwealth transition to rehabilitation based corrections?
3. What can be done to improve member health in the State Confinement Facilities, and reduce disease transmission?
4. Assuming the Commonwealth has been imprisoning people that should not have been imprisoned, are reparations in order? If so, what kind and what amount?
5. What will the effects be on the Commonwealth, both long and short term, after plans to remedy these issues are implemented?

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## Policy Area | Public Health and Safety

# Childhood Nutrition

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Justin Mink, President of the CW Senate | HS KYA 3  
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### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

The state of Kentucky has a crisis on the rise and does not even notice it. Obesity is a rising issue in the United States. Obesity is defined as a disorder in which an individual consumes more calories than they burn off, resulting in excess body fat contributing to increased health risks. In the Commonwealth of Kentucky, 20.8% of youth aged 10 to 17 years old are obese. This places Kentucky at number three among fifty states and the District of Columbia. Kentucky is also ranked number five in adult obesity. Roughly 36% of adults are medically obese. The issue facing Kentucky is providing healthy options to fight obesity and promote healthier lifestyles for the wellbeing of the Commonwealth. Obesity is an obstacle to both economic growth and education improvement. In 2009, Kentucky launched policies to reduce obesity, but rates have been on a steady incline since.

Right now in Kentucky, a few policies are in place to help children establish good nutritional habits. These include the National School Lunch Program, a federally assisted program in schools and residential child care which provides balanced low or no cost lunches. The School Breakfast Program also provides breakfast to Kentuckian students, combined with the Afterschool Snack Program which reimburses schools for giving students snacks during afterschool activities. The Seamless Summer Option allows schools to continue these programs into the summer for students who rely on them. While these policies are good at helping kids keep from getting hungry they don't address ways to keep them healthy, or how to build habits for the future.

Policies include:

- \* Support Breastfeeding in the Workplace
- \* Require Menu Labelling at Fast Food and Chain Restaurants
- \* Require Standards for Nutrition and Physical Activity in Licensed Child Care Centers
- \* Require Healthy Food in State Agencies
- \* Provide Worksite Wellness Tax Credits to Businesses
- \* Establish Complete Street Policies
- \* Establish a BMI (Body Mass Index) Surveillance System for Youth
- \* Increase Physical Activity and Physical Education in Schools

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. In what ways can we tackle childhood and adult obesity?
2. What resources can we offer Kentuckians with obesity?
3. What effect does obesity have on standard of living?
4. What effect does obesity have on Kentuckians versus eating disorders such as anorexia?
5. Should the government have a voice in the issue of obesity?
6. What health issues arise in regards to the fight against obesity?
7. In what ways can existing policies be altered to be more impactful?

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## Policy Area | Social Equity

# Unemployment Benefits

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Hunter Coady, Lt. Governor | HS KYA 4  
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### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Unemployment benefits are a way for people terminated from their job for reasons outside their control and who are actively seeking new work to stay afloat while transitioning occupations. Unemployment benefits can cover your insurance and/or necessary expenses. People terminated for misconduct, illegal activity, or chronic medical problems that affect their future proficiency, or those who are not looking for work cannot file for benefits. The system has always had problems with its infrastructure, with frequent delays on the delivery of money, which by the time it arrives, loses its initial purpose. The website has had significant problems and is known for crashing. These problems escalated even more with the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, many Americans were laid off of their jobs due to the shutdown of the country. In Kentucky alone, 750,718 unemployment claims were made between March (considered the start of the pandemic) and June (most recent data filed). Of the Kentuckians that have filed, many have had issues ranging from receiving double benefits, to long wait times. Many citizens of the Commonwealth are not being served correctly and/or not eligible for a reason that shouldn't hold them back. The response system to those who are filing consider the website antiquated and needs to be up to 2020 standards. The website is outdated and takes too long to load many of the pages, as well as many pages do not hold up to date information or do not even work for others in the first place. The call centers only have so many people and others have experienced high wait times. And the website and call centers can be hard to use for those who are not tech savvy and need in person help. Local in person Help Centers have closed because of Covid-19, so people cannot even be helped in person or over the phone locally. Some have not even received their checks from the Unemployment Relief since March of this year. News reports show that they are understaffed and millions in the US are waiting to get assistance from the call and always seem to be experiencing issues with their website.

