

Donate Life Kentucky Trust Records One of Strongest Years Ever for Donor Registration and Family Support

More than 75,000 new registered donors and \$1.7 million raised

Donate Life Kentucky Trust was founded by Kentucky's Circuit Court Clerks in 1992 to support the lifesaving mission of organ donation and support Kentucky families in need. 2025 is proudly marked as one of the strongest years in its history. More than 75,000 Kentuckians joined the state's organ, eye, and tissue Donor Registry, and more than \$1.7 million was raised to support donor families, transplant patients, and caregivers across Kentucky.

"When Kentuckians choose to register as a donor, or financially contribute to the Trust, they're helping donor families and transplant patients from every corner of Kentucky," says Michael Boling, Hancock Circuit Court Clerk.

With more than 1,000 Kentuckians currently waiting for a lifesaving transplant, each registration represents hope. The foresight of Kentucky's Circuit Court Clerks in establishing Donate Life Kentucky Trust ensures that these decisions are supported by education, stewardship, and access to care for Kentucky families.

"The leadership of the Circuit Clerks continues to shape how we support donor families and transplant patients beyond the moment of registration. We provide financial assistance for lodging, travel, and basic life necessities to ensure families in every county of Kentucky receive access to lifechanging care," said Shelley Snyder, Executive Director of Donate Life Kentucky Trust.

Through its patient and family support programs, Donate Life Kentucky Trust provided direct support to more than 100 families with pre- and post-transplant assistance essentials such as gas and grocery cards, rent and utility assistance, and medication and co-pay support. Additionally, Donate Life Kentucky Trust helped donor families with funeral and memorial needs through their Donor Family Support Program.

Donate Life Kentucky Trust also provided more than \$20,000 in scholarships through the Circuit Clerk Trust Endowment Fund for students who wanted to creatively express their donation and inspire others to register as donors. Scholarship applications for this year are due on April 6, 2026. Everyone can apply online – no minimum GPA or extracurriculars necessary: <https://www.donatelifeky.org/news/investing-in-the-next-generation-of-donate-life-advocates/>

In 2026, Donate Life Kentucky Trust will continue expanding education on organ donation, deepening community partnerships, honoring donors, and helping transplant patients and their families across the Commonwealth. To learn more about the nonprofit organization, visit www.donatelifeky.org.

About Donate Life Kentucky Trust

Donate Life Kentucky Trust envisions a world where no one dies waiting for a transplant. Our mission is to educate and encourage Kentuckians to be registered organ and tissue donors to save lives and holistically support those impacted by donation and transplant. The dollars contributed at Kentucky Transportation Cabinet driver's license counters and other philanthropic partners, including Kentucky's Circuit Clerks and Kosair for Kids, fund the statewide community outreach and critical family support programs. For more info, call 1-866-945-5433, email info@donatelifeky.org, or visit www.donatelifeky.org.

Mental wellness is important for a healthy heart and brain

According to the American Heart Association, psychological health can positively or negatively impact a person's health and risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

People in rural communities live almost three years fewer than urban dwellers, and they're more likely to die early from heart disease or a stroke. Anxiety, stress and depression can have a negative impact on your physical health and may even increase your risk for heart disease and stroke, according to research reported in the 2021 scientific statement, Psychological Health, Well-Being, and the Mind-Heart-Body Connection, from the American Heart Association, the world's leading nonprofit organization focused on heart and brain health for all. These findings identified the strong interconnection between the mind, heart and body.

"Research has clearly demonstrated that negative psychological factors, personality traits and mental health disorders can negatively impact cardiovascular health. The body's biological reaction to stress, anxiety and other types of poor mental health can manifest physically through an irregular heart rate or rhythm, increased blood pressure and inflammation throughout the body," said Dr. Yuvraj Chowdhury, Interventional Cardiologist, UofL Health.

"Negative psychological health is also associated with health behaviors that are linked to an increased risk for heart disease and stroke, such as smoking, lower levels of physical activity, unhealthy diet, being overweight and not taking medications as prescribed. This all takes a real toll on the body's cardiovascular system."

