

Lawmakers address child care affordability and access

Access to high-quality, affordable child care remains at the forefront of public policy discussions as a priority for the Kentucky General Assembly. The state's child care shortage has become a growing strain on families and employers alike, limiting parents' ability to work and making it harder for businesses to find and retain employees. It is a complex challenge - driven by a web of regulations and local requirements, workforce shortages, rising costs, and limited access in many communities. As a result, addressing it will require coordinated solutions at the state, local, and federal levels, alongside strong partnerships between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Lawmakers have heard from a variety of stakeholders advocating for child care reforms that will help increase access to care.



JAMES ALLEN TIPTON

Without a doubt the most promising bill to pass this session was House Bill 6, the result of working with stakeholders. HB 6 is a comprehensive bill that modernizes state child care regulations by implementing a consensus-driven, safety-focused approach to streamline the regulatory environment in which child care centers operate, making it easier to open and run high-quality child care services. Modeled after successful reforms in Montana and Tennessee, the bill requires a third-party review of child care regulations over an extended timeline to ensure any regulatory reform is undertaken carefully and in a prescriptive manner.

HB 6 also establishes robust data-collection requirements for the child care industry, bolstering transparency and accountability both within the sector and among the state agencies that oversee it. Notably, it requires the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to track actual child care capacity rather than licensed capacity, and mandates a monthly count of child

care providers. Fiscal transparency is also addressed through an annual financial report from the Office of the State Budget Director. Finally, the bill streamlines existing statutory programs, including privatizing the Employee Child Care Assistance Partnership (ECCAP) and reinforcing the Certified Child Care Communities designation available to local governments.

Additional bills were rolled into HB 6 by the Senate. The first was the addition of the Kentucky Kindergarten Readiness Performance-Based Child Care Incentive Pilot Program, which would promote kindergarten readiness through monetary incentives underwritten with funds from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement. The pilot program will be a collaboration with the University of Kentucky. Additionally, HB 6 was also amended with language that establishes standards and factors for the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to consider when determining whether to issue a plan of correction, a directed plan of correction, or suspend or revoke a child-care license in response to any alleged violation of an administrative regulation by a child-care center.

The General Assembly also adopted House Joint Resolution 50 to support future child care reforms. This resolution directs the Auditor of Public Accounts to study the statutes, regulations, and policies and processes that impact the opening and operation of licensed and certified child care services in the Commonwealth.

In addition to legislative actions and resolutions, the Commonwealth's two-year budget included significant financial commitments to child care programs.

Child Care Assistance Program: The budget provides \$10,176,000 in fiscal year 2026-2027 and \$9,858,000 in fiscal year 2027-2028 to the Child Care Assistance Program. This program provides

services to families at or below 160 percent of the federal poverty level, as determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Employee Child Care Assistance Partnership: The budget includes \$1 million in each fiscal year to support the Employee Child Care Assistance Partnership for matching contributions. This program incentivizes employers to contribute to their employees' child care costs by matching employer contributions.

Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) Initiatives: Included in the General Fund appropriation are \$18,680,000 in fiscal year 2026-2027 and \$18,065,000 in fiscal year 2027-2028 to support CCAP initiatives. The appropriations will be allocated to the individual programs as follows:

\$17,240,000 in fiscal year 2026-2027 and \$16,670,000 in fiscal year 2027-2028 to support an income exclusion from eligibility determinations for child care providers to help recruit the workforce; and \$1,440,000 in General Fund in fiscal year 2026-2027 and \$1,395,000 in fiscal year 2027-2028 to support a six-month transition for families no longer eligible for CCAP benefits. These programs help low-income families afford child care so they can work or attend school.

This session represented meaningful progress in supporting the growth and affordability of child care in the Commonwealth, but much work remains to be done. Both HB 6 and HJR 50 are focused on future child care reforms, recognizing that lasting solutions will require continued legislative action.

As always, I can be reached on my mobile at (502) 639-7079 or through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via email at James.Tipton@kylegislature.gov and keep track through the Kentucky legislature's website at legislature.ky.gov.

Senator Jimmy Higdon's Legislative Update

As the 2026 Legislative Session enters its final days, we are wrapping up our work, sending legislation to the governor and preparing to return to consider any vetoes. This is where months of work come together and every bill is finalized before becoming law.



JIMMY HIGDON

The focus now shifts to the veto period. The governor has 10 days to sign or veto legislation. We will return for the final two days of the session to review those decisions and, if necessary, override vetoes.

These final days are an important part of the process. They ensure that the work Kentuckians sent us here to do is completed and that every piece of legislation is fully considered before it takes effect.

bridges across Kentucky.

