

Sen. Storm's legislative update: Week 11

Our communities were reminded this week of the tremendous sacrifice made by those who serve in our nation's armed forces. I was deeply saddened to learn of the loss of Tech. Sgt. Ashley B. Pruitt, a proud Kentuckian from Bardstown who gave her life while serving our country overseas.

At just 34 years old, Sgt. Pruitt was among six airmen killed on March 12 when a KC-135 Stratotanker crashed in western Iraq during a mission supporting Operation Epic Fury. Her service and sacrifice represent the very best of our armed forces.

Moments like this remind us that the freedoms we enjoy every day are protected by men and women willing to serve far from home. My prayers are with her family, her fellow airmen and the entire Bardstown and Nelson County community as they mourn this tremendous loss.

Budget process

The Senate also took a major step forward this week by passing a balanced and responsible state budget that protects taxpayers while continuing to invest in the services Kentuckians rely on every day.

The plan maintains strong reserves, avoids using one-time dollars to fund ongoing expenses and continues reducing long-term liabilities such as pensions and retiree health obligations. At the same time, it allows the commonwealth to make targeted investments in education, public safety, work-

force development and other priorities that support strong communities across Kentucky.

The budget sustains support for education at every level, including increased per-pupil funding, school safety investments and continued support for student services and workforce training. It also maintains funding for Medicaid while improving accountability and strengthening services for vulnerable populations.

In addition, the plan fully funds pension and health obligations while providing targeted support for state employees, law enforcement and first responders. It also includes strategic investments in infrastructure, energy development, technology modernization and disaster preparedness.

With the Senate's changes now before the House of Representatives, lawmakers from both chambers will continue working together in the coming days to finalize a two-year budget that protects Kentucky's long-term financial stability while meeting the needs of our growing state.

HB 1 veto override
Another significant development came as the General Assembly voted to override the governor's veto of House Bill 1, allowing the measure to become law.

This legislation allows Kentucky students to potentially access hundreds of millions of federal dollars that can help families meet a variety of educational needs. Scholarships may be used for expenses such as tu-

tion, tutoring, special-needs services, books, technology, transportation and other approved education-related costs.

If Kentucky chose not to participate, those same federal dollars could still be claimed by taxpayers and directed to organizations in other states—meaning funds paid by Kentuckians would ultimately support students elsewhere. This law ensures those opportunities remain here at home.

Importantly, the program does not direct public funds to any particular school. Instead, private contributions support scholarship-granting organizations that provide assistance directly to eligible students and families. The focus is on expanding opportunities and allowing families to make the best educational decisions for their children.

Bills moving forward
I was pleased to see Senate Bill (SB) 289, titled Wynter's Law, pass the Senate this week. The legislation strengthens Kentucky's Amber Alert system by clarifying activation standards and improving coordination when a child is abducted or reported missing and endangered. When a child's safety may be at risk, every second matters.

As the legislative session continues to move quickly toward its final weeks, several additional measures have advanced through the Senate and House. Below are a few of the bills that moved forward recently and what they mean for Kentuckians.

SJR 139: Designates and renames various highways, bridges and roadways across multiple counties in honor of individuals and makes technical

corrections to previously named roadways.

SB 249: Establishes a framework allowing Kentucky to approve workforce training programs eligible for federal Workforce Pell Grants and coordinate programs to prevent duplicate payments.

SB 251: Clarifies that execution protocols used by the Department of Corrections may be set through internal policy rather than administrative regulation.

SB 263: Updates Kentucky's Schools of Innovation law to streamline the waiver process, expand flexibility for districts pursuing innovative practices and create a pilot program with a dedicated fund.

SB 278: Limits certain types of secondary employment for designated law enforcement personnel while allowing work connected to public entities, contractors and ticketed events requiring public safety.

SB 281: Updates Kentucky's grandparent visitation law by establishing new evidentiary standards and factors courts may consider when determining a child's best interests.

SB 324: Updates Kentucky's film and entertainment tax incentive program by expanding eligible productions, clarifying qualifying expenses and strengthening oversight to ensure economic impact.

HB 96: Updates the structure and membership of the Council on Postsecondary Education's working group and changes the meeting cycle to every four years beginning in 2026.

