

KENTUCKY YOUTH ASSEMBLY 2022

YOUTH GOVERNOR'S AGENDA

To help facilitate broader understanding of policy issues facing our Commonwealth, our KYA Governors and their Presiding Officer teams have published the Youth Governor's Agenda.

The Youth Governor's Agenda is a list of policy issues organized into 6 policy areas:

- **Environmental Health**
Developing and managing the resources and public land of our Commonwealth
- **Education and Educators**
Reforming K-12 education systems and rights of educators in our Commonwealth
- **Institutional Reform**
Improving current systems and institutions that run our Commonwealth
- **Labor and Economics**
Increasing the wealth and economic prosperity of the Commonwealth and its citizens
- **Public Health and Safety**
Ensuring the health and well-being of all Kentuckians and Kentucky families
- **Social Equity**
Developing public policy to better protect all Kentucky citizens regardless of identity
- **Special Issue**
Issues that are especially relevant to our Commonwealth in 2022

There are 2-3 issues per policy area on the agenda (20 total). Each issue includes a one-page briefing:

- **Background on Issue**
Summary and background information on the issue
- **Questions to Address in Bills**
Guiding questions/problems that any BILLS on the issue should look to answer/solve
- **Sources for Research**
Links to research, articles, and other resources for your delegations

HOW TO USE THE AGENDA

- The best way to use the Agenda is to have bill sponsors review each issue and consider how they would best answer/solve the "Questions to Address".
- While multiple bills may address the same issue, each bill will likely have a different answer or solution to the problems that must be addressed.

YOUTH GOVERNOR'S AGENDA FAQ

Do we have to write bills on these topics?

These topics are not mandatory (only recommended by your KYA Presiding Officers), nor are they tied to awards, but these topics will be taken into account by each Youth Governor when determining which Commonwealth bills they choose to sign into law.

Does the Agenda take a position on an issue?

The agenda does not take positions on issues (or endorse any issue or solution), but rather provides "Questions to Address in Bills" so delegates can research their own positions when drafting their BILLS.

2022 AGENDA ISSUES

Policy Area | Environment

Environmental Justice | Becca Kaelin and Brooklyn Mullins
Clean Water Protection in Eastern Kentucky | Lauren Wood and Cortez Carver
Renewable Energy | Anna Palumbo and Ben Schrader

Policy Area | Education

Foreign Language Standards | BrentLee Threlkeld and Ryan Britz
Mental Health Curriculum | Claire Thornhill and Emmy Slaton
Higher Education Accessibility | Elijah Siracuse and Ali Kashif

Policy Area | Institutional Reform

Foster Care System | Logan Ward and Valerie Mohrmann
Juvenile Justice Reform | Ashlyn Poole and Kaylee Bow
Felon Voting Rights | Rebecca Vaught and Kadence Leigh

Policy Area | Economy

Small Business and Entrepreneurship Enhancement | Caden James Lucas and Eliza Renshaw
COVID-19 Relief | Lilia Saxena Smithson and Eli Lewantowicz
Casinos | Ava Roberts and Talbott Dilger

Policy Area | Public Health

Mental Health | Audrey Gilbert and Ryan McAfee
Mental Health | Dannhi Nguyen and Peyton Troutt
Abortion Access | Elle Moses and Mary Dudgeon

Policy Area | Social Policy

Transgender Rights | Will Schindler and Cam Suave
Gentrification | Lexie Pace and Kacey McCray
Banning Conversion Therapy for Minors | Chris Raymer and Quinn Holtzman

Policy Area | Special Issue

Adequate Opportunities for Rural Communities | Ollie Fegenbush and Mandi Cathers
Protecting Constitutional Rights and Preserving True Education | Tala Saad and Coral Ghrist

Prepared by your **2022 KYA Presiding Officers**

Position	HS KYA 1	HS KYA 2	HS KYA 3	HS KYA 4
Governor	Lauren Wood	Lilia Saxena Smithson	Caden James Lucas	Ollie Fegenbush
Speaker of CW House	Will Schindler	Elle Moses	Chris Raymer	Peyton Troutt
Pres. of CW Senate	Becca Kaelin	Talbott Dilger	Ali Kashif	Cam Sauve
Secretary of State	Anna Palumbo	Coral Ghrist	Mandi Cathers	Lexie Pace
Chief Justice	Dannhi Nguyen	Brooklyn Mullins	Logan Ward	Mary Dudgeon
Attorney General	Kaylee Bow	Rebecca Vaught	Kadence Leigh	Elijah Siracuse
Sec. of Exec. Cabinet	Eli Lewantowicz	Audrey Gilbert	Claire Thornhill	Emmy Slaton
Editor-in-Chief	Sophie Schaeffer	Katie Isaac	Sarah Umbarger	Thomas Clem
Lt. Governor	Valerie Mohrmann	Ben Schrader	Ava Roberts	Ashlyn Poole
Speaker of BG House	Quinn Holtzman	Cortez Carver	Ryan McAfee	Tala Saad
Pres. of BG Senate	Ryan Britz	Eliza Renshaw	Kacey McCray	BrentLee Threlkeld

Environmental Justice

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Becca Kaelin, President of the Commonwealth Senate | HS KYA 1
Brooklyn Mullins, Chief Justice | HS KYA 2

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

There are many definitions of Environmental Justice (EJ). Most definitions share some common ideas and are situated in a framework that values a healthy environment for all and acknowledges that disparities have occurred based on income, race, and ethnicity. EJ exists when no particular group experiences more environmental hazards than others, and when environmental laws are applied and enforced with equal rigor in all communities.

