

# Statistics show a decrease in the number of overdose deaths in KY

■ **By Mark White**

Overdose deaths in Kentucky have decreased for three consecutive years with a 30.2 percent decrease in 2024 compared with the previous years, according to statistics in the Kentucky 2024 Drug Overdose Fatality Report, which was released May 1.

A News Journal review of the 2024 Drug Overdose Fatality Report also showed significant drops in overdose deaths in both Whitley and Laurel counties compared to the prior year.

A total of 1,410 Kentuckians lost their lives in 2024 to a drug overdose compared to 1,984 people in 2023, 2,135 people in 2022 and 2,250 people in 2021, according to reviews of the drug overdose fatality reports for those years.

Fentanyl was present in 62.3 percent of overdose deaths, and methamphetamine was present in 50.8 percent of overdose deaths in 2024. The two continue to be the most prevalent drugs contributing to overdose deaths in the state. The report also indicates that most Kentucky age groups saw a decrease in overdose deaths, with the only increase being among those ages 75-84, according to a release from the governor’s office.

“I am thankful that more Kentuckians are alive and in recovery today compared with last year,” said Gov. Andy Beshear. “But we still mourn and grieve our 1,410 Kentuckians who lost their life last year to addiction and the

many more who we lost before that. Every life lost is a child of God, and someone’s mom, dad, son, daughter and loved one. We won’t stop until every Kentuckian is saved from addiction.”

In 2023, Kentucky reported a 9.8 percent decrease compared with 2022. In 2022, there was a decrease of 2.5 percent from 2021, marking the first year Kentucky saw a decrease in overdose deaths since 2018, according to the release.

Many local counties have also seen a drop in overdose death rates. (The drug overdose fatality reports don’t release the actual number of overdose deaths in a county if there were few than five deaths.)

Whitley County reported 13 overdose deaths in 2024 compared to 19 deaths in 2023, 32 deaths in 2022 and 16 deaths in 2021.

Laurel County reported 15 overdose deaths in 2024 compared to 33 deaths in 2023, 23 deaths in 2022 and 16 deaths in 2021.

Knox County reported 5 overdose deaths in 2024 compared to less than 5 deaths in 2023, 7 deaths in 2022 and 17 deaths in 2021.

Bell County reported 11 overdose deaths in 2024 compared to 12 deaths in 2023, 10 deaths in 2022 and 15 deaths in 2021.

McCreary County reported less than 5 overdose deaths in 2024 and 2023 compared to 7 deaths in 2022 and 6 deaths in 2021.

“If you are a family member of one of the Kentuckians who lost their lives to an overdose last year, we are praying for you and will

continue this work in your loved one’s honor,” said Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy Executive Director Van Ingram.

The 2024 Kentucky Overdose Fatality Report is compiled by the Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center using data from the Office of Vital Statistics, the Office of the State Medical Examiner and Kentucky’s coroners. These numbers are subject to change.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report includes both the deaths of Kentucky residents and nonresidents in their reporting. Kentucky’s overdose report includes only the deaths of Kentucky residents, which has been the standard since the Kentucky General Assembly first required this annual report. The Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy includes resident deaths only to better target harm reduction and prevention activities for Kentuckians.

If you or a loved one are struggling with addiction, the KY HELP Call Center can connect you to treatment by calling 833-8KY-HELP (833-859-4357).

Information about treatment programs all across the commonwealth is available at FindHelpNowKy.org.

Information on how to obtain the life-saving drug naloxone, which is used to reverse an opioid overdose, can be found at that website as well as at FindNaloxoneNowKy.org and FindMentalHealthNowKy.org.

# Obituaries

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## William Petrey

William Petrey, age 76, of Williamsburg, Ky., passed away Wednesday April 30, 2025 at his home.

He was born November 6, 1948 in Jellico, Tennessee to the late Joe Nelson and Lula Belle Gentry Petrey.

Along with his parents he was preceded in death by one sister, Ruth Ann Campbell; and one brother, Carl Nelson Petrey.

