

UK Child Life specialists blend healing, playtime for patients

BY HILARY BROWN
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

LEXINGTON — Most children will never be diagnosed with a serious illness or experience a life-altering injury. Their families will never have to navigate and unfamiliar hospital setting, understand a complex diagnosis or grapple with the stress while trying to help their child be brave in the face of uncertainty.

But for the families who do find themselves in those situations, they can find solace in knowing that in addition to the array of healthcare providers working to improve the patient's physical health, there's a team with a unique set of skills dedicated to their child's emotional health.

Certified child life specialists (CCLS) are health care professionals who help children of all ages cope with the stress of medical procedures, clinic visits and hospital stays. Members of the Child and Family Life team at Golisano Children's at UK can be found throughout the hospital's inpatient units, ambulatory clinics and the emergency department, ready to help make a patient's experience a little less scary. Three specialists who have recently embarked on their careers — Allison Schiltz, Shayla Embry and Ella Kate Nichols — discuss the challenges and triumphs of this integral health care position.

"I want to support families through challenging times," Schiltz originally wanted to be a teacher but instead pursued a career in child life after learning about the unique support specialists provide.

"As I learned more about how hospitalization can affect children and their families, I knew I wanted to pursue this career to support them through challenging times and create more positive experiences," said Schiltz.

After completing the required course work and internship for certification at the University of Missouri, Schiltz joined the staff of the DanceBlue Golisano Children's at UK Hematology/Oncology Clinic as a CCLS. There, she helps young patients understand their diagnoses and prepare for procedures, while also supporting them throughout their treatment. Schiltz and the other Child Life specialists use both real and play medical equipment to demonstrate procedures such as an IV placement. Children learn about the world through play, and medical play is an important therapeutic tool to help children cope with the stress and anxiety of being in a



Hilary Brown/UK

From left, Ella Kate Nichols, Shayla Embry and Allison Schiltz are embarking on their careers as Certified Child Life Specialists at Golisano Children's at UK.

clinical or hospital setting. But they still make time for regular playtime, too. After all, these aren't just patients in a hospital — they're kids.

"Part of my job is to provide fun activities and play to help normalize the clinic environment for patients," Schiltz said. "Providing normalization during clinic appointments helps to make them less stressful for children."

It's not just the kids who need support — entire families are affected by a child's illness or injury. When a parent's focus is on their hospitalized child, siblings can sometimes feel lost in the shuffle. Child life specialists work to make sure every member of the family has the tools they need to cope when the stress of a hospital stay carries over to their homelife.

"When children are hospitalized and receiving medical treatments, the entire family is affected," she said. "When providing sibling support, we use developmentally appropriate language to help them understand why their brother or sister is hospitalized. Supporting and educating siblings helps reduce fears and misconceptions they might have."

"Many children I meet are going through their first significant medical experience."

Shayla Embry first learned about the role of child life specialists from UK Department of Family Sciences newsletter. She always knew she wanted to work with children in a health care setting, so this career felt like a perfect fit. After graduation and completing her internship, Embry began her role as a CCLS in the UK Golisano Children's Makenna David Pediatric Emergency Center, where many children get their first hospital experience.

"In the emergency department, many children that I meet are going through their first significant medical experience," said Embry. "This allows us to

teach positive coping skills early to help prevent medical trauma down the road."

For a little kid, the emergency department is a scary, overwhelming place full of strangers and confusion. The pain of their injury or illness is compounded by the fear of the unknown. While emergency providers have specialized training in caring for pediatric patients, sometimes taking the time to explain situations and alleviate their patients' fears must take a backseat to providing urgent medical care. That's where Embry and the other child life specialists come in.

"One unique challenge that children in the emergency department face is undergoing a trauma alert in the case of a critical injury," she said. "A trauma alert can be very overwhelming for a child due to the high number of people in the room, multiple procedures taking place at once, and the fear of being in a new environment. As an emergency department CCLS, my role is to help the child understand what is going on by using developmentally appropriate language and remaining calm amidst the chaos."