Environmental benefits and resources should be accessible, and the decision-making power (for actions that pertain to the environment) should be free from discrimination. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines EJ in part as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.” The 2002 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, in a meeting of grassroots groups held that “peoples and communities are entitled to equal protection of our environmental, health, employment, housing, transportation, and civil rights laws.” Moreover, everyone has the right to live in a healthy area and to experience the benefits of such a healthy environment.

Today, individuals are affected by environmental injustice. Which is the complete inverse of EJ. Environmental injustice exists when one segment of the population is affected adversely by the environment more so than others. For example, in 2011, sixty thousand cancer cases in Eastern Kentucky were linked to mountaintop removal. The activity of mountaintop removal in Eastern Kentucky targeted the local population, as a result, much developed cancer. Furthermore, environmental justice problems tend to affect the poor and vulnerable first and hardest.

In 1994, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898, which created a federal EJ program that would help agencies throughout the country identify and address Environmental Justice in low-income and minority populations. In the fall of 2015, the EPA issued a rule, called the Clean Power Plan, requiring states to reduce greenhouse gas pollution from the electric power sector. The CPP required Kentucky to cut our carbon pollution by 31% by 2030 and gave the state lots of flexibility and time to get the job done. Additionally, Kentucky has taken strides to progress the environmental justice movement but more actions need to be implemented for Kentucky to be a healthier Commonwealth for all of its citizens.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What is the interconnection between environmental injustice, environmental racism, and climate change?
2. How and why did the environmental justice movement start?
3. How might environmental justice problems become an issue for Kentuckians in the future?
4. What actions or steps are being implemented at the local level? Are there any organizations that focus on environmental justice?
5. What factors contribute to environmental injustices and how do they affect individuals?

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

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Environmental justice 101. Kentucky Resources Council. (n.d.). Retrieved June 23, 2022, from <https://www.kyrc.org/news/energy-and-environment-101/environmental-justice>

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Environmental Justice Resource Document - KIPDA. (n.d.). Retrieved June 24, 2022, from <https://www.kipda.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Environmental-Justice-Resource-Document.pdf>

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Clean Water Protection in Eastern Kentucky

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Lauren Wood, Governor | KYA HS 1
Cortez Carver, Speaker of the BG House | KYA HS 2

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Lack of access to clean, safe drinking water has plagued some of the most vulnerable Kentuckians for decades. Much of the problem is concentrated in Eastern Kentucky, where mining and drilling have destroyed a significant portion of the groundwater. In 2000, a massive coal slurry impoundment broke in Martin County, sending 306 million gallons of toxic sludge oozing into the county's water source, leaching into groundwater and seeping into residents' wells. As a result, Martin County residents are forced to live with unsanitary drinking water that leaves them at risk of negative health impacts. Despite the poor quality of the water, as of 2019, Martin County still had the 8th most expensive water in Kentucky. In contrast, Louisville Water is consistently ranked among the nation's top water utilities, signifying a substantial rural-urban divide that exists in Kentucky water quality.

Beyond commercial drilling and mining, runoff from a variety of sources has also threatened Kentucky's water supply. As explained by an article from Kentucky's Energy and Environment Cabinet, "when runoff from rainfall or snowmelt is not able to infiltrate into the soil, it instead flows over the surface of the ground where it comes in contact with pollutants" (source). These pollutants are then carried into waterways. Nonpoint source pollution comes in many different forms, including fertilizers on lawns, oil on roads, dirt from construction sites, and even soap from car washes. Faulty plumbing and transportation of the water may cause lead to be present as well. Additionally, agricultural runoff from pesticides and other potential pollutants used on farms presents a serious risk to Kentucky waterways. Yet, there are actionable policy responses that can be taken to ensure the protection of Kentucky water.

Water in Kentucky can be seen on both sides of the spectrum. In places such as Louisville, some of the nation's cleanest water is on display. On the other hand, Martin County and areas in Eastern Kentucky continue to struggle with poor water quality and high cost. Limiting nonpoint source pollution and issues in commercial drilling and mining should be made a priority in order to solve this glaring issue. The quality of Kentucky water could become a unanimous strength if more focus and support was implemented. Taking these steps would certainly contribute to the growth of our Commonwealth.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How can we better regulate Kentucky agriculture and drilling/mining to ensure that runoff does not pollute waterways?
2. How can water infrastructure in Eastern Kentucky be upgraded and strengthened to best provide clean water for communities in need?
3. What steps have already been taken to limit water pollution in Kentucky?
4. What are some specific examples of events when water pollution has severely affected Kentucky or areas in Kentucky?

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

Boles, S. (2019, October 31). First these Kentuckians couldn't drink the water. Now they can't afford it. NPR. Retrieved August 4, 2022, from <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/31/772677717/first-these-kentuckians-couldnt-drink-the-water-now-they-can-t-afford-it>.

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Martin County Water Crisis. (2020, August 31). Appalachian Citizens' Law Center. Retrieved August 4, 2022, from <https://aclc.org/environmental-justice/martin-county-water-crisis/>.