He is survived by his wife, Sheila Petrey of Williamsburg, KY; one son, Joseph Petrey of Williamsburg, KY; one brother, Ronnie Petrey (Martha) of Williamsburg, KY; several nieces, and nephews; and a host of relatives and friends to mourn his passing.

Funeral service was Sunday, May 4, at Ellison Funeral Home with Rev. Gerald Mullins officiating. Interment followed at the Maple Creek Cemetery.

Condolences may be made to the family at [www.ellisonfh.com](http://www.ellisonfh.com).

Ellison Funeral Home in charge of arrangements.



## George “Sonny” Thomas

George “Sonny” Thomas, age 82, of Newcomb, Tennessee, passed away Wednesday, April 30, 2025, at the Methodist Medical Center. He was born February 28, 1943, in Middlesboro, Kentucky.

Sonny is preceded in death by son, Brian Earl Thomas; father, Robert “Bob” Thomas; mother, Ethel Dean (Whitson) Thomas; brothers, Luther Ray Thomas, and James “Jim” Thomas; and sister, Wanda Jean Russell.

He is survived by wife, Christine (Morgan) Thomas; son, Philip Thomas and wife Lydia; daughter-in-law, Rosa Thomas; grandchildren, Victoria Jerde, Felicia Bryant and husband John, Sierra Thomas, Morgan Thomas; great-grandchild, Callen Jerde; brothers, Buggs Thomas and wife Judy, Danny Lee Thomas; sisters, Betty Sue Branam and husband John, Joyce McNealy, and Debbie Lynn Owens; and a host of nieces, nephews, friends and family to mourn his passing.

Funeral service was Sunday, May 4, 2025, Harp Funeral Home Chapel, with Rev. Junior dople officiating.

Burial followed in the Newcomb Cemetery with Military Honors by the Jellico Honor Guard.

Harp Funeral Home of Jellico in charge of arrangements.



## Betty Jo Lambdin

Betty Jo Lambdin, 84, a loving mother, dedicated grandmother, and cherished family friend, passed away on May 5, 2025 surrounded by her family at her home.

Born on February 27, 1941 in Williamsburg, KY to Joe Cox and Bonnie Capps-Cox.

Betty was a beacon of warmth and kindness in the community, always ready to offer a helping hand or a kind word.

Betty dedicated her professional life to the Whitley County Board of Education, where she served as a lunchroom attendant until her retirement. Her love for her family was equally profound, and she found great joy in spending time with her grandchildren, creating memories that will be cherished for generations to come.

Betty is survived by her sons, Larry Lambdin and wife Sheila of Williamsburg, KY, Eddie Lambdin and wife Jennifer of Williamsburg, KY and Scotty Lambdin of Williamsburg, KY; her grandchildren, Mercedes Lambdin, Lauren Lambdin, Jeremy Lambdin, Allison Murphy (David), and Logan Lambdin; and a special family friend and caregiver, Susie Knight of Williamsburg, KY.

She was preceded in death by her mother, Bonnie Capps; her father, Joe Cox; her beloved husband, Joe Alonzo Lambdin; and her daughter-in-law, Teresa Lambdin.

A visitation will be held for Betty at Croley Funeral Home, located at 103 South 2nd Street, Williamsburg, KY, on Thursday, May 8, beginning at 11:00 am.

A funeral service will follow at 2:00 pm with Rev. Billy Carpenter and Rev. Lester Cox officiating.

Following the funeral service, a burial service will be held at Pleasant View, Kentucky at 3:00 pm.

We invite all who knew and loved Betty to share their memories of her on the memorial page, where photos can also be uploaded. Even in our grief, we remember Betty’s loving nature and dedicated service to her family and community, and these memories bring comfort and peace. Betty’s life was a testament to the power of love, dedication, and service, and her legacy will live on in the hearts of those she touched.

Croley Funeral Home in charge of arrangements.



# Hometown Bank announces new president

Hometown Bank is proud to announce the transition of leadership as Corey Chesnut has been named president effective May 2.

