## Have changes in immigration laws affected KY businesses?

BY BETH MUSGRAVE bmusgrave@herald-leader.com

Some members of the Kentucky business community said increased federal government scrutiny, including immigration enforcement, has meant more time spent dealing with regulators and less time on business.

Moreover, the federal government has hit pause on all refugee resettlement programs, which brought 4,500 legal refugees to the state last year. Without new immigrants coming into Kentucky communities, employers may have smaller pools of potential employees, some business leaders said Friday.

"It's been an overwhelming success," said Lisa DeJaco Crutcher, CEO of Catholic Charities of Louisville, of Kentucky's resettlement pro-

Crutcher and others spoke Friday at a Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Federal Issues Summit at the Griffin Gate Marriott in Lexington on a panel about immigration policy changes and how it affects businesses.

Refugees are vetted and brought to the United States by the government and are traditionally on a path to citizenship. However, that program under President Donald Trump has been halted. Also, the legal status of many immigrants has now been changed, halted or changed.

On Friday, the U.S.
Supreme Court ruled the
Trump administration
could revoke the legal
status of 500,000 immigrants who came to the

country from countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti and Venezuela. It's not clear how many people in Kentucky could be deported under the new rules.

"We haven't received any new refugees since Jan. 20," Crutcher said.

Ninety-two refugees — many of whom were waiting to be reunited with family in Kentucky— had plane tickets to come to Kentucky that were canceled

In addition, the Trump administration has also recommended that resettlement agencies that received federal funding to help refugees settle in the United States be defunded.

Crutcher said those agencies have funding until 2026. But after that, agencies that serve the thousands of refugees in Kentucky will no longer have funds to connect those refugees to jobs, education and English classes.

The United States and Kentucky have participated in the refugee programs because studies have shown it is a boon to cities and states that take refugees, she said.

"Tax revenues generated by legal refugees just grows and grows over years," Crutcher said.

Immigrants are seven times more likely than native-born citizens to start businesses, for example.

Puma Veer, president of V-Soft Consulting Group, which recruits international employees for companies that need high-skilled employees that can't be filled with U.S. citizens, said his company has had to spend more time docu-

menting and processing applications for H2-B visas, or visas for highlyskilled and non-agricultural employees, since January.

But many potential employees are also worried about coming to the United States, Veer said.

"The talent pool that we are trying to recruit are fearful of what to expect," Veer said.

Chelsea Granville
Reed, a lawyer at Dentons, a law firm, said she
has seen her work load
increase about 20-to-30%
since January. Many of
the companies she represents have had questions
about Immigration, Customs and Enforcement
actions and how to respond to those ICE demands and questions.

But that's not the only reason why Reed's workload has increased.

Many of her clients have also seen a jump in federal investigations of companies, including civil investigative demands —a civil action federal officials can use to investigate companies. Some of those investigations involve coronavirus-related the Payroll Protection Program, which gave businesses forgivable loans during the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

There's still many unknowns about how immigration and other federal policies will play out given the number of lawsuits, many business leaders said Friday.

Those unknowns mean more time spent by businesses trying to navigate and comply with federal laws — including immigration laws.

"There is no greater business interruption than having to do deal with federal enforcement," Reed said. "It is a major, major interruption."

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## Fiscal court commissioner to recuse himself from school tax increase vote

BY VALARIE HONEYCUTT

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A Fayette County commissioner on the fiscal court confirmed Monday he is a Fayette schools employee and will be recusing himself from Thursday's vote on the school occupational license tax increase.

"Yes, I am employed with FCPS, and I will be recusing myself from that vote," Brian Miller told the Herald-Leader in an email Monday morning.

Miller is listed as an employee at the district's Maxwell Spanish Immersion Elementary School.

Miller, a 1st District
Fayette County commissioner who took office in
2023, is listed as a law enforcement officer at the
school. The fiscal court does
not typically vote on Fayette
County Schools issues.

A Facebook post from Dec. 15, 2022, from Maxwell Elementary said, "Congratulations to the District 1 Fayette County Commissioner Brian Miller. Thank you Officer Miller for your dedication to the community."

The fiscal court has three voting members. Two other Commissioners Alayne White and David Lowe are to vote on the resolution at 1:30 p.m. Thursday.

Fayette County Attorney Angela Evans said last week her office is researching to provide guidance to the fiscal court after the school board approved a resolution asking the court to increase the Fayette County occupational license tax.

She did not immediately respond to questions from the Herald-Leader Mon-

dav.

Despite opposition, a split Fayette County school board last week approved a resolution seeking an increase to the occupational license tax rate to help tackle a \$16 million budget deficit.

The Fayette County
Public Schools board voted
3-2 to ask the Fayette Fiscal Court to increase the
occupational license tax
rate for schools from 0.5%
to 0.75% of wages of individuals and net profits of
businesses. Parent Matthew Vied has said he will
lead an effort to recall the
tax increase if the fiscal
court approves it.

Fayette County Clerk Susan Lamb said Monday a vote on the resolution is set for 1:30 p.m. Thursday at the Pam Miller Downtown Arts Center, 141 East Main St., Room 301.

Multiple people at the May 27 school board meeting asked the school board to hold off on voting on the resolution until a public hearing could be held.

However, board chair Tyler Murphy, vice chair Amy Green, and board member Penny Christian voted to ask the fiscal court for the increase. School board members Monica Mundy and Amanda Ferguson voted against it.

The current occupational license tax is expected to bring in \$57 million to the district for the next fiscal year. Initially, the increase in January 2026 would be \$13 million to \$16 million with an estimated \$27 million to \$32 million annually when fully implemented, Fayette Deputy Superintendent Houston Barber said.

The average Fayette County worker is paying

\$26 per month under the current Occupational License Tax Rate for schools. Under the increase, the average worker would be paying \$39 per month, or \$13 more. On an annual basis the average Fayette County worker is paying \$312. Under the increase, they would be paying \$468 per year.

The tax increase will not impact retirees who are not currently working, and Social Security benefits are not subject to the tax.

Kentucky state law — KRS 160.603 — says that "notice shall be given by causing to be published, at least one (1) time in a newspaper of general circulation published in the county or by posting at the courthouse door if there be no such newspaper, the fact that such levy is being proposed."

The law also says: "The advertisement shall state that the district board of education will meet at a place and on a day fixed in the advertisement, not earlier than one (1) week and not later than two (2) weeks from the date of the advertisement, for the purpose of hearing comments and complaints regarding the proposed increase and explaining the reasons for such proposal."

The resolution became public for the first time over the Memorial Day weekend when it appeared on the school board meeting agenda. No public hearing was held.

School district spokesperson Dia Davidson Smith said last week the district's process in seeking the increase was legal.

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