As bill sponsors, try to find solutions to fixing the overwhelmed system and expand on a feasible way to help out the Commonwealth who are looking for support for themselves and loved ones. The system has a great many problems that can be addressed with new creative ideas in your bills. This is an issue that affects a great percentage of our commonwealth, and a great percentage of our peers, so keep that in mind when brainstorming.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How could the technology behind the unemployment insurance helpline be fixed and more accessible?
2. What reforms could be made in order to make sure unemployment benefits are distributed as fairly as possible?
3. How could funding be changed in order to maximize the efficiency of the system?
4. What are some ideas for changing the benefits so that it fits those who are actually eligible, and doesn't leave out anyone or include too many people?
5. What are some solutions for helping out citizens who are in need of unemployment benefits?

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## Policy Area | Social Equity

# Child Maltreatment

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Sophia Olivia, Attorney General | HS KYA 1  
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### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

In their most recent child maltreatment report published in 2018, The US Department of Health and Human Services reported Kentucky as the leading state in rates of child abuse and neglect. 22 out of every 10,000 children in Kentucky are victims of child abuse, which is more than twice the national average of nine. This does not account for the large number of cases that go unreported. In addition, there is currently a record number of more than 10,000 children in foster care, and this number is increasing.

Maltreatment can have profound and lifelong effects on victims, including stunted brain development, poor mental and emotional health, and attachment and social difficulties. Victims' physical health may also be affected by physical abuse inflicted upon them. These factors more than likely will lead to behavioral consequences into adolescence and adulthood, even if abuse has ceased. Victims are at higher risk for substance abuse disorders, are more likely to engage in criminal activities, and are more likely to abuse their own children.

High rates of maltreatment and the increasing number of youth in foster care has led to a strained child welfare system and extreme excessive caseload for social workers. In 2017, a study conducted by the Kentucky Department of Community Based Services revealed that caseworkers manage an average caseload of 32 families, although state law prohibits caseloads over 25 families and the recommended standard is 15-20 cases. This coupled with the low pay lead to high turnover rates, the average social worker only working for four years.

Child maltreatment is a contributing factor to other major issues plaguing Kentucky such as high incarceration rates, the opioid epidemic, and increasing numbers of mental health disorders. In order to solve many issues in Kentucky, we must focus on ensuring our youth is receiving the care, attention, and resources they require.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. Should being a social worker classify as a hazardous duty job?
2. Which sectors of Kentucky funds can be decreased to provide more funding for social workers?
3. How can our commonwealth better protect children in schools or other governmental organizations?
4. How can we assist children in Kentucky's minority in relation to child abuse and neglect?

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## Policy Area | Social Equity

# Foster Care

**ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS:** Jacob Grant, Governor | HS KYA 4  
Austin Terrell, Attorney General | HS KYA 3  
Chloe Jones, Speaker of the House | HS KYA 3

### BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Foster care is a system developed to house minors in either a ward, state certified private-home, or group home. Funding is provided by the Federal Government to States to administer Child Welfare Systems. General issues pertaining to the foster care system include a lack of healthy psycho-developmental stages key to educational, cognitive, social, and moral behavior. Interestingly, many of these issues are caused by the placement of foster children and their treatment. For instance, the Group Home Setting lacks the parental guidance and figure that is obtained by a familial household environment. Furthermore, in 2017, 81 percent of Kentucky foster children under age 18 lived with families, whether that was with actual relatives or non-relatives. That's the seventh-lowest rate in the nation.

In Kentucky, foster care is given publicly or through privatization. Privatized Foster Care risks the ability to hire unlicensed workers, installs the "fill beds" to meet quota for Group Homes, provokes a higher social worker turnover rate, and hides the ability to neglect foster youth while in care. Due to the social worker turnover, there is an inadequacy in following-up on fatalities and monitoring of care placements. Additionally, while public child welfare systems are funded by the government, privatized foster care is funded by a 3rd party private agency which tends to be a nonprofit organization (ie. the MENTOR Network- A non-profit organization that aids young children and teenagers through foster care services such as the Individualized Service Plan).

Under the previous administration, debates of foster care as an issue of separation of church and state became more abundant. With cases involving public funding of child care providers with immediate ties to religion, debates such as these were bound to occur. Many called for a revision of non-secular child care organizations within the state, as well as their boundaries when pertaining to funding or state aid. Claims made by the previous governor regarding the state's child care system also created tensions and questions between foster care in Kentucky and its relationship with religion.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How does the increasing privatization of foster care in Kentucky affect the foster care system?
2. What does the Kentucky foster care system do differently than other states' systems?
3. Are churches and other religious institutions a part of the privatized foster care system?

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