HB 280: Updates healthcare and school health policies,

including expanded access to emergency diabetes medications in schools and liability protections for trained individuals who administer them.

HB 290: Allows the state to provide electronic access to legal opinions and resources in place of bound volumes for courts and law libraries.

HB 459: Establishes a statewide system to collect healthcare workforce data through licensure renewals to better assess workforce supply and needs.

HB 470: Updates policies for alcohol and drug peer support specialists and creates a work group to develop a statewide credentialing system.

HB 555: Allows schools to create student-run businesses to provide hands-on business experience while requiring food sales to meet federal nutrition standards.

HB 562: Creates two high school diploma pathways for students with disabilities and supports workforce connections for graduates while protecting KEES eligibility.

HB 648: Strengthens protections for motor vehicle dealers by establishing clearer reimbursement standards for manufacturer warranty and recall work.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve you in Frankfort.

Please do not hesitate to reach out. You can contact my office at 502-564-8100 or Brandon.Storm@kylegislature.gov if you have any questions, concerns, or ideas. Learn more about bills, committees, and the Kentucky General Assembly at www.kylegislature.gov.



SEN. BRANDON STORM

Kentucky Fish & Wildlife links genes to bigger bass

BY CASEY COUNTY NEWS

FRANKFORT — Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources researchers have found the genetic keys to unlocking the potential for bigger largemouth bass, the most popular species sought by anglers.

Biologists with the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Fisheries Division, collaborating with the Center for Aquaculture Technologies, have identified specific genetic markers associated with enhanced size in native largemouth bass.

The discovery was made through the Fisheries Division's Thoroughbred Bass Program, which has a research goal of selectively breeding Kentucky-origin bass that carry these markers in order to stock public waters in the future with fish that have a higher probability of reaching trophy size.

"For more than 50 years, biologists have been trying to increase the size potential of largemouth bass," said Adam Martin, Fisheries Division biologist with Kentucky Fish and Wildlife. "In many states to our south, that effort involves stocking non-native Florida bass or first generation (F1) hybrids. Stocking Florida bass has increased bass size in many lakes in warmer climates but despite other attempts, it hasn't worked so far in areas colder than southern Tennessee. More northern states like ours haven't had any great options for improving their genetics until now."

Martin said this marks a major advancement in fisheries science and management.

"Modern genetic tools are opening up a whole new world of potential that biologists even 10 years ago could only dream about," he said. "To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time such markers have been identified in largemouth

bass."

In a process known as a Genome Wide Association Study, researchers used whole-genome sequencing to identify single genetic markers linked to large size potential. Fisheries biologists clipped fins from 300 largemouth bass statewide to use for genetic testing. The sampled fish included 150 bass weighing more than 5 pounds from 30 different lakes and 150 slow-growing bass under 3.5 pounds from the same lakes. All samples were confirmed as pure largemouth bass before undergoing full genome sequencing. Researchers then analyzed more than 3 million markers per fish to identify the genetic markers common in trophy fish but rare in smaller individuals.

Because of this recent discovery, department staff can screen potential largemouth bass broodfish for genetic purity and use fish with the best complement of trophy genetics. Then, they will selectively breed fish in department hatcheries to maximize the size potential of the offspring. As selectively bred fish reproduce with wild bass in stocked waters, the desirable growth genetics can integrate into wild populations over time, creating sustained, generational improvement. Kentucky Fish and Wildlife plans to stock public waters with fish having greater trophy-size potential under the name of "Thoroughbred Bass."

"This process is very similar to the traditional selective breeding programs used in agriculture for millennia," said Jeff Ross, Fisheries Division assistant director. "The only difference is that we are using genetic markers to pick which fish to breed. Most importantly, we can use bass caught right here in Kentucky - which preserves local adaptation and genetic integrity."

"The Thoroughbred Bass Program represents a science-driven, sustainable investment in Kentucky's bass fisheries," Fisheries Division Director Dave Dreves said. "By combining advanced genetics with traditional hatchery practices, we are working to ensure that future generations of anglers have the opportunity to continue to catch exceptional bass in Kentucky waters."

Another advantage of this program: research suggests angling pressure can impact fish genetics by removing larger or more aggressive bass. The Thoroughbred Bass Program could help invigorate waterbodies by introducing more replacement fish with genetics for larger size.

