

Viewpoints

Why workforce development matters to rural communities

Rural workforce development is about more than just jobs, it's about building strong, thriving communities and creating pathways to a better future for individuals and families. In the Lincoln Trail Region, rural communities play a vital role in shaping our growing regional economy.

Supporting rural workers means ensuring that community members have access to the training, education and resources needed to excel in today's dynamic job market. It also entails working to ensure people of all ages have opportunities to explore meaningful career paths without leaving the communities they call home.

Our goal at the Lincoln Trail Workforce Development Board (LTWDB) is to empower every citizen to build meaningful careers and contribute to a prosperous region. This is also the objective of the Kentucky Career Center-Lincoln Trail (KCC-LT), overseen by LTWDB.

For many young adults living in rural areas, relocating to a metro area can often feel like the only path to meaningful employment. However, through targeted workforce development efforts and strong connections with local employers, LTWDB and area career centers are working to change that narrative. By helping young people discover real career opportunities in their own communities, we aim to retain local talent and show them that they can build a successful future close to home.

Manufacturers and small businesses are economic engines in rural communities. They provide jobs, support families and help keep communities vibrant. To support these essential sectors in attracting and retaining emerging tal-

ent, including in rural areas, KCC-LT's Business Solutions Team offers a range of employer services. From recruitment and training to strategic business planning, the team works closely with businesses of all sizes to strengthen the local workforce and fuel long-term growth.

Overcoming barriers to employment is also a key part of the equation. In rural areas, transportation and distance can limit access to job opportunities and services. KCC-LT is working to close these gaps and to make services more accessible, including expansion of virtual capabilities for career exploration services.

For example, KCC-LT offers two online job fairs per month, giving job seekers the opportunity to take part in interviews with area employers from a variety of regional industries from the comfort of their homes. From July 2024 to June 2025, nearly 700 job seekers registered for job fairs and more than 150 employers participated. In addition, virtual reality technology is also utilized for career exploration through KCC-LT, helping individuals experience different career paths in an engaging, hands-on way.

KCC-LT is committed to helping individuals access training programs and vital job-related resources to support their path to employment. By investing in people and creating clear pathways to opportunity, we are helping to ensure that rural residents in our service region have access to the services they need to succeed in this ever-changing workforce. To learn more about career services offered through KCC-LT, visit ltcareercenter.org.



JACKIE MASTERSON



Week in review: Child safety, disaster prevention, and veterans centers

The legislative interim continued this week with a full agenda of interim joint committees (IJC), statutory committees, and task forces meeting to discuss a wide variety of topics in preparation for the 2026 Regular Session. These discussions ranged from the digitization of land records to the preparation of our commonwealth for future natural disasters. I have included summaries of the meetings here, but you can also watch them yourself on the legislature's YouTube page, @KYLRCCommittee Meetings.



SAMARA HEAVRIN

IJC on Families and Children: Members heard from the Center for Courageous Children and learned about their summer camp programs and spoke about how they have been able to serve more than 22,000 Kentucky children with disabilities and chronic illnesses since 2008. Next, the panel discussed state guardianship and awareness initiatives being pursued by Adult Protective Services. Finally, the committee discussed the annual report of the External Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Panel, which found a decline in firearm related child injuries and fatalities but also an increase in drug related child overdose and ingestion cases.

IJC on Local Government: Lawmakers met with the Kentucky County Clerk's Association about electronic reporting for land records. Although nearly all counties are now engaging in electronic reporting and scanning historical documents, the verification process for older records is time-consuming. The commit-

tee also discussed Area Development Districts. They serve as crucial councils of governments, unifying city and county administrations to collaboratively address regional needs. Additionally, members heard from the Kentucky Association of Counties and Kentucky League of Cities about local taxing sources.

IJC on State Government: Legislators first heard from the Kentucky Center for Statistics, an agency that collects and links data to evaluate education and workforce efforts in the commonwealth. The presentation covered the agency's history, mission, products, funding sources, and the Kentucky Longitudinal Data System. Next, the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives provided members with a general overview of its organizational, operational, and budgetary structure and functions. Finally, members heard from the Kentucky Library Association about the structure and funding mechanisms of public libraries, as well as some of the work public libraries are doing to support communities.