Chesnut succeeds Tim Barnes, who has faithfully served as both president and CEO since the bank’s founding. Barnes will continue in his role as chief executive officer, guiding the bank’s strategic vision while Chesnut steps into day-to-day leadership.

“I am proud of what our team has accomplished at Hometown Bank over the last 25 years and excited to pass the torch to Corey Chesnut, who I know will lead with integrity and vision,” said Barnes. “This transition ensures that Hometown Bank will remain focused on serving our community and

customers with the same passion and dedication that Don Ashley and I dreamed about 25 years ago.”

Chesnut has been with Hometown Bank for two years, bringing a strong background in community banking, relationship building, and operational excellence. Under Chesnut’s leadership, Hometown Bank will continue to focus on its founding principles of personal service, community involvement, and hometown values.

“I am deeply honored to be entrusted with the role of president at Hometown Bank and to follow in the footsteps of a remarkable leader like Tim Barnes,” said Chesnut. “I am grateful for the confidence placed in me by Tim and the board of directors,

and I am excited for the future of our bank, our employees, our customers, and the community we proudly serve.”

Hometown Bank recently celebrated its

25th anniversary, marking a quarter-century of service to the Tri-County area with seven locations and over 70 employees.

For more, visit [www.ahometownbank.com](http://www.ahometownbank.com).

# Dates, locations set for local high school graduations

Dates, times and places have been set for graduation ceremonies across the Tri-County area with most of them taking place this month at the Corbin Arena, including:

- Jellico High School – Friday (May 23) at 7 p.m. in the Jellico High School Gymnasium.
- Whitley County High School – Friday (May 23) at 7 p.m. at the Corbin Arena.

- Barbourville High School – Saturday (May 24) at 11 a.m. in the Barbourville High School Gymnasium.
- Williamsburg High School – Saturday (May 24) at 2 p.m. in the J.B. Mountjoy Gymnasium.
- Corbin High School – Sunday (May 25) at 2 p.m. at the Corbin Arena.
- North Laurel High School – Saturday (May 31) at 10 a.m. at the

Corbin Arena.

- South Laurel High School – Saturday (May 31) at 2 p.m. at the Corbin Arena.
- Knox Central High School – Sunday (June 1) at 2 p.m. at the Corbin Arena.
- Lynn Camp High School – Sunday (June 1) at 4:30 p.m. at the Corbin Arena.

For information about tickets, contact the local high schools.

# WHITE: Providing clarification on a few common misconceptions

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dollar stores or vape shops.

This is typically done by private individuals or businesses and not government entities.

What being inside the city limits does is provide a business with city fire and police coverage. It also allows businesses, such as restaurants, grocery stores and convenient stores, to potentially sell alcohol, which is a big drawing point for some of them.

Cities and counties do sometimes offer tax incentives to get manufacturers to locate in their community, which are usually major employers.

In regards to the comment that Corbin can’t even fix the streets and sidewalks downtown, it should be pointed out that many of the streets people are most upset over, such as Main Street, Kentucky Avenue and Master Street, aren’t actually city streets as most people logically assume that they are.

Main Street, Kentucky Avenue, Masters Street, Gordon Hill and a few others are actually state roads, which are actually theoretically maintained by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. I say theoretically because I am not sure what the last

time was that the state paved those roads. (Hey, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet take hint!) By the way, Corbin leaders would also like to see the state repave these roads.

In regards to the sidewalks in some areas, the reader has a good point. It is a cost thing.

Another misconception people often have is in regards to bond for people accused of committing a crime. Often, readers will ask why a particular person even has a bond. This is especially true in cases involving alleged sexual assaults particularly against children.

The courts are generally required to set bonds for defendants, who are accused of crimes but haven’t been convicted. There are instances where judges can order someone held without bond if they judge them to be a flight risk or to be a danger to the public, but this is the exception to the rule.

In the case of particularly serious crimes, judges will many times set cash bonds. For instance, a \$10,000 cash bond means that someone would have to post \$10,000 cash in order to be released from custody. This is a pretty substantial bond that most people can’t post, and the judges know this.

It is very rare that a defendant is able to post a \$25,000 cash bond or higher.



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