

Bill to prevent utility disconnections across KY falls by the wayside, advocates say

BY PIPER HANSEN
phansen@herald-leader.com

FRANKFORT

A policy that would align Kentucky with the majority of U.S. states preventing utility shutoffs during dangerous weather conditions likely won't get a hearing in the final days of the General Assembly.

After repeated previous attempts to pass a version of the bill, this year is the first time it has been assigned a committee, though one of its sponsors and a group of advocates said March 25 that with just seven days left of session, they're under the impression it won't go much further.

Kentucky has neither hot nor cold weather utility disconnection protections, but House Bill 377 would establish both

in addition to setting new rules for how utility companies notify customers about disconnection.

"We are running out of time in this legislative session to put in place permanent protections against utility disconnections during extreme weather," said Cara Cooper, a coordinator for Kentuckians for Energy Democracy, at a news conference in Frankfort. "But it's not too late and we won't stop pushing our elected officials to be the kind of leaders that Kentuckians deserve."

"Instead of spending time designating an official dog breed or pushing for false solutions to our energy crisis, we need the people standing in the way to become the champions for the kinds of protections that most Americans already have and that Kentuckians

desperately need."

Sponsored by Rep. Susan Witten, R-Louisville, it is just one in the housing task force co-chair's slate of bills to address housing affordability.

This year's Republican-sponsored bill would prevent gas and electric companies from disconnecting utilities when temperatures are below 32 degrees or more than 95 degrees for more than three days.

The bill also prevents disconnections for residential ratepayers who have arranged a payment plan with their provider and have paid at least 10% or \$200. Disconnection prevention, according to the bill, also extends to ratepayers who have documentation showing disconnection would threaten their health and safety.

Disconnections also would only be allowed if

the bill were to pass between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Disconnections would not be allowed on Fridays, weekends or holidays.

Kentucky Power, which serves much of Eastern Kentucky, put in place utility disconnection protections in 2024 and Big Sandy RECC has a program for ratepayers facing disconnection. A number of other gas and electric companies supplying residents across the state with utilities have their own internal policies in the event of weather, health emergencies and for financial assistance.

But the blanket protections are what advocates like Chris Woolery, the Mountain Association's energy programs coordinator, described Wednesday as "common sense."

"The simple fact is that our investor-owned utilities are doing just fine and protecting Kentucky families would not impact their profit margins," he said.

In a recent year-long period, Kentucky's electric utilities made more than 268,000 disconnections. According to a February report, there was an 87% increase in disconnections in fiscal year

2025 compared to the preceding fiscal year.

The increase, according to the report, was driven primarily by a spike in disconnections by utility Louisville Gas and Electric and Kentucky Utilities. The companies serve the most customers across the state.

Following the report, a spokesperson for the companies said disconnections vary by year "for several reasons, including our weather-related suspensions."

The bill's cosponsor, Rep. Lisa Willner, D-Louisville, said it's difficult to know why the bill hasn't progressed.

"Your guess is as good as mine about why this has not moved," Willner said. "It's extremely frustrating. We've had bipartisan support on this, we've had bipartisan sponsorship and cosponsorship, so it is one of the great mysteries of the session. We seem to move a lot of legislation that's not nearly as impactful as this would be."

Utility disconnection protection seems to have been left to the wayside this year, said Lane Boldman, director of the Kentucky Conservation Committee.

Lane Boldman, director of the Kentucky Conser-

vation Committee, said weather-related policy attention has been paid by the Disaster Prevention and Resiliency Task Force and in Senate Bill 11, which was signed March 23 to establish a residential safe room rebate program, but disconnection prevention doesn't seem to be a priority.

In a letter sent to members of the General Assembly this week nudging them to take action on House Bill 377, the Leave the Heat On Collective — made up of a group of place-based advocacy groups — said essentials remain out of reach for Kentuckians as prices rise.

"We need more than assistance with paying our bills," the letter said. "We need guaranteed protection from utility shut-offs when it is most dangerous."

It's possible a future iteration of the policy would be assigned to the Health and Human Services Committee instead.

