

Gov. Beshear Provides Team Kentucky Update

FRANKFORT, Ky. (July 14, 2022) – Today, Gov. Andy Beshear updated Kentuckians on economic development, a decrease in gas prices and state real property taxes, the highest annual growth rate in decades, tips to ease the burden of rising costs for Kentuckians, Western Kentucky tornado recovery, work to address the water shortage in the city of Marion, the new 988 mental health crisis lifeline, Christmas in July events for families impacted by December tornadoes and COVID-19. He also announced Ada Limón, the 24th U.S. poet laureate, as this week's Team Kentucky All-Star.

Economic Development

Today, the Governor highlighted two economic development projects in the commonwealth, totaling over \$2.5 million in investment, which will create 50 full-time jobs.

Gov. Beshear congratulated Advanced Handling Systems LLC, a Hy-Tek Material Handling company and leader in full-service integration of automated fulfillment and distribution products, on the grand opening of its newly renovated innovation space in Erlanger yesterday. The innovation lab is a catalyst for 35 new, high-wage jobs with a more than \$500,000 investment.

The Governor also announced leaders at Accuride Corp., a manufacturer of wheels, wheel ends and braking components for commercial and passenger vehicles, are investing in the company's Henderson County facility with a \$2 million commitment, creating 15 well-paying jobs for Kentucky residents.

Decrease in Gas Prices

Today the Governor shared good news with Kentuckians, as U.S. gas prices have seen nearly a 50-cent drop over the last month, with a 4-cent-per-gallon drop since just yesterday in Kentucky. The average price for gas in Kentucky is 32 cents lower than the national average of \$4.605 at \$4.285, according to AAA.

The Governor highlighted the average price drops over the past month in the following areas:

- 57 cents in Bowling Green;
- 45 cents in Covington;
- 69 cents in Elizabethtown;
- 57 cents in Henderson;
- 50 cents in Hopkinsville;
- 34 cents in Lexington;
- 45 cents in Louisville; and
- 70 cents in Owensboro.

While prices are still higher than usual, the Governor shared a story from John Hicks, the current state budget director and incoming executive cabinet secretary, that stuck with him: "When you watch inflation, it's like a rocket coming up and a feather coming down. We're certainly seeing that in a couple of areas, including gas prices, as those prices start to decrease. While these silver linings can give us hope, we must still acknowledge these are tough times. This is why my administration is committed to doing everything we can to help Kentuckians save money."

State Real Property Tax Decrease

In more positive news for Kentuckians, Gov. Beshear shared that the state real property tax rate has decreased, dropping from 11.9 cents to 11.5 cents per \$100 assessed value. The Kentucky Department of Revenue is required by statute to set the real property tax rate each year by July 1. This is the second annual decrease in the real property tax rate – the only two years the rate has decreased since 2008.

The Governor said, "I want Kentuckians to know, we're watching and we know the property you own has gone up in value. That's why we've cut the state property tax rate for real estate to try to help out. To ensure your bill isn't going up significantly and hopefully, for many of you, it is in fact going down."

The drop in the state rate may also help mitigate an increase by other local taxing districts.

Highest Annual Growth Rate in 31 Years

Gov. Beshear said that Kentucky's record-breaking economic momentum continues this week as the state's fiscal year 2022 General Fund receipts grew at the highest rate in 31