Renewable Energy

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Anna Palumbo, Secretary of State | HS KYA 1
Ben Schrader, Lieutenant Governor | HS KYA 2

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Kentucky has often turned to nonrenewable energy sources such as coal or natural gas. We are currently the fifth largest producer of coal in the United States. Coal also accounts for 69% of Kentuckians energy sources. But, with coal on the decline, and gas prices increasing, many have looked to more renewable energy sources. Solar prices alone have dropped 33% in the past three years. Meanwhile, Kentucky's energy usage has gone up 41% in the past decade. Coal and natural gas take over millions of years to form, and with the way they're being consumed, will not last much longer. Directing more funding towards renewable energy centers can create new jobs and economic gains, while also preventing climate change and keeping Kentucky healthy.

There are many ways renewable energy is used around the Commonwealth. Biomass accounted for one-tenth of the renewable energy generation in 2020. Waste from agriculture, forests, animals, and industrial buildings can help put electricity into our homes. Hydropower, however, is the main source of renewable energy for Kentucky. 10 hydroelectric dams powered 7% of the state's electricity, but more funding can increase that percentage. Kentucky has also led the way with the nation's first public school involving zero-net energy use. Open since 2010, it uses energy efficient ways to keep the building usable for many elementary students.

Promoting renewable energy also helps tackle climate change in many forms. It lessens the need for coal miners to risk their lives, or for companies to blow the top of a mountain off to collect more nonrenewable energies. Current renewable energy policies passed in neighboring Ohio and North Carolina have created hundreds of thousands of jobs, with more planned to come. Why shouldn't Kentucky work towards doing the same?

Many nonrenewable energies are projected to run out in less than 100 years. With coal being one of our most outsourced imports, running out of it will cause great damage to the economy. Now more than ever is the time to create bills and make change. Putting focus on clean energy will create jobs, open opportunities, and help keep our state beautiful for longer. This is not an issue we can put off for the next generation, like past generations have with us. Now is the time to incorporate renewable energy into our commonwealth.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How does the cultivation and use of nonrenewable energy affect Kentucky?
2. How will a shift from nonrenewable to renewable energy affect Kentucky's economy?
3. What are some of the cons of renewable energy to be considered?
4. How will incentives for renewable energy look?
5. Where will the funding for new renewable energy facilities come from?

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

(2017) Kentucky Coal Facts. Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet.

[https://eec.ky.gov/Energy/Coal%20Facts%20%20Annual%20Editions/Kentucky%20Coal%20Facts%20-%2017th%20Edition%20\(2017\).pdf](https://eec.ky.gov/Energy/Coal%20Facts%20%20Annual%20Editions/Kentucky%20Coal%20Facts%20-%2017th%20Edition%20(2017).pdf)

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Sustainable Energy Solutions. Kentucky for the Commonwealth.

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Foreign Language Standards

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: BrentLee Threlkeld, President of the Bluegrass Senate | HS KYA 4
Ryan Britz, President of the Bluegrass Senate | HS KYA 1

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

With Kentucky being the state with the largest number of counties, we have a lot of schools. There are 538 high schools alone in the state of Kentucky. Therefore, there are a lot of standard differences between these differing schools. We need a state all-school standard for these languages. Such as how many credits students need if they complete the courses. What kind of benefits will the students receive if they complete the foreign languages? Overall, we need standards set.

A fundamental job of teachers is to shape and educate the young minds that come into their class. With a class like foreign language, where no prior knowledge of the content is a common occurrence, we need to expect the best from our teachers. Languages are already difficult subjects, and those we decide will teach them must be suitable for the task. Qualifications need to be addressed when we are looking at the future of foreign language in our schools. It is up to us to decide what we want out of our language classes and teachers.

Foreign language can be a class that is not widely regarded as being important compared to math or sciences, but for colleges it can be. Only one out of every five students takes foreign language in high school according to Education Week. In the Jefferson County Public School System, there are eight languages offered: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Japanese, Latin, and Spanish. But, these classes are offered as electives, not as requirements. Only the Pre-College Curriculum track in Kentucky makes it mandatory to have foreign language credits to graduate. However, a majority of colleges in Kentucky, including the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville, require two years of foreign language before enrolling. This is similar to most cases in the U.S., where foreign language is required pre-enrollment. Foreign language progresses the cultural awareness and respect of our students and constitutes a more respectful and responsible future for all.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How can we make online learning be as beneficial to students?
2. How will all state standards work for different types of schooling? (Public, Private, Home, Charter, ETC)
3. What grades are available to be taught a foreign language?
4. Will there be a set standard of what language options there will be offered?
5. How can we better educate our teachers, to give students a more proper learning experience?

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

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Policy Area | Education and Educators

Mental Health Curriculum

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Claire Thornhill, Secretary of the Executive Cabinet | HS KYA 3
Emmy Slaton, Secretary of the Executive Cabinet | HS KYA 4

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Mental Health Issues are becoming increasingly prevalent in students, with suicide being the 2nd leading cause of death among people aged 10-34 in the U.S. The stigma and uneducation about mental illnesses in teens is only contributing to the issue. 1 in 10 youth have mental health challenges that directly affect how they function at school. High school students with significant symptoms of depression are more than twice as likely to drop out compared to their peers. With only 20% of youth struggling having adequate access to mental healthcare. According to the CDC, the easiest way schools can aid is training staff, linking students to mental health services, encouraging positive parenting practices, and educating parents and students.

