

Revised fluoride bill in the works for 2026

BY LEGISLATIVE
RESEARCH COMMISSION

FRANKFORT — Two Kentucky lawmakers are hoping 2026 will be the year a bill to remove the state mandate for fluoride in Kentucky's drinking water crosses the finish line.

Rep. Mark Hart, R-Falmouth, has filed legislation similar to House Bill 16 from the 2025 legislative session nine times, he said. The bill did not become law this year, but did receive House approval.

On Tuesday, Hart was joined by Sen. Greg Elkins, R-Winchester, and other stakeholders at the Interim Joint Committee on State Government meeting to testify on a new version of HB 16.

Hart plans to carry the bill in the House, and Elkins said he would file companion legislation in the Senate next year.

"The legislation simply undoes the unfunded mandate in the state of Kentucky that requires water producers to add fluoride to the water," Hart said.

The newer version of the legislation from Hart would protect local water districts from civil and criminal liability, he said. The decision to add this provision to the bill is the result of conversations with water districts.

"One of the biggest concerns we heard was they were worried about possible litigation," Hart said. "Doesn't matter whether they keep fluoride in water or take it out, they are afraid they're going to be sued with whatever decision is made."

Dr. Jack Kall, a dentist and the executive chair of the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology, shared scientific studies with the committee that show water fluoridation might cause lower IQ in children, among other health

concerns.

Kall said the fluoride in most toothpaste and other fluoride treatments administered by dentists are sufficient in preventing tooth decay.

Hart said his legislation is an effort to make water fluoridation a local decision in light of newer studies on the risks and benefits of water fluoridation.

"We're not promoting fluoride one way or another – good or bad," Hart said. "We're trying to steer away from that conversation, because that's not what the legislation does. However, with some of the stuff in the media today, we thought it was necessary to give you a little bit of an education on the risks and benefits for it."

Elkins said he considers the proposed legislation to be "permissive" rather than a requirement.

"It's more of a local control bill to me than anything else," he said.

In commenting on the proposed

legislation, Rep. Matthew Lehman, D-Newport, said all of the countries that do not have water fluoridation mentioned in Kall's presentation have "robust, publicly funded dental programs."

He wondered if Kentucky should be funding water fluoridation and other dental health initiatives instead of leaving water fluoridation as an unfunded state mandate.

Rep. T.J. Roberts, R-Burlington, said he's received multiple messages asking him to oppose legislation that removes community water fluoridation programs, but he believes the proposed legislation is more about local control.

"This is a good piece of legislation that expands the ability for community-based decision making," Roberts said. "I think it's backed up by data, and I fully support this."

In a continuation of the local control discussion, Rep. James Tipton, R-

Taylorsville, asked Hart if the new version of HB 16 would require a public hearing. Hart said no, but he wouldn't be opposed.

"Maybe you might consider something like that to just make sure that the local people in the local communities are informed, and they have an opportunity to (provide) input on decisions of their local water district board," Tipton said.

Sen. Steve Rawlings, R-Burlington, said he would support the proposed legislation.

"I would also be supportive of a total ban, as Florida and Utah have done to date," he added.

The Kentucky General Assembly cannot take action on new legislation until the 2026 legislative session begins Jan. 6.

The next Interim Joint Committee on State Government meeting is at 3 p.m. Nov. 13.

House candidates say fundraising reports show strength

BY MCKENNA HORSLEY
KENTUCKY LANTERN

In Central Kentucky, more candidates for Congress have thrown their hats into the ring ahead of May's primary — meaning the race is underway to raise cash from donors.

Between Republicans and Democrats, eight candidates have launched campaigns to succeed Republican U.S. Rep. Andy Barr. He is running for the U.S. Senate seat opened up by Sen. Mitch McConnell's retirement.

Most of the candidates in the 6th Congressional District said their latest fundraising numbers put them in a strong position to win their party's nomination.

Meanwhile, another competitive primary is heating up in Northern Kentucky, as President Donald Trump backs a challenger to unseat incumbent Republican U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie.

Massie broke a personal fundraising record with his latest campaign finance reports as he fights for reelection in the 4th Congressional District.