"Although the first production of Thoroughbred Bass was anticipated in 2026, unfortunately we are currently still awaiting the manufacture of the required screening panel of trophy markers," Martin said. "Bass only spawn once a year so we only get one shot. Unfortunately, it looks like we will miss our window this year to start the selective breeding process."

Regardless, biologists will spend significant time this spring and summer collecting and testing hundreds of wild largemouth bass to ensure the best possible broodfish will be available for 2027 production. Additional trophy-sized bass from across the state will also be tested to further confirm the validity of each genetic marker and help narrow down which markers are the most important.

More information is available in the Thoroughbred Bass Program Interim Progress Report on the department's website (fw.ky.gov). The report will be continually updated with the achievement of new milestones in the Thoroughbred Bass Program.

EXTENSION

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Also approved at the meeting was a budget for \$1 million. Of that budget, \$769,700.39 was designated for emergency or capital expenditures over the next 10 years. Most of that

amount is from several years of carried over revenue.

The total revenue from taxes would be \$258,740, which is also the total operating expenditures budget, minus capital expenditures, for the fiscal year.

The 10-year reserve plan includes acoustic tiles for the education building, new fur-

niture for the meeting room at the extension office, painting the exterior of the office and more.

The next meeting of the Casey County Extension District Board would be at 8:30 a.m. May 21. The board meets every other month on the third Thursday, at 8:30 in the morning.

Kentucky State Police charges Lincoln County official

BY KENTUCKY STATE POLICE

The Kentucky State Police Drug Enforcement Special Investigations Branch launched an investigation into Lincoln County Deputy Ron Luster in January 2026 after receiving a misconduct tip.

On Feb. 3, 2026, KSP detectives notified Lincoln County Sheriff Shawn Hines of the allegations. The Sheriff

fully cooperated and assisted with the investigation, immediately suspending Mr. Luster. On March 13, 2026, Mr. Luster was indicted by the Lincoln County Grand Jury on charges of Tampering with Physical Evidence, Abuse of Public Trust, and Official Misconduct 1st. Mr. Luster was arrested and lodged at the Pulaski County Detention Center.

The investigation into the

incident remains ongoing. Until the judicial process is complete, premature disclosure of additional information could reveal investigatory leads and potentially hinder future investigative steps. Additionally, releasing further details could pose a significant risk of influencing potential jurors by shaping opinions before all relevant evidence is presented in court.

FISCAL

FROM PAGE A1

The old backhoe was declared surplus with the condition that if it the new backhoe were to arrive before Friday, the old backhoe would be sold at the March 21 Consignment Auction at the Central Kentucky Ag/Expo Center.

The Casey County Sheriff's Office also requested and received motions to surplus ATVs and trucks to sell at the auction.

Magistrates also approved a contract to move the child support office a few doors down from its current location in the county attorney's office. It will remain on Campbellville Lane in Liberty.

Also in the meeting, Sheriff Chad Weddle gave his monthly report for the month of February 2026. According to the report, his office: drove 12,190 miles; served 20 warrants; opened 7 new cases; worked 610 hours of court security; worked 11 traffic accidents; had 3 DUI arrests; conducted 47 vehicle inspections, had 40 total arrests; issued 56 citations for non-

arrestable offenses; issued 96 total citations; served 49 total summonses, subpoenas, and eviction notices; responded to 510 total calls; and worked a total of 1,510 hours.

Jailer Mike Woodrum gave his report for the month of February, which ended with \$258,759 in revenue from state-held inmates, \$32,018 from Lincoln County inmates, \$10,461 from Madison County inmates, \$47,736 from programs and GED completions, for a total of \$348,974.

The next meeting of the Casey County Fiscal Court would be at 5 p.m. April 13.

ABSOLUTE AUCTION

ESTEL LOUIS RICHARDS ESTATE
SATURDAY, APRIL 4TH, 2026 AT 10:00 AM
271 WOLFORD AVENUE, LIBERTY, KY 42539

DUPLIX WITH GARAGE & LOT
2020 FORD ECOSPORT SUV, 2009 KAWASAKI TERYX UTV,
GUNS, HOUSEHOLD PERSONAL PROPERTY,
CUB CADET M60 ZERO TURN MOWER

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