Mental Health issues are not avoidable, or even completely curable, but we need to act soon to stop these issues from becoming an epidemic among youth. In 2019 it was recorded that 7.7 million american youth experienced a mental health disorder, this number continues to grow as an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the juvenile justice system specifically, 70% of the youth have a diagnosable mental health condition. Substance use can also be an indicator of a youths mental health issues. Many of these juveniles simply needed mental health treatment, not punishment.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kentucky General Assembly has provided \$7.4 million dollars to fund school-based mental health services. The Kentucky Center for School Safety and the State School Security Marshal has yet to decide how to allocate the funds. It is important that these funds are used in the most beneficial way..

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What is a feasible solution to implement mental health education?
2. What aspects of schools can be resolved to increase mental well-being?
3. Who will be responsible for introducing the new curriculum?
4. What grade(s) will this include?
5. How are schools contributing to the growing rate of mental health issues?

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

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Policy Area | Education and Educators

Higher Ed Accessibility

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Elijah Siracuse, Attorney General | KYA 4
Ali Kashif, President of Commonwealth Senate | KYA 3

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

87.2% of Kentucky Adults have graduated with a High School diploma, yet only 20% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. In 2016, 60% of public high school students enrolled in a university. 86% of students attend an in-state college or university. The percentage of grants based on need in the Commonwealth was 49%, 24% less than the national average, while the average tuition costs remain incredibly similar.

While the high school performance of students in the Commonwealth improves, their enrollment in higher education declines. With the looming effects of the Covid-19 pandemic looming, it is more important now than ever to provide public grants to students seeking higher education based on needs and academic performance. Public grants based off of academic and economic performance and needs have been a proven way to increase enrollment in secondary education. An attempt to build a culture of academic excellence in the Commonwealth can only be achieved with a strong foundation who are willing to take up the task. The state cannot continue to match the national average in tuition costs, while falling short of grants given by nearly a quarter.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. Where can money be allocated from to increase grants and federal funding towards scholarships?
2. Can this issue be solved through an executive action, or must it go through the state legislature?
3. Are there current steps being taken to increase the amount of funding given through scholarships?
4. How can the money allocated be divided up through individual grants?
5. What factors (if any) would cause these grants to be distributed differently from one student to another? (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Kentucky-2.pdf>

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<https://wkuherald.com/65850/news/sqa-votes-to-allocate-funds-towards-scholarships-hardin-planetarium-donation/>

<https://wfpl.org/report-kentuckys-college-graduation-rate-is-low-across-the-board/>

Policy Area | Institutional Reform

Foster Care System Reform

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Valerie Mohrmann, Lieutenant Governor | HS KYA 1
Logan Ward, Chief Justice | HS KYA 3

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

In Kentucky, there are currently around 8,700 children in active placements within OOHC (Out-of-Home Care). That number currently places Kentucky in one of the highest percentages of children in the foster care system, compared to other states. The foster care system has many inadequacies such as a lack of education surrounding it, a lack of willing guardians to participate in it, and a lack of funding from the government with the foster-care reimbursement rate being too low.

A 2018 report by the state's Legislative Research Commission made nine recommendations for areas in which the foster care system could be improved, many of these addressing the aforementioned issues with the system. All of these recommendations related to either the welfare of the children within the system, or the case workers who helped to ensure that the needs of these children are being met. Between both the children and the case workers, the issues at hand dealt with the system's handling of abuse and neglect, custody, the safety of foster homes, and case worker salary and workload.

On average, all of the kids placed into the foster care system are there for 31% of their lives. This is concerning as time in foster care can be correlated to other concerns such as lack of adequate schooling, homelessness, health issues, and onset delinquency. The foster care system is a necessary and vital system, the proper maintenance of which is key to ensuring the welfare of the most vulnerable among our state's youth, making the problems that it is facing troubling. As the youth of Kentucky are Kentucky's future, it's necessary we take action.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How are the overarching problems relating to the welfare and treatment of children in foster care addressed?
2. Do resolutions relating to the welfare of case workers take into account the issues of their salary, workload, or any other inadequacies that they may be facing?
3. In what ways can we help in reforming the foster care system in a cost-efficient manner?
4. Will your resolution be effective for all cases, regardless of whether or not the children seek adoption or reunification?

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

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"Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care: Challenges and Solutions." Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care: Challenges and Solutions | Youth.gov, <https://youth.gov/youth-briefs/foster-care-youth-brief/challenges>.

Policy Area | Institutional Reform

Juvenile Justice Reformation

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Ashlyn Poole, Lt. Governor | HS KYA 4
Kaylee Bow, Attorney General | HS KYA 1

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

The juvenile justice system in Kentucky and the United States as a whole is beset by disparities. These disparities include racial and ability-based discrimination. The juvenile system also has an overall outlook regarding the abuse and isolation reported throughout the system. There are many reports of abuse and wrongdoing done to minors in the juvenile system. The system needs to be reformed for issues relating to these for the best interest of those involved.

Many youths that enter the Kentucky Juvenile System have experienced some form of abuse in their life before entering the system. Whether it includes past physical/emotional trauma, neglect, sexual assault, etc. Putting more of this abuse on the minors involved has cost lives lost or personal setbacks for the youth involved. Nothing is being done to help the youth stuck in these situations like this. There's no one fighting for their overall situation and laws to help them are being pushed aside.

Both mentally ill/disabled juveniles and youths of color are largely discriminated against within the system. As many as 80% of juveniles currently in the system have disabilities, many of which go untreated or improperly treated. These youth are put into the system instead of receiving the help they need and deserve. In 82% of studies, it was found that certain races were treated better within the juvenile justice system. Minority youths are more likely to face family separation or parental conviction than their non-marginalized counterparts in America.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How can racial disparities be eliminated in the juvenile justice system?
2. What more can be done to assist youth with disabilities in the system?
3. What is the average number of abuse case reports in the juvenile system in Kentucky?
4. Are there any examples of previous abuse reports and what was done about the report?