The collective is also intent on pursuing emergency moratoriums from the governor's office to protect residents in peak summer months and again in winter before next year's legislative session gets underway.

Dottie Bean, former editor and reporter at Lexington Herald-Leader, has died

BY KARLA WARD
kward1@herald-leader.com

Dottie Bean, who spent 25 years working for the Lexington Herald-Leader and 20 more working for the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, died Saturday, her family announced. She was 77.

Bean became former Lexington Mayor Pam Miller's press secretary in 1994, and the following year, she moved to the city's public information office. She worked for the city for two decades before retiring in 2015.

"During an outstanding career in newspapers and for the city, Dottie was committed to providing accurate, useful information to the public," said Susan Straub, communications director for Mayor Linda Gorton.

Attorney Michael York, immediate past president of the Virginia State Bar and a former Herald-Leader investigative reporter, remembered Bean as a bright, tough, demanding editor who also "had a heart as big as all outdoors."

"She could hold her own with anybody," he said. "She was fiercely independent and had an ability to focus like nobody's business."

York, who won a Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting with Jeffrey Marx for his reporting on University of Kentucky basketball and went on to a career at the Washington Post, credited Bean with helping him get his start as a young journalist.

"I was really green, and I was prone to lots of rook-



Dottie Bean

ie errors," he said. "She saw something in me. She was determined not to let me fail."

On the day the Pulitzer Prize winners were announced, York said Bean was "one of the biggest cheerleaders."

She also gave him a nudge toward the woman who would later become his wife.

When fellow reporter Becky Todd got into a car wreck one day, Bean suggested York give her a ride home.

"Now, almost 45 years later, I'm still driving that reporter home," York wrote in a social media comment. "So thank you, Dottie Bean. I'll never forget you."

Other former Herald-Leader employees also shared fond remembrances of Bean on Facebook.

Mike Johnson said Bean was an assistant state editor when he began working for the Lexington Herald newspaper in 1970, and he remembered her as a great colleague.

"She was a hard-working, dedicated editor who loved newspapers and loved Kentucky," he wrote.

Judy Owens, who worked as a reporter in the Herald-Leader's Hazard bureau in the 1980s, remembered Bean as well.

"Dottie was remarkably kind, calm and down to earth," Owens said in a message. "She was always interested in the stories I was reporting and respectful to me personally."

Bean was born in Mason

County in October 1948 to William Bean Sr. and Dorothy Moran Bean, according to her obituary.

After graduating from high school, she attended the University of Kentucky, where she was a student journalist at the Kentucky Kernel.

In 1969, she was among the first group of journalism department students to be appointed to the department's standing committees with full voting powers, the Kernel reported at the time.

Bean went on to work at the Lexington Herald-Leader throughout the 1970s and 1980s as a reporter as well as state editor and night city editor. In 1986, she was named executive business editor when the business desk separated from the newspaper's city desk to become an independent division of the news department, according to Herald-Leader archives.

"She was tenacious, determined, and stubborn but loved her family and longtime friends," her obituary stated. "Forever the reporter, Dottie's curiosity and interest in local government continued to demand much of her attention. Her love of reading was a deep and lasting passion of Dottie's."

"Her faith and church family helped sustain her in her later years."

Bean had one sibling, the late William C. Bean Jr. She is survived by several nieces and nephews, cousins and longtime friends, according to her obituary.

Funeral services are scheduled for 3 p.m. Sunday at Tates Creek Christian Church in Lexington.



ADRIAN PAUL BRYANT

VisitLEX and Gatton Park on the Town Branch, alongside city officials, cut the ribbon on a new statue of famous race horse Lexington, also known as Big Lex.

Larger-than-life horse statue will now greet visitors to this Lexington park

BY ADRIAN PAUL BRYANT
abryant@herald-leader.com

The new Gatton Park on the Town Branch is now home to Lexington's newest public art piece: a larger-than-life statue of legendary race horse named Lexington.

Representatives from VisitLEX, Keeneland, the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government and Gatton Park unveiled the new art piece on March 24. The tall, blue stallion sits near Oliver Lewis Way along the park's Town Branch Creek bed.