Studies have found that some people, including people of color, may face a greater risk of poor health outcomes due to chronic stress, depression and anxiety linked to psychosocial stressors, particularly those related to social and economic inequality, discrimination, systemic racism and other societal factors. A recent study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association found that U.S. adults who reported feeling highly discriminated against at work had an increased risk of developing high blood pressure than those who reported low discrimination at work.

Chowdhury said identifying and addressing negative psychological feelings is important for everyone. Practicing mindfulness-based interventions such as meditation or cognitive behavioral therapy can help decrease anxiety, perceived stress and depression and have a positive impact on cardiovascular disease and risk. Positive psychological health is also associated with beneficial health behaviors such as smoking cessation, increased physical activity, heart-healthy eating, increased medication adherence and regular check-ups and health screenings. People with better mental health tend to have positive social relationships, support and connections, which can facilitate healthier adaptation to life's challenges.

"Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices," said Chowdhury. "Practicing mindfulness in all forms allows one to be more aware of and to have more control over one's emotional responses to the experiences of daily life."

Here are a few tips the American Heart Association recommends to improve your mind-heart-body connection:

- Practice meditation regularly. While there are many types of meditation, even something as simple as communing with nature, or sitting quietly and focusing on your breath can have a positive impact.

- Get plenty of good, restful sleep. Most adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep for good health, yet 1 in 3 people don't get enough. Set a regular bedtime and wake-up routine and turn off or dim electronic screens as bedtime approaches.

- Make connections and stay in touch: Reach out and connect regularly with family and friends, or engage in activities to meet new people. Research shows that social isolation and loneliness can have a negative impact on your physical and mental health.

- Practice mindful movement: There are many types of Yoga and Tai Chi that can help ease your soul and your muscles. These mindful practices can be gentle and may be done by just about anyone, anywhere, with no special equipment needed.

- Spend time with your furry BFF: Companion animals are beloved members of the family and research shows pets may help reduce physiological reactions to stress as well as support improved physical activity.

- Work it out with a workout: Regular physical activity — a recommended 150 minutes of moderate activity, 75 minutes of vigorous activity, or a mix of both weekly — can relieve tension, anxiety and depression and give you an immediate exercise "high."

"Wellness is more than simply the absence of disease. It is an active process directed toward a healthier, happier and more fulfilling life," Chowdhury said. "When we strive to reduce negative aspects of psychological health, we are promoting an overall positive and healthy state of being."

Learn more about the importance of heart health at heart.org.

Rabbit 4-H Club Meeting Minutes

January 15, 2026

Recorded by Jane Kolonich

The meeting of the Rabbit 4-H Club was called to order at 5:05 pm on January 15, 2026, by President J.D. Powers. The pledges were led by J.D. Powers, and eleven members were present.

The Following Business was discussed: Rabbit 4-H Club Elections will be held at the February 12, 2026, meeting. Also, the August Rabbit showing will be open only to Hancock County kids.

No new decisions were made.

The business part of the meeting was adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

The Club Activity was introduced by Lori Miller. The activity was club members presenting their finished 4-H Club Rabbit posters. Also, there was a rabbit giveaway.

School board sets 2026 meetings, updates student support plans

By Jennifer Wimmer

Hancock County Board of Education members set their 2026 meeting schedule Thursday, Jan. 22, and approved plans aimed at supporting special education services, family resource programs and next year's budget.

2026 meeting dates

The board will meet at 5:30 p.m. at the Hancock County Board of Education office on the following dates in 2026: Feb. 26, March 26, April 23, May 14, June 17 and 18, July 30, Aug. 20, Sept. 24, Oct. 22, Nov. 19 and Dec. 17.

The May 14 meeting, which will include a staff retirement ceremony, will be held at Hancock County High School. The Capstone Presentation on Wednesday, June 17 will be held at the Hancock County Board of Education office.

The first regular school board meeting in 2027 is scheduled for Jan. 21.