IJC on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection: Members heard testimony from the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs as well as the Finance and Administration Cabinet regarding consistent and ongoing issues with the HVAC system at the Radcliff Veterans Center, a long-term care facility. Specifically, members questioned officials why it has taken so long to be addressed, to what extent has the delay affected the facility's capacity, and when residents can expect results. Officials stated many factors contributed to

delays, and the project is scheduled to be complete by March 2027. Members also heard testimony about a proposed measure to exempt veterans from the motor vehicle usage tax.

Medicaid Oversight and Advisory Board: Legislators held their first meeting of the legislative interim this week where lawmakers received an overview of the purpose and goals of the advisory board, discussed the committee's priorities moving forward, and the guiding of policy-development over the coming months. Members also received an update on the state's Medicaid Program, reviewed recent changes under House Bill 695, and discussed the ongoing changes regarding Medicaid eligibility.

Capital Projects and Bond Oversight: Lawmakers met to receive an update from the Finance and Administration Cabinet on projects to enhance clean water access across the commonwealth and renovate multiple public schools in Kentucky. They approved a new lease for the UK HealthCare Speech Language Pathology Clinic and authorized renovations to the Louisville Detention Center. Members also heard from the Kentucky Communications Network Authority, and discussed efforts to safeguard continuous access to communications infrastructure statewide.

Commission on Race and Access to Opportunity: Members examined barriers faced by minority-owned businesses in Kentucky and explored practical solutions. A variety of business officials addressed key systemic challenges faced by minority owned businesses such as access to capital, discrimination, and lack of financial literacy. Commission members also

heard about initiatives that have helped mitigate these barriers with competitive loan programs and networking opportunities. Emphasis was placed on building partnerships, encouraging entrepreneurship, and creating a level playing field that allows all Kentuckians to succeed through their hard work and innovation.

Artificial Intelligence Task Force: Members convened to begin the task force's second year of work, focusing on AI's growing and evolving role in Kentucky. The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce provided testimony on the status of federal and state legislation regarding AI and discussed benefits and risks of AI adoption. Members then heard from the Commonwealth Office of Technology regarding the current status of this year's Senate Bill 4, which introduced some of Kentucky's first regulatory frameworks for AI. Members discussed the importance of a consistent federal approach, data privacy concerns, and the role of AI in education.

Disaster Prevention and Resiliency Task Force: Members received an update on the state's response to catastrophic flooding in April from the Division of Emergency Management. The task force also discussed how other states prepare and address natural and man-made disaster planning and how communities may better prepare for flooding.

As always, I can be reached anytime through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via email at Samara.Heavrin@kylegislature.gov and keep track through the Kentucky legislature's website at legislature.ky.gov.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The power of finding beauty in the humblest things makes home happy and life lovely."

- Louisa May Alcott

Proud to be an American and a Kentuckian

The Fourth of July means more to me than fireworks and cookouts. It's a reminder of how blessed we are to live in a country where freedom is the foundation, not just in our laws, but in our everyday lives.

To me, independence means the ability to work hard, speak freely, and worship as I choose. It means raising a family in a place where faith, community, and responsibility still matter. Those aren't just ideals. They're part of how we live here in Kentucky.

When our Founding Fathers declared independence nearly 250 years ago, they risked everything to give future generations a chance at something better. That courage,

and the belief that people should have a voice in their own government, set the course for the nation we call home.

We're not a perfect country, but I believe we're a good one. I believe it's our job to keep it that way. That means showing up for our neighbors, teaching our kids what matters, and being thankful for our freedoms, for our families, and for the grace of God that carries us through it all.

I'm proud to be an American. I'm proud to be a Kentuckian. I'm grateful, for freedom, for faith, and for the people who make this commonwealth home.

I wish you and your family a safe and meaningful Fourth of July!



STEPHEN MEREDITH