"You go to Vegas, and you go the Welcome to Vegas sign. You go to Nashville and you got the mural of the wings. I said, 'we need to have a big blue horse where people will come and they'll get their picture taken, and they'll post on social media,'" At-Large Council member Chuck Ellinger

said Tuesday.

Ellinger put \$25,000 of his office's capital funds into the \$54,000 piece. The remaining costs were paid by VisitLEX, the city's tourism bureau.

"Initially I wanted one that was going to be all the way across Newtown Pike, like 60 feet high," Ellinger joked. "That was my first goal, but we couldn't do that. And we got something even better: we got two icons here with Big Lex and Gatton Park."

THE STORY BEHIND THE NAME

Lexington the horse, also known as Big Lex when shown as a blue horse, has been a local icon and mascot for the city since 2009, VisitLEX president Mary Quinn Ramer said at the unveiling. The idea for the piece has long been in the works.

"Obviously, people have for a long time said,

'Wouldn't it be fun to have a big blue horse?' ... I kept saying 'yes, as soon as we have the perfect spot,'" Ramer said. "And voila! We are so fortunate to be standing here in Gatton Park today."

The horse was known in the 1800s as the fastest horse in the world, once running 4 miles in 7 minutes and 19.75 seconds. News of Lexington's death in 1875 made the front page of the New York Times, Ramer said.

The Big Lex statue is the second large statue to be built in Gatton Park. First Impressions, formed like a maclurite fossil common to Fayette County, is a giant, climbable sculpture bearing a timeline of important local and global historic events.

Gatton Park on the Town Branch opened in August 2025 after nearly a decade of fundraising and planning, all to the total of roughly \$55 million.

FROM PAGE 1A

RULES

sober living homes.

There was some confusion between city attorneys and several council members on how precisely these groups are regulated.

Wu told the Herald-Leader there are no clear regulations for work groups and task forces in either the city charter or the council's rules and procedures.

"They're not really even mentioned," he said in a March 19 Herald-Leader story on the legality of these bodies.

The city's law department denied that the work group violated open meetings law, which sets standards for when groups of government officials have to provide public notice and welcome the public in for meetings. The law department argued in a March 23 letter that because these work groups do not have membership formally appointed by the mayor, vice mayor or the council altogether, they are not subject to the Open Meetings Act.

"Instead, without any

action, direction, creation, or control by the Urban County Council, a small group including several members of the council volunteered to informally discuss a very broad topic," city attorneys wrote in response to a Herald-Leader letter alleging the solar work group violated the Open Meetings Act by failing to have those meetings open to the public.

Additionally, because the groups are not comprised of a majority of council members — at least eight of the 15 member body — and were not authorized to enact public policy, they are also exempt from the act, city attorneys argued in the

letter.

"They brought their informal discussions to the General Government and Planning Committee and to the Urban County Council as a whole for further discussion and for further action at public meetings," attorneys wrote of the solar work group's March 10 presentation to the council which included eight pages of written policy regulations.

The group drafted the recommendations over the course of 11 scheduled meetings.

But a 2025 Kentucky Attorney General guide on the state's open meetings and Open Records Act shows that subcommittees

of public bodies are subject to open meetings.

"A committee of a public agency, even if its function is purely advisory, is a public agency for open meetings purposes and a quorum of its members is calculated on the basis of the committee's membership and not the membership of the public agency that created it," the guide said.

Wu's move to place the topic into a council committee could create specific regulations for work groups. City attorneys conceded in their letter to the Herald-Leader those regulations could be beneficial to the public.

"The Council does rec-

ognize based upon the Objection that further discussion and clarity regarding the application of the Open Meetings Act to Council subgroups would be appropriate," they wrote.

Meanwhile, the ordinance that regulates solar on agricultural land is moving forward.

In April, the full council will decide whether to send the new draft language to the Urban County Planning Commission. The commission will discuss and potentially revise the rules before sending them back to the council for further debate and a final vote of approval.