For most children, their only experience with a medical setting is their yearly trip to the pediatrician. As harrowing as a trip to the emergency department can be, Embry and her colleagues turn adversity into opportunity — the chance to foster a positive, educational environment where kids can build the coping skills to face any medical matter they encounter in life.

"I recently worked with a 6-year-old who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes and had a fear of needles," she said. "This type of diagnosis is the beginning of a lifelong medical journey that requires frequent pokes. Using real medical equipment and developmentally appropriate language, we made a plan together for how to get through tough pokes. She

was able to have two IVs placed without a single tear. The patient's mother was incredibly grateful for my involvement in her daughter's care and wrote that the presence of a child life specialist during her diagnosis 'truly changed the trajectory of her experience.'"

"I knew that I wanted to make that same kind of impact"

Growing up, Nichols saw several childhood friends battle cancer and witnessed the toll it took on them and their families.

"I saw firsthand how a diagnosis can completely turn a patient and their family's lives upside down, but I also saw the impact that child life specialists are able to make on patients," Nichols said. "Each of my friends who were frequently hospitalized talked about how incredible their child life specialist was, and I knew that I wanted to make that same kind of impact on kids."

After completing her internship, Nichols began her full-time position in the acute care unit of the children's hospital in January 2026. Using play as therapy, she helps patients understand what they need to do to get better. She recalls working with one young patient who had never learned to swallow pills. She worked with him every day during his admission, helping him build the skills his treatment required. Over time, there was more than just an improvement in his physical health.

"I witnessed more than just skill development; I watched him grow," she said. "Not only did his ability improve, but his demeanor began to shift. He gradually warmed up to his health care team, and I could see his confidence in himself strengthening each day."

Nichols knows that every family's response to hospitalization or complex medical treatments is going to be different. Supporting families and ensuring that patients have a positive hospital experience — which in turn impacts their treatment and recovery — starts with a very basic tenant: trust.

"Whether a patient is with us for one night or several months, building genuine, trusting relationships is at the center of my work," she said. "I strive to ensure every patient and family feels seen, heard and deeply valued. Above all, my goal is to help children feel less afraid, more understood, and reminded that they are still kids first, even in the hospital."



LRC

Rep. Matthew Koch, R-Paris, speaks on House Bill 9 on the House floor on Tuesday. The bill would streamline a new regulatory and tax framework for intoxicating products, like alcohol.

House approves new tax framework for alcohol, cannabis beverages

BY LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH COMMISSION

FRANKFORT — A comprehensive bill on alcoholic beverages, cannabis-infused beverages and other intoxicating products advanced off the House floor on Tuesday.

Rep. Matthew Koch, R-Paris, who is one of the sponsors of House Bill 9, said the legislation would streamline the regulatory and taxation framework for intoxicating products. "That includes alcohol, cannabis-infused beverages, hemp-derived cannabinoids and products like kratom, all while laying out the framework to capture any new and emerging products as they come into the marketplace," Koch said.

Although HB 9 is revamping the tax framework for intoxicating products, Koch said the bill is designed to be "revenue neutral-ish" when it comes to alcohol.

"We eliminated the cumbersome structure of the existing alcohol tax system to assist us with compliance while maintaining the revenue neutrality," he added.

If HB 9 becomes a law, Kentucky would be the first state in the nation to establish a regulatory fee based on the pure alcohol content, Koch said.

The legislation would also establish a new 4% regulatory retail licensing fee on alcoholic and cannabis-infused beverages beginning July 1, 2027. To make the bill revenue neutral, Koch said other taxes were eliminated.

Additionally, HB 9 would

streamline the local regulatory license fee collected by cities and counties and implement a 5% cap within a year, Koch said.

Cities and counties that drop the fee to 3% or lower will be able to use the funds for any emergency services and not just alcohol-related emergency services, he added.

