

CONCERNS

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that, under the new rules, which became effective Nov. 1 as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, veterans, the homeless, recent foster care youth and adults ages 54-64 are no longer exempt from work requirements to receive food benefits.

Changes in Medicaid could affect eligibility, and some have said, could result in impacts on rural healthcare providers.

Individuals on the ground in Eastern Kentucky, however, say that uncertainty is causing fear and nervousness, which may ultimately be founded as changes are instituted in these programs in the coming months, at a time when needs are growing.

Hunger, food insecurity rising in Eastern Kentucky

Between October and November, according to God’s Pantry Food Bank President and CEO Michael Halligan, the organization, which provides food and other supports to food pantries throughout Central and Eastern Kentucky, saw a 20 percent increase in people coming to food pantries, many of whom had never been to a food pantry before.

“And it’s because they’re uncertain about what their food resources will look like in the coming months,” Halligan said. “Hunger, food insecurity, is higher than it’s ever been, and that was before the shutdown. We know it’s growing.”

SNAP usage is widespread throughout the Appalachian Newspapers coverage area.

In Pike County, according to Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services data, in December, there were a total of 6,145 active SNAP households, which were issued an average of \$311.

Floyd County, the data shows, had a total of 4,369 SNAP households in December, which received an average of \$315, while Johnson County had a total of 2,354 SNAP households which received an average of \$308.

Perry County, the data shows, had a total of 3,423 SNAP households in December, which received an average of \$321.

In total, the data shows just over \$5.1 million was directed to the four counties through SNAP distributions in December.

Halligan said the impacts of the SNAP interruption during the shutdown are still being felt.

“We continue to see the ripple effects of the loss of those SNAP benefits today,” he said. “We will continue to see the ripple effects of the loss of those SNAP benefits into 2026.”

However, the shutdown is not the only issue, Halligan said, pointing to the work requirements going into effect.

“Part of what was missing during that conversation in November was that work requirements are now elevated for folks who are eligible for a SNAP benefit,” he said. “There are households aged 55-64 that are now responsible for work requirements that they were not before. There are households that have children aged 14 to 18 that are now responsible for

work requirements, and they weren’t before.”

People are fearful, Halligan said, about the future.

“Folks who are experiencing hunger have shared with us all across our service area that they’re nervous, they’re fearful that they’re going to need to rely on food pantries and meal programs more than they ever have,” Halligan said.

Concerns go beyond SNAP

Genesia Kilgore-Bowling, chair of the School of Social Work and director of the Master of Social Work program at the University of Pikeville, said she has also seen that fear present among people who receive the benefits.

“This One Big Beautiful Bill is causing lots of uncertainty and lots of fear — it’s just out and out fear from folks,” said Kilgore-Bowling, who was speaking on her own behalf and not on behalf of the university.

However, Kilgore-Bowling said, she is also concerned about the impacts of changes to health care, such as those that could be brought about in Medicaid.

“I think we’re going to see a decrease in health, because they’re going to have less access to health care, so people are going to put off going to the doctor more and, as a result of that, the issues just get compounded,” she said.

“SNAP was never intended to feed the family completely; it’s supposed to be a supplement, and it’s already not a whole lot,” she said. “For some families, particularly, it’s not a great deal and, with the rising cost of gro-

ceries — and they really have not come down — we’re going to see people getting less.”

That, Kilgore-Bowling said, will lead to people buying cheaper, less healthy food.

“When they get less, they’re going to purchase what they can,” she said.

However, Kilgore-Bowling said, the impacts will also reach into education as children go hungry or are affected by diet-driven health issues.

“They can’t go to school and focus on learning, so academics are going to be impacted,” she said. “This is truly going to impact every aspect of our lives.”

Addiction will rise, she said, as stress levels drive substance abuse in families.

Communities can provide hope

Kilgore-Bowling believes that, at this point, changes that come will likely do so with little input from those most affected.

However, she said, communities can provide help.