HCMS CSIP

The board approved an addendum for the Hancock County Middle School Comprehensive School Improvement Plan that targets improved performance and accountability in special education.

Under Kentucky and federal law, districts must identify students with disabilities, develop an Individualized Ed-

ucation Program (IEP)

and provide specially designed instruction and related services in line with that plan.

State regulations under 707 KAR 1:320 (Kentucky Administrative Regulations) set out how schools must write and carry out IEPs so students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

FRYSC

The board also approved the Family Resource Youth Services Center continuation program plan, a document renewed every two years that outlines center operations, budgets and goals.

Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSCs) were created under the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 to remove nonacademic barriers to learning for at-risk students.

FRYSCs connect students and families with services such as health and mental health referrals, family literacy programs, basic needs assistance and academic

support, with the goal of helping students come to school ready to learn.

The centers are state funded and operate in partnership with community agencies to improve attendance, reduce behavior challenges and help students stay on track to graduate.

Booster clubs

The Hancock County High School booster clubs for the 2026-27 school year were approved for operation. Booster organizations support athletics and extracurricular programs through fundraising, volunteering and event support under board-approved guidelines.

2026-27 budget

The 2026-27 tentative budget for fiscal year 2027 was approved. State guidance requires each local board to adopt a tentative budget by May 30 that projects revenues and expenditures for the coming year, followed by a working budget by Sept. 30 that becomes the district's official operating plan.

Treasurer's report

Chief Financial Officer Trey Anderson reported a beginning balance of \$2,441,625.48 for the month. The district received \$3,371,917.60

and recorded expenditures of \$1,201,917.60, ending the month with a balance of \$4,583,921.29.

From Candlemas to coattails: The story behind Groundhog Day

By Jennifer Wimmer

Will Punxsutawney Phil spot his shadow? If he does, legend says we're in for six more weeks of winter.

Groundhog Day brings tradition and fun and arrives on Tuesday, Feb. 2. Next week, all eyes will turn once again to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania and to our own backyards.

Will one of them peek out from a warm burrow to make this year's weather forecast? According to folklore, if the groundhog doesn't see its shadow then spring is right around the corner.

Groundhogs are true hibernators. They get cozy in late fall and sleep through winter. In many areas they don't fully emerge until mid or late February, sometimes even March. So, your backyard groundhog probably won't pop

up next week to "check the weather," but that won't stop many of us from keeping an eye out.

Even if your neighborhood groundhogs stay tucked away, you can still join the fun. Tune in to TV networks or the official livestream from Pennsylvania next Tuesday to watch the ceremony from Gobbler's Knob. If you've never seen it, it's a treat. The hosts don top hats, coattails and pocket watches in a truly time-honored affair.

This quirky forecast actually stems from a much older tradition. Groundhog Day grew out of an old European church holiday called Candlemas Day.

On Candlemas, church leaders blessed the candles that people would use for light during the year. Then they watched the weather to guess

how long winter might last, many believing that if Candlemas was sunny and bright, winter would drag on, but if the day was cloudy, spring would come sooner.

In some parts of Europe, a hedgehog was part of that tradition: if the hedgehog made its way out and saw its shadow, that meant more winter. If it didn't, warmer days were on the way.

When German immigrants moved to Pennsylvania in the 1800s, they brought this tradition with them but swapped the hedgehog for a groundhog, as they found them all around their new homes.

Today, thousands gather to see what Phil predicts — will it be six more weeks of cold weather or an early arrival of spring? What's your prediction?

Riddle of the Week

Last Week's Riddle: I stand without breath through the freezing night and noon. I fear the touch of spring's warm

tune. I have a nose, mouth, and eyes to "see," but none were

given naturally. What am I? Merranda Smith, Diane Perkins

and Lisa Harris guessed it! **ANSWER:** a snowman.

This Week's Riddle: Binoculars ready for birding and a sharp

mind for what is true, I walked the White House hallways

on a Netflix night with you. With watchful eyes both quirky

and kind, I spot the clues most leave behind. Who am I? Send

guesses by Monday to: jenniferwimmer7@outlook.com.



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