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

J. (2021, October 11). Senator Westerfield on Criminal Justice Reform: Solution Lies In "Data and Not the Emotions." The Bottom Line.

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Robles-Ramamurthy , B., & Watson, C. (2019). Examining Racial Disparities in Juvenile Justice. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*.

<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.29158/JAAPL.003828-19>

Permanently Restoring the Voting Rights of Felons

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Rebecca Vaught, Attorney General | KYA 2
Kadence Leigh, Attorney General | KYA 4

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Kentucky was the first state to disenfranchise felons from voting. We remain one of two states to continue this practice. While there have been executive orders to restore these rights, those can be easily overturned. For instance in 2015 Governor Matthew Bevin overturned Governor Steve Beshear's return of the right to vote. Due to the oft-overturned nature of executive orders, the only permanent solution would take an act of the legislature to amend Section 145 of the Kentucky constitution.

Roughly 9% of Kentucky residents could not vote due to their felony convictions--and 15% of Black Kentuckians. This totals over 300,000 Kentuckians (half of whom do have their rights under Beshear's order) who do not have their right to vote protected by legislation or constitution.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What can be done to ensure that the voting rights of all are enshrined in the Kentucky constitution?
2. How can Kentucky be sure that voters don't pose risks without discrimination?
3. What legislation do other states have that could be echoed in Kentucky?
4. How can the Commonwealth work to reverse the damage caused by over two centuries of banning felon voters?

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Small Business and Entrepreneurship Enhancement

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Caden James Lucas, Governor | HS KYA 3

Eliza Renshaw, President of the Bluegrass Senate | HS KYA 2

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Kentucky has always been regarded as one of the best states to do business. Our beloved bluegrass state has always reigned in the most passionate, driven, and hard working entrepreneurs and practitioners of all trades to make Kentucky their root-bearing place for their businesses. Even though generations of entrepreneurs, practitioners, and small business owners have called Kentucky their place of business, our lack of infrastructure and avoidance of best practice methods and social policies have called for the demise of our businesses. As a result, Kentucky continually ranks among the lowest in the nation when it comes to the effectiveness of our economy, where we sit at #30. Additionally, over the past 3 years Kentucky has dropped four places in the rankings of best states to do business, from number 23 to 27. Small businesses and the practices of entrepreneurship is what shaped Kentucky into the state that it is today, and after the traumatic hardships faced by businesses over the past two years, Kentucky needs to enhance the operations of small businesses and our entrepreneurs.

As evident as it may be, Kentucky has worked hard to maintain some sort of financial stability over the years- through both entrepreneurial and personal means. Yet, the Covid-19 Pandemic has left us in a state of emergency that not only affects public health, but our financial health as well. Far too many businesses have had to lay off staff, reduce hours, or close permanently as a result of the financial hardships and economic disparity Covid-19 left us in. Sadly, two years later as we begin to return to a sense of normalcy, it is evident that the side effects of a global pandemic have yet to wear off. Even as one of Kentucky's primary industries, Spectrum News1 reports that leisure and hospitality providers are still experiencing drops in revenue. However, a silver lining to the supposive downfall of Kentucky's economy is that according to the Kauffman Foundation's 2020 National Report on early-stage entrepreneurship in the United States, the rate of new entrepreneurs increased sharply from 2019 to 2020; especially in Kentucky. This also means that since the start of the pandemic, Kentucky's entrepreneurs have been hard at work offering unique skills in unique collaborations to ensure the people's needs are met during a "distanced" time.

Improving the financial and personal aspects of Kentucky's entrepreneurs will not only improve our economic standing, but provide an improved quality of life for all Kentuckians. While also remaining a nationwide and international example for how essential small businesses and entrepreneurs are to the survival of our economy, prosperity, and normalcy.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What are some ways that we can make starting or maintaining a business easier for all Kentuckians?
2. Why does society not see the enhancement of entrepreneurship and small business operations as something that is pertinent to the survival of the economy, government, and our daily lives?
3. Why are the numbers of entrepreneurs decreasing as more and more young adults move through their education, and is it a matter of education issues in Kentucky?
4. How can the state better support small business owners and entrepreneurs in an unpredictable economy despite the strong foundations we “appear” to have?
5. Is Kentucky missing the mark when it comes to how other states treat their small business owners/self-labeled entrepreneurs?

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COVID-19 Relief

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Lilia Saxena Smithson, Governor | HS KYA 2

Eli Lewantowicz, Secretary of the Executive Cabinet | HS KYA 1

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

As Kentucky has entered 2022, the state has seen a growing return to the economic prosperity felt prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic of the previous two years. This return to normalcy can be directly correlated to the rise in vaccination rates throughout the commonwealth. As of now, the main issue Kentucky workers are left to face is keeping a stable income, allowing them to make ends meet as inflation has created challenges cross-nation. With the withdrawal of post-pandemic relief services such as the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) in September of 2021, the challenges have worsened. To combat this newfound challenge, governmental supports such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and unemployment insurance have proved to be beneficial in supporting the Kentucky workforce in facing a newly shaped economy.