As for the bill's provisions on hemp, Koch said there is language to ensure proper lab testing and labeling on the products so hemp can be taxed properly.

Another major aspect of HB 9 would strengthen the penalties on retailers who sell alcohol to minors.

"Three strikes within two years at the same retail location is a lifetime ban on holding that alcohol license," Koch said.

During debate on the legislation, Rep. Lisa Willner, D-Louisville, asked Koch if he could clarify who would be paying the taxes on the products.

Koch said who pays the taxes will not change under HB 9.

"(It's) the same people who have always paid the tax on these products, and that's all of us. That's anybody that purchases alcohol," Koch said.

Willner said she doesn't think it is "sound fiscal policy" to continue to pass expenses on to consumers, so she would be voting against HB 9.

In answering a question on revenue from Rep. Adrielle Camuel, D-Lexington, Rep. Jason Petrie, R-Elkton, said the alcohol industry generates around \$170 million in revenue.

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House OKs plan to spend \$801 million but doesn't specify what for

BY MCKENNA HORSLEY
KENTUCKY LANTERN

FRANKFORT — Seven pieces of legislation — including a vague one-page plan for spending \$801 million and the state's road projects plan — were approved Tuesday by the House Appropriations and Revenue Committee and passed by the House within a few hours.

With a Republican supermajority, GOP lawmakers easily had the votes to move the bills out of the chamber. Still, a few

Democrats voted against the bills and resolutions and denounced the lack of time they had to review committee changes before casting a vote.

"It's not available for the public to see. Don't know what's in it. Didn't have time to read it, so I'm a no," said Rep. Adrielle Camuel, D-Lexington, while the House voted on House Bill 501, which is the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet budget.

Democrats have made similar arguments this legislative session and in

years past. Some advocates, such as the League of Women Voters of Kentucky, have also called for legislators to avoid giving floor votes to bills on the day they move out of committee.

However, Republicans — who control the House and Senate — have defended their transparency to the public.

Republican House Speaker David Osborne, of Prospect said most of the bills passed Tuesday in the A&R committee and on the floor had been public information for most of the

legislative session.

"There were some small tweaks on some of the bills. The alcohol bill got a little bit smaller, some small changes on that, but overall the road plan was exactly as filed," Osborne told reporters. "So, I think the overwhelming majority of substance was unchanged."

In order to veto-proof bills from Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear, both the GOP-controlled House and Senate must pass them by April 1 to ensure they have

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LEGAL NOTICE

ORDINANCE NO. 2026-01
A SUMMARY OF AN ORDINANCE RELATING TO THE ANNUAL BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR JULY 1, 2026 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2027 FOR THE CITY OF DAWSON SPRINGS, KENTUCKY

On February 24, 2026, the City Council of the City of Dawson Springs, Kentucky adopted an ordinance relating to the annual budget and appropriations for the fiscal year July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027. The budget for the general fund projects revenues and expenditures totaling \$1,995,824.00. The budget projects all revenues and expenditures for the year totaling \$2,127,226.00.

The full text of this Ordinance is on file in the office of the undersigned City Clerk for the City of Dawson Springs at 100 E. Arcadia Ave, Dawson Springs, KY, where it is available for public inspection between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. A copy of the entire ordinance may be obtained from the Dawson Springs City Clerk.

Passed on First Reading this 17th day of February, 2026.
Passed on Second Reading this 24th day of February, 2026.
APPROVED
/s/ Jenny Sewell, Mayor
City of Dawson Springs, Kentucky

ATTEST
/s/ Martha Hamby, City Clerk
City of Dawson Springs, Kentucky
I, Benjamin R. Talley, hereby certify I am an Attorney licensed to practice law in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, my office is located at 701 South Main Street, Hopkinsville, KY 42240. I further certify the foregoing Summary of Ordinance 2026-01 was prepared in accordance with the requirements of KRS 83A.060(J9), and is a true and accurate summary of the contents of said Ordinance.

/s/Benjamin R. Talley
Benjamin R. Talley