The contributions come as Massie gains national attention for leading the charge to release the federal investigation files into convicted sex offender Jeffery Epstein.

Massie has gained a total of more than \$1.8 million this year for his reelection campaign.

Ed Gallrein, the challenger

President Donald Trump is backing in the primary against Massie, announced his campaign after the latest filing deadline and has not filed campaign finance reports yet. However, Trump's support is likely to bring Gallrein cash. A Trump super PAC spent more than \$1 million on ads against the congressman before a challenger candidate was named.

REPUBLICANS

On the Republican side, Dr. Ralph Alvarado, a former state senator, has the most cash, with a total of more than \$376,900 raised between July and the end of September. As of the last campaign filing, his campaign has spent under \$57,000.

"Our fundraising numbers prove that our message is winning with voters not only in Kentucky's 6th District but across the Commonwealth and the nation," Alvarado said in a statement to the Lantern. "People are investing in our campaign because they know I am the most qualified candidate to keep the 6th District in Republican hands. My primary opponents cannot say the same. They were both forced to pour more than a quarter million dollars of their own money into their campaigns in a desperate attempt to stay relevant."

State Rep. Deanna Gordon has nearly \$358,250 from July

to September — most of which she provided. Records show Gordon loaned her campaign \$268,000. Her campaign has spent nearly \$43,900.

In a press release, her campaign said her numbers are a "powerful show for the movement she's building across Kentucky's 6th District."

"This campaign is powered by patriots, everyday Kentuckians, and those who love this country and are ready to fight for President Trump's America First agenda," Gordon said in the press release. "The American people delivered President Trump a clear mandate last fall, and I'm ready to help him deliver his Agenda."

State Rep. Ryan Dotson also made a major contribution to his campaign, lending it \$260,000. He reported raising more than \$324,460 from April to September. So far, the campaign has spent just over \$14,770.

His campaign said in a statement to the Lantern that the finance report "makes clear that the grassroots is with Ryan Dotson" and puts him "in a uniquely strong position to win both the Primary and the General Election — backed by the people, not the political class."

"The vast majority of support came from right here in Kentucky — from people who know Ryan, trust him, and have seen his leadership firsthand. He's a pastor, a veteran, and

a proven leader who raised his family in the same district he's now running to represent. Ryan is proud to have called the Commonwealth home his entire life."

Another Republican and a retired pharmaceutical executive from Nicholasville, Greg Plucinski, announced his candidacy last week after the latest campaign filing deadline. At present, he isn't required to submit finance reports.

DEMOCRATS

Former Kentucky House Democratic caucus chair Cherlynn Stevenson has the most money of the Democratic field, but also the most spent. Between May and September, her campaign amassed more than \$345,200, but also spent the most, more than \$190,000.

In a news release, the Stevenson campaign said the reports show a lot of "grassroots support," with donations from 88 of the state's 120 counties, including all 16 within the 6th Congressional District. Nearly 70% of the campaign's more than 5,000 donations are under \$25, the campaign said.

"People are fired up to hear a Mountain Democrat stand up and fight for Kentucky values," Stevenson said in the release. "I'm proud that our campaign is being built by teachers, veterans, small business owners and family farmers who love this Commonwealth as much as I do.

And I'm proud to earn over 40 endorsements from people and organizations both in the district and all across Kentucky, including the IBEW and Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman."

Former federal prosecutor Zach Dembo gained fundraising momentum since announcing his candidacy this summer. Between June and September, the campaign has amassed more than \$290,000 and spent more than \$61,000. In a statement, Dembo's campaign said it has more than 1,800 donors from more than half of Kentucky's counties and all 50 states.

"This campaign is about sending a new leader to Congress who actually fights for the health, safety and rights of people in this district, and I'm grateful for the recognition that our campaign is ready for that challenge," Dembo said in a statement. "My entire career, as a Navy JAG officer and federal prosecutor, I have been focused on public service and helping others, and now that call is more serious than ever. This outpouring of support comes from people all across Central Kentucky, and I know that if we keep working together, we will be successful in this campaign for hard-working families here."