Throughout the pandemic we saw astronomical rates of unemployment insurance claims. Coming out of the pandemic we see them at an all time low mirroring the health of our recovering economy. There has been a steady decrease in past months, and despite the fluctuation in inflation, more jobs are being filled. Kentucky's economy proves resilient to the other Covid-19 variants. After seeing the initial impact of the pandemic, we are finally seeing a consistent improvement that will surpass what we had established before.

As we move further past the woes of the pandemic through 2022 and 2023, it becomes clear that the next steps to take are surrounded in finding ways to adapt the economy to the pandemic full time. As cases ebb and flow, and new variants arise throughout the country, the pandemic is something that is not soon to escape us in the following decade. As such, legislation, programs, etc. should be structured with the tides of the pandemic in mind to keep communities safe and jobs secured in the effects of it.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What Kentucky-specific efforts can be made in providing relief to rural and urban populations alike?
2. How can economic recovery funds be implemented without furthering the foreseen issues due to inflation within the commonwealth?
3. Besides monetary relief, what programs and/or agencies could be created or utilized in ensuring sufficient support for Kentucky workers?
4. In what ways can supporting workers allow for a consistent decrease in unemployment?
5. How can the state support workers directly rather than through employers?

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Policy Area | Labor and Economics

Casinos

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Ava Roberts, Lieutenant Governor | HS KYA 3
Talbot Dilger, President of CW Senate | HS KYA 2

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Many states have relaxed state gaming statutes, while Kentucky remains resolute. There are currently no full-fledged casinos in Kentucky and only charitable games are legal. Gambling by Kentucky law is defined as, "staking or risking something of value upon the outcome of a contest or game based upon an element of chance." Horse running, trotting, and pacing races and wagering on these races is legal as is off-track interstate wagering. Horse racing is legal in Kentucky because it is pari-mutuel; this means that the person placing the wager is wagering against the other people wagering, not wagering against the house. In casino gaming gamblers are wagering against the house. Casinos and gambling establishments are illegal as is bookmaking, organizing or promoting gambling, and possessing gambling records and devices.

Proponents of legalizing casinos bring up the money flow casinos bring into their states. Casinos have been shown to generate tourist income which creates growth in local retail and great boosts in tax revenue which can be used by states for public projects. Increased employment is also a popular reason for the legalization of casinos as it creates many new jobs. Opponents of the legalization of casinos cite many reasons for advocating against it such as concerns of gambling addictions and other negative effects on patrons.

Indiana legalized casinos in 1993. Since the legalization of casinos, Indiana has made over \$13.1 billion in wagering taxes and \$1.8 billion in admission taxes. In Indiana, the wagering tax is 22.5% of the casino's gross revenue. The admission tax is \$3 per person in Indiana. Currently, \$1 of that goes to the state, \$1 goes to the city hosting the casino, and \$1 goes to the county that hosts the Casino. The state of Indiana has received massive increases in tax revenue from legalizing casinos and this revenue has been able to help many state programs.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. Should all gambling be legalized in Kentucky or just Casino gaming?
2. How would the legalization of casino gaming help the horse industry?
3. How have other states legalized casino gaming and other gambling?
4. Where should the state allocate the new tax revenue earned from the casinos?
5. Are there similar issues to the legalization of casino gaming that should be considered?

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Mental Health

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Audrey Gilbert, Secretary of the Executive Cabinet | HS KYA 2
Ryan McAfee, Speaker of the BG House | HS KYA 3

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Mental health among Kentuckians has shown a significant decline since the start of the pandemic, specifically with our teenagers- about 40,000 Kentucky youth suffer from depression. With so much political division, effective mental health-related policy has been difficult to pass in recent years. In the 2022 legislative session, there were several mental health bills proposed including one offering excused absences for mental health days for students. However, funding is severely lacking for programs that are currently in place. The time for impactful and innovative policy is now.

Kentucky ranks 32nd in the nation for mental health. We are in need of long lasting solutions and investments to help our population receive the care it needs. Mental health is not a problem that can be ignored and it deserves far more attention and resources than it receives. Utilizing schools systems, public health resources, and Medicaid have worked in the past for mental health solutions. Moving forward, innovative ideas and methods will be necessary to make strides in mental health for Kentucky.

Funding for mental health in schools needs to be a priority for Kentucky. Students are suffering more now than ever before, and our schools are great places to facilitate solutions. The pandemic provided extra temporary funding for mental health in schools, but Kentucky deserves permanent solutions.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What resources need to be provided to improve mental health in Kentucky?
2. What kind of funding needs to be provided for mental health programs in Kentucky?
3. How can we utilize systems already in place to further mental health efforts?
4. How can Kentucky take a new approach to tackle the mental health crisis?

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Mental Health

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Dannhi Nguyen, Chief Justice | HS KYA 1
Peyton Troutt, Speaker of CW House | HS KYA 4

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Mental health is a serious issue that needs to be addressed in Kentucky. 40,000 Kentuckians aged 12-17 have depression, as reported in 2021. Moreover, many youths were not treated for depression either; Kentucky currently ranks 30th for youth who have depression that does not receive treatment. Due to COVID-19, fewer people visited the hospitals for being at risk of suicide. Hospitals are crucial points for people with severe mental issues as they can provide support and the proper treatment to individuals. However due to the pandemic, many did not have access to hospitals during the pandemic.