“I think, at this point, that there’s very little individuals can do to truly prepare, because if it’s going to happen, it’s going to happen,” she said. “What communities may need to do is to lend a little more support. Those who have the means and can need to lend a little more support to those food pantries, to give donations to places like the Mud Creek Clinic, which offer a lot of free health care.”

Halligan said that, during the shutdown, even among the negative effects, there was a positive seen.

“During the shutdown, we saw an amazing amount of

support,” he said. “Communities became very engaged; more than I’ve seen in my career.

“Kentuckians are resilient, and they’re resilient because we care about one another,” Halligan continued.

Once the community understood the needs and the number of people who received support from SNAP, Halligan said, there was a response.

“We’ve been able to keep pace because the community has leaned in,” he said. “Financial donations are on the rise. It’s more important than ever for that financial support to be there.”

At the God’s Pantry Food Bank’s website, godspantryfoodbank.com, Halligan said, people can find information on where they can go for help or how they can offer help, either by donating financially or finding volunteer opportunities at their local food pantries.

Kilgore-Bowling said she hopes that people do pay attention to what candidates are saying and doing and what legislation is being discussed and enacted at the state and federal levels.

“We’re just so far removed from legislation and politics, especially in Eastern Kentucky; not only do we feel so removed from it, but we are so far from Frankfort that we’re not interacting with those people a lot and they’re not interacting with us,” she said.

Kentucky treasurer’s office aims to expand, streamline unclaimed property returns in 2026

By McKenna Horsley
Kentucky Lantern

In the year to come, Kentucky Treasurer Mark Metcalf hopes to expand and streamline services in his office that return unclaimed property to Kentuckians.

Metcalf said in a recent interview with the Kentucky Lantern that his office has returned about \$80.5 million in unclaimed property since he took office at the start of 2024.

Unclaimed property can take a variety of forms, like paychecks or refunds for insurance or utilities. Metcalf recalled one story of a family living in Austin, Texas, being reconnected with a dormant estate of a deceased relative who lived in Kentucky. The family was unaware of \$1.7 million in the account for three years.

“We called the family in Austin and said there’s \$1.7 million which was not accounted for when the estate was opened,” Metcalf said.

The treasurer’s office tries to make the process to search for unclaimed property “as user-friendly as possible,” Metcalf said. Kentuckians who want to check if they have any property in the system can go to the treasurer’s website, treasury.ky.gov, and click on “Unclaimed Property” in the menu at the top of the page. Then, they may fill out the search with their information to see if the database has any matches. If they do have a match, then they will be directed to begin the process to reclaim the money.

People can also make nationwide searches for unclaimed property at missing-money.com.

“It’s their money. We intend to get it back,” Met-

calf said. “It is public money in the sense that it’s being managed by us for the public good, but all of these monies that you see in the Unclaimed Property Trust Fund are monies that belong to someone.”

The office is in the first phases of a pilot program to add child support and crime victims’ restitution payments to the system, Metcalf said. Those pilot programs will likely last a year or so before it can be fully implemented.

Metcalf, a Republican who is halfway through his first term as state treasurer, told the Lantern he plans to run for reelection in 2027.

“It’s a great job,” he added. “Serving the people of the commonwealth is the greatest honor extended to me, and we don’t take for granted what we’re doing.”

The Kentucky Lantern, an independent, nonpartisan, free news service, can be found at, kentuckylantern.com.

APPROVES

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this joint ownership arrangement beyond 2028, ruling then that a new power plant would be less expensive than adding environmental compliance upgrades necessary to keep the plant operating after 2028.

West Virginia’s Public Service Commission, at that time, ruled that Wheeling Power, which owns the other 50 percent of the Mitchell Plant, would bear the entire cost of the upgrades, the statement said.

The order, the statement said, approves a settlement between Kentucky Power and Kentucky Industrial Utility Customers, Inc. and to which the Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Kentucky’s Office of Rate Intervention did not object. The Sierra Club, also a party to this proceeding, rejected the settlement.