We also made sure this plan lives within our means by aligning funding with available dollars. By comparison, the governor's proposal listed projects totaling more than 400 percent of available funding. That's over \$2 billion overprogrammed.

This road plan will be my final as your state Senator. It's been an honor

to serve in this role over the past several budget cycles and to fight for improvements to the roads, bridges, and highways in our district. I remain grateful for my Senate colleagues for trusting me to serve as Senate Transportation Chair, but the real praise needs to go to the awesome legislative staff that makes it all possible.

areas to ensure long-term stability. This approach reflects a commitment to responsible budgeting while continuing to invest in priorities that matter most to Kentucky families.

EDUCATION

Over the next two years, we increased per-pupil funding by 2 percent to continue supporting our public schools. We also committed an additional \$500 million to strengthen our pension system, building on years of progress that have led to one of the most significant turnarounds in the country.

In total, SEEK funding alone exceeds \$7 billion, with additional support going toward early childhood education, student services and classroom support. These investments reflect our ongoing commitment to students, teachers and families across Kentucky.

MEDICAID AND SPENDING OVERSIGHT

Medicaid now accounts for roughly \$6 billion in state funding annually. Our budget protects services, includes no cuts, adds stronger oversight and accountability measures, and sets aside reserve funding to ensure long-term stability.

CORRECTING INFORMATION ABOUT JUDICIARY FUNDING

There has been some misleading information about judiciary funding. The reality is the enacted budget increases funding for the court system by tens of millions of dollars, supports salary increases and maintains resources

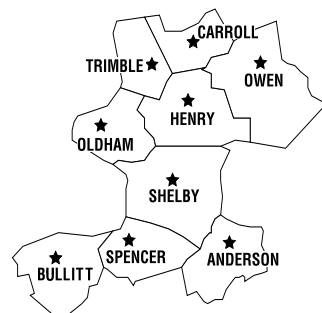
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Location: 715 Devin Drive, Bedford, KY 40006, Take Hwy 421 to New Hope Road, to Devin Drive.

Real Estate: 72+/- acre farm located at the end of Devin Drive. The ultimate privacy at your finest. The property is mostly wooded, with approximately 7 acres of open ground, with a nice barn on it. The real estate has nice creek frontage and plenty of wildlife for the hunting enthusiast. Great opportunity to buy a great asset at your price.

A lot of 4 pieces of farm equipment sold as a package: Post hole digger (3pt hitch), Box grader blade with teeth, Grader blade, 5ft finish mower. You will need to bring your own loading equipment to get the items, you will have 2 weeks to get the items off the property after the auction ends.

Terms: 10% Buyers Premium added to the final bid to determine the final sales price. 10% of the total sales price of the real estate will be due the day of the auction from the winning bidder as a deposit with the balance due on or before 5-25-26.

Public Viewing: Sunday, April 19th 2-4pm

Auctioneer's Note: This is to settle the estate of Edward Hofstetter.

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UK resources for supporting military families

BY BETH MAXEDON,
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE
FCS AGENT
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
FAMILY CONSUMER SCIENCES

The University of Kentucky is committed to helping military families through the Family and Consumer Sciences Extension's Military Families Program. Started in 2008, the program exists to develop research-backed programming to improve the lives of military families.

The goals of the Extension Military Families program are to assist Active Duty, Guard, Reserve and Veteran families by:

- Connecting military families to needed resources and support;
- Helping service members more effectively reconnect with their children before, during and after deployments;
- Improving healthy parent/child relationships and family communication skills by providing programs that involve the entire family;

Improving the sense of connectedness for geographically dispersed military families by providing opportunities for interaction, community resources, activities involving multiple local/regional/state organizations, and introducing military families to Extension programs.

Within the program, there are different options for families with different needs.

The Military Camping Program at UK provides various camps for military families to spend quality time outdoors while learning team building and bonding skills. These camps rotate locations around the Commonwealth to best serve Kentucky military families.

In 2025, UK Cooperative Extension launched the Kentucky Extension Military Collaborative, a multidisciplinary effort to strengthen statewide partnerships that support military-connected families and professionals. OneOp, a featured program

in the Collaborative, is an online learning hub that prepares community-based professionals to better serve military families and the specific challenges they face. From deployment and mental health to financial well-being and community support, OneOp's mission is to promote comprehensive Military Family Readiness.

More information about how UK Cooperative Extension serves UK's military families can be found on the Family and Consumer Sciences Extension webpage at www.spencer.ca.uky.edu.

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