Moreover, Kentucky continues to see a rise in the percentage of people visiting Emergency departments for mental illnesses and substance abuse, indicating a higher need for mental health services. On the local level, some counties might not have access to as many mental health resources as other counties in Kentucky. Some schools might not have any mental health resources at all for students, such as mental health counselors or therapists. There is also a state hotline, 988, in Kentucky that is running to connect Kentuckians in crisis with mental health professionals.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What problems do younger people face when dealing with mental health?
2. What could be a feasible solution to help those struggling with mental health?
3. What can be done in schools to prevent the prevalence of mental health issues for future generations?
4. How can current legislation be changed to benefit more people?

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Abortion Access

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Elle Moses, Speaker of the Commonwealth House | HS KYA 2
Mary Dudgeon, Chief Justice | HS KYA 4

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Currently, Kentucky ranks in the top for premature death percentages in the US followed by a positive trend of adverse childhood experiences. A combination of these issues weighs heavily on the commonwealth's access to abortion. Access to abortion allows for Kentuckians to make educated decisions about what will provide the best option for both their health and safety and the potential child's health and safety. The "abortion" umbrella term includes many different situations and procedures. This wide span creates even more concerns when discussing overall access to healthcare. Abortions are not always a choice for some. Abortions are needed to save lives. As a result of looming legislature shifts, fake clinics have been created as a means of attempting to "talk individuals out of the decision" and furthermore risking both the physical and mental health of Kentuckians everywhere.

Unfortunately, the right to access abortion in Kentucky has been largely limited at a legislative level. On May 26th, 2022, Kentucky became the first state to implement such restrictive measures regarding abortion that it has in essence been effectively outlawed. For instance, in addition to stating that abortion would be outlawed in the instance that *Roe v. Wade* were to be overturned, it also established that a patient must receive state-directed counseling that includes information designed to discourage the patient from having an abortion, and then wait 24 hours before procedure is provided. Furthermore, a minor must receive parental consent in order to receive an abortion, and an abortion may only be performed after twenty weeks of post-fertilization in the case of a life-threatening instance. In Louisville, the two remaining abortion facilities have been forced to close their doors as a result of inadequate equipment and staffing.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What can be done to ensure that abortion remains accessible in the Commonwealth of Kentucky?
2. What can be done by governmental agencies to ensure that abortion facilities remain available to every Kentuckian regardless of age, race, or socioeconomic status?
3. How can current legislature be strengthened to ensure that every Kentuckian has access to abortion?

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Transgender Rights

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Will Schindler, Speaker of the CW House | HS KYA 1
Cameron Suave, President of the CW Senate | HS KYA 4

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

An estimated 17,700 adults in the Commonwealth of Kentucky identify as Transgender. Amongst these adults, and the thousands of additional unaccounted for minors, all face discrimination, harassment, and violence which could potentially result in unemployment, homelessness, and negative health outcomes. Only 31% of Kentuckians live in the 3 counties (20 cities) that have protections against discrimination based on gender identity in private employment, housing, and public accommodations.

The mistreatment of Transgender individuals stems from bigotry rooted in misconceptions regarding the psychiatric health and behavioral health, as well as reductive notions of biological sex. On a statewide level, government officials have continuously refused to enact policies that would safeguard trans people. Instead, they oftentimes opt to pass legislation that poses further drawbacks for the community. An example of this being how difficult it is to receive accurate identifying documents that correspond to one's gender identity. The results of systemic mistreatment by society include discrimination and harassment in the workplace, academic settings, and public/private restrooms, as well as negative experiences with primary care providers and law enforcement officers. These results further contribute to the significantly higher rates of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, sex work, and incarceration amongst trans people.

With only 3 counties out of 120 in Kentucky having an ordinance prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity in private employment, housing, and public accommodations, there is little stride being made. Further, at a statewide level, legislators have taken measures against Transgender inclusivity. Most recently the legislature passed SB83 a bill that bans Transgender women from competing in women's sports.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What legislation can be put in place to subsidize/back Transgender youth (18 or younger) across Kentucky who do not possess bodily autonomy?
2. How could a potential solution be implemented so that it helps underprivileged trans people just as much as those with privilege and more access to resources?
3. What resources can be provided to trans people so that they feel supported?
4. What resources beyond primary-care are crucial to Transgender livelihoods?

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Gentrification

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Lexie Pace, Secretary of State | HS KYA 4

Kacey McCray, President of the Bluegrass Senate | HS KYA 3

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Gentrification is a process in which wealthy individuals move into poor, or low income communities, typically with large numbers of people of color. The wealthy people have goals for the neighborhood that contradict the existing culture, and even cost of living. With the immigration by the wealthy, there are higher costs of living and the residence culture shifts tremendously. These changes (especially the cost) are the main cause of emigration of low income residents, people of color, and minority owned businesses. Gentrification is mainly an urban practice and the direct effects are not often seen in suburban or rural areas with the exception of the flow of “nomadic” people who lost their homes due to the high cost of living.

The main places in Kentucky that gentrification is prevalent are Louisville and Lexington due to their large urban settings, low income communities, and population density. Numerous cases have been brought to the public attention where gentrification has directly affected people of the lower class in urban Kentucky areas.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What kinds of legislation can be put into place to prevent gentrification from happening in Urban Kentucky areas?
2. What can be done by government agencies to ensure that gentrification is not occurring without a worthy cause or reason?
3. What current legislation is put into place to prevent gentrification and how can it be improved to hold more strength?