The PSC said in the statement that it was reluctant to grant the CPCN, stating that the “current request is due to the failure of Kentucky Power to correctly plan for and actually acquire alternative resources.”

The statement said the order also reflects the PSC’s concern that there are flaws in Kentucky Power’s methodology and that, “Kentucky Power’s analysis was not conducted with the level of rigor that the commission would expect to see for a decision of this magnitude.”

“In the three years since the PSC denied the request to continue investing in this plant, Kentucky Power has failed to propose a feasible plan for new generation or firm capacity contracts to meet its capacity requirements,” PSC Chair Angie Hatton said in the statement. “We are now forced to either permit continued investment in a 54-year-old plant in another state or allow Kentucky Power customers to be at the mercy of a volatile market. Neither option is good for customers and we are forced to choose the least bad.”

Kentucky Power, the statement said, filed this case on June 30, requesting a CPCN for capital investments necessary to continue taking 50 percent of the generating capacity from the Mitchell

Plant after December 31, 2028. Mitchell Plant, located on the Ohio River, includes two coal-fired baseload generating units, and is co-owned in equal parts by Wheeling Power and Kentucky Power, both subsidiaries of American Electric Power.

The statement said the PSC, in its Order, found that continued access to the plant is the most cost-effective choice at this time and will limit it potentially significant market exposure in the short-term.

The statement said the order noted that the CPCN is limited to those investments specifically identified in the case and requires Kentucky Power to file annual reports each year until 2031 to track the spending.

The PSC said in the statement that Kentucky Power customers will see a refund on their bills for the first four months of 2026, amounting to \$6.40 per month for the average residential customer as a result of the refund ordered in Case number 2023-0008 related to prior fuel adjustment clause charges.

ed state challenges are the only realistic path to forcing judicial reconsideration.

If Kentucky’s veto-proof majority and 84 percent voter support aren’t enough to move forward, then the supermajority isn’t worth the paper ballots it was printed on. The power to lead means nothing if you’re not willing to use it.

Pass the law. Invite the challenge. Let the Supreme Court decide.

Kentucky has the votes and the voters behind it. The only question is whether Kentucky has the will.

Tanner Willis is a Kentucky native, and a business operations analyst based in Arlington, Virginia. His writing on congressional reform has appeared in The Hill, The Philadelphia Inquirer, and the Clarion Ledger. He is the author of “Smoke and Silence: The Lives of Ol’ Mort” (Jesse Stuart Foundation, 2025).

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expectations while establishing a new standard going forward.

Washington won’t fix itself. The people can’t amend the Constitution directly because Congress controls that process too. But Kentucky’s supermajority gives the commonwealth something rare: the ability to act unilaterally and decisively. As I argued in “The Hill,” coordinat-

Tuesday’s Sudoku & Crossword Answers

2	5	8	1	7	3	4	6	9
4	6	1	5	2	9	3	8	7
3	9	7	6	8	4	1	5	2
9	1	4	8	6	7	2	3	5
6	2	5	4	3	1	7	9	8
8	7	3	2	9	5	6	4	1
5	8	6	7	4	2	9	1	3
7	4	9	3	1	8	5	2	6
1	3	2	9	5	6	8	7	4

	B	U	D		C	R	A	M	P		S	H	O	W
R	A	V	I		H	O	N	O	R		C	A	N	E
O	R	E	S		A	M	I	N	O		R	I	C	E
B	E	A	T	E	N					T	O	I	L	E
		A	G	E	R		C	R	A	M				
S	H	I	N	G	L	E	O	U	T	P	O	S	T	
T	A	L	C				S	A	N	D	S		P	E
E	R	I	E		S	P	I	C	E		T	I	N	E
E	P	A			G	U	I	D	E		R	U	S	E
P	O	D	C	A	S	T		R	E	S	U	M	E	D
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D	I	V	I	N	E					R	A	B	B	L
I	R	A	N			N	O	R	M	A		L	A	I
S	O	N	G			D	R	A	I	N		U	L	N
K	N	E	E			S	C	E	N	T		E	L	K