Former Lexington council member David Kloiber's campaign garnered more than \$176,000 between April and September and spent nearly

\$34,000. He loaned his campaign \$127,000.

Program manager Erin Petrey's campaign had more than \$65,000 from July to September and spent more than \$7,000. She loaned her campaign \$5,000. Neither Kloiber's campaign nor Petrey's campaign returned requests for comment for this story.

IN NORTHERN KENTUCKY

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Kentucky Lantern is a non-profit news site covering state government and politics.

Trump-endorsed candidate enters race to challenge Massie

BY BRUCE SCHREINER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SHELBYVILLE — President Donald Trump's choice to challenge maverick Republican Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky announced his candidacy Tuesday, pledging to steadfastly support the president's agenda while describing the incumbent as an obstructionist.

Retired Navy SEAL officer Ed Gallrein entered the 4th District campaign after gaining Trump's endorsement. He will have the president's vaunted political operation on his side, and a super PAC launched by Trump aides already has run ads attacking Massie. But he will confront an entrenched, well-funded incumbent in Massie, who steamrolled past challengers, even when he incurred Trump's wrath.

"I've dedicated my life to

serving my country, and I'm ready to answer the call again," Gallrein said in a release. "This district is Trump country. The president doesn't need obstacles in Congress — he needs backup. I'll defeat Thomas Massie, stand shoulder to shoulder with President Trump, and deliver the 'America First' results Kentuckians voted for."

The GOP primary election contest next May will test Trump's hold over Republican politics. Gallrein, who has never held elective office, was defeated in a state Senate primary last year.

The president's dominance was on full display this month in Tennessee, where the Trump-endorsed candidate won a crowded GOP primary for an open congressional seat.

The libertarian-leaning Massie has won reelection by lopsided margins since entering Congress in 2012.

He has beefed up fundraising in preparation for the toughest political fight of his career.

His reputation as a contrarian willing to buck GOP leaders goes back years, but reached a tipping point with Trump this year, when he opposed the president on key budget and foreign policy issues. Massie is betting that Kentuckians will embrace his independent streak despite Trump's popularity in the district.

"Fourth District voters appreciate having an independent, conservative voice who works for them, and I look forward to continuing my fight for transparency, constitutional rights, secure borders, a true America-first foreign policy and fiscal responsibility," Massie said in a statement Tuesday.

Massie dismissed Gallrein as "someone willing to be a rubber stamp for globalist billionaires, endless debt, foreign aid and forever wars."

Massie is at the forefront

of efforts to trigger a vote on legislation that would force the release of files related to Jeffrey Epstein. The Kentuckian opposed Trump's massive tax breaks and spending cuts package, saying it will grow the national debt and hurt the economy, while Trump calls it "beautiful." Massie said the president lacked authority to attack Iran's nuclear sites without congressional approval.

Previewing a likely campaign theme, Gallrein described Massie as an obstructionist.

"Thomas Massie has become one of the biggest roadblocks to President Trump's 'America First' agenda," Gallrein said. "President Trump endorsed me because Kentuckians deserve a congressman who will stand with our president, not against him."

Gallrein, 67, is a farmer and businessman who had a long, decorated military career.

Massie has the support of Kentucky Republican Sen.

Rand Paul, who joined him on a swing through the district last month. During one stop, Massie said Trump is "probably the best president we've had in my lifetime," but indicated he's not a rubber stamp.

"If I think he's wrong on policy, or if I think one of his cabinet members has misled him on policy, and they want us to vote on something ... I will speak up if I don't think it's following the Constitution," he said.

In 2020, during Trump's first term, Massie tried to stall a COVID-19 relief package.

Trump berated him then as a "third rate Grandstander" who should be tossed from the GOP, but Massie cruised to reelection. Trump changed course in 2022, calling Massie a "Conservative Warrior" and a "first-rate Defender of the Constitution."

Several other candidates have entered the race for the 4th District, which stretches across northern Kentucky. The eventual Republican nominee will be heavily favored in a district last represented by a Democrat two decades ago.



Ed Gallrein

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