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Banning Conversion Therapy for Minors

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Chris Raymer, CW Speaker of the House | KYA HS 3
Quinn Holtzman, BG Speaker of the House | KYA HS 1

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

Of the 419 incorporated cities in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, only 3 have banned conversion therapy. Conversion therapy is a harmful practice that aims to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. It is rooted in intensive practices that promote self-hatred and internalized shame regarding an individual's sexuality. Conversion therapy not only promotes internal negativity and shame but does serious damage to those inflicted's mental health. The Commonwealth of Kentucky has taken minimal action against this harmful practice, and much more needs to be done for the safety and health of our youth LGBTQ+ population.

42% of those who have survived conversion therapy have committed suicide or seriously considered taking their own life. According to a report done by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, an estimated 20,000 LGBTQ minors in states without protections will be subjected to conversion therapy by a licensed healthcare professional if state officials fail to act. Banning conversion therapy protects the mental health and lives of the youth populations. Conversion therapy promotes the idea that being yourself and having the ability to express that individuality is a bad thing. Our state motto is "United we stand, Divided we fall", but if we are suppressing our youth population, are we truly united? Banning conversion therapy is necessary for the well-being and success of future generations of LGBTQ+ Kentuckians.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What are the negative effects of conversion therapy, particularly regarding minors?
2. How should funding be allocated or provided, if needed?
3. What is the purpose of conversion therapy, or why do people believe it is still required?
4. Can any current legislation be strengthened or amended to assist with banning conversion therapy?
5. What is a feasible way to ensure the ban is dispersed throughout the state?

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Adequate Opportunities for Rural Communities

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Ollie Fegenbush, Governor | HS KYA 4
Mandi Cathers, Secretary of State | HS KYS 3

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

One prevalent issue in Kentucky, as it is currently, is the divide in advantages between rural and urban parts of the Commonwealth. In 2021, the estimated population for Kentucky was 4,509,349 people, and 1,837,472 people living in rural areas. According to the ERS, the poverty rate in rural Kentucky is 19.2 percent, compared to 12.0 percent in the state's urban areas, based on 2020 ACS data. According to 2016-2020 ACS statistics given by ERS, 17.2% of the rural population has not completed high school, while 9.8% of the urban population has not completed high school. Rural Kentucky has a 5.1 percent unemployment rate, whereas metropolitan Kentucky has a 4.4 percent unemployment rate (USDA-ERS, 2020).

Comparing the metropolitan counties, micropolitan counties, and rural areas of the commonwealth, statistics read that the rural population stays at a disadvantage in opportunity. There's no question that communities across the Commonwealth, rural and urban, have serious problems to address. The difference is that rural areas often lack the infrastructure to even begin addressing those problems. Providing rural communities with adequate access to the internet, first responders, and education can lead to a substantial increase in future opportunities for Kentuckians that hail from rural areas.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. What is the most prevalent cause of rural inaccessibility?
2. What can Kentuckians in rural areas be provided with in order to better equip them for the 21st Century?
3. How significant is the divide between rural and urban communities in Kentucky?
4. Is there a fiscally feasible solution that can solve this problem?

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Protecting Constitutional Rights and Preserving True Education

ISSUE BRIEF AUTHORS: Tala Saad, Speaker of the BG House | HS KYA 4
Coral Ghrist, Secretary of State | HS KYA 2

BACKGROUND ON ISSUE:

In 2022 alone, over 120 educational “gag” orders have been introduced into state legislatures. In Kentucky, this censorship has taken the form of multiple bills introduced into the state legislature (Educational Gag Orders: Legislative Restrictions on the Freedom to Read, Learn, and Teach, n.d.) including House Bill 14 and House Bill 18, which include the prohibition of classroom instruction or discussion that includes concepts relating to race, sex, and religion. Other legislation within Kentucky with similar goals was passed into law this past year such as Senate Bill 138 and Senate Bill 1. Bills like these dictate which materials teachers can use to cover history and attempts to deprive educators and students of their first amendment right to freedom of speech while inhibiting a student’s ability to engage with and understand the world in which they exist while creating a culture of fear within the classroom. (Statement Regarding New Classroom Censorship Law, Senate Bill 1, 2022)

This wave of censorship violates the first amendment right to freedom of speech and expression as well as the equal protection clause within the 14th amendment by disproportionately targeting enforcement against educators of color and LGBTQ+ educators. Constitutional challenges of similar legislation in other states have established that the enforcement of viewpoint-based censorship in education is motivated by a desire to advance a political agenda by capitalizing on race-based fears.

This legislation criminalizes educators for teaching fundamental aspects of American history, creating a chilling effect on teachers which leads to teachers avoiding teaching material that they believe is an excellent educational tool because of the potential for a formal complaint and disciplinary action. This prevents teachers from guiding instruction and conversation on foundational themes of American History such as slavery or the treatment of Native Americans. (The First Amendment in Schools - The First Amendment in Schools, 2021). Students in Kentucky are already expressing the impacts that this chilling effect has had on their learning experiences in classrooms with over 46% of students of color reporting that their racial or ethnic group is rarely or never represented in textbooks, posters, or other classroom materials. Additionally, 53% of students say their teachers rarely or never talk about issues related to race or ethnicity in the classroom. (Kentucky Student Voice Team, 2021).

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN BILLS

1. How can we protect the first amendment rights of students and educators in schools from administrative and legislative censorship?
2. How can we ensure that students are provided with information on opposing viewpoints of controversial issues so that they may develop the practice of critical thinking and problem solving?
3. How can we provide materials representative of the many religious, ethnic, and cultural groups that have contributed to American history?
4. How can ensure that the removal of any materials within schools is due to a legitimate concern regarding the educational benefit of the material and not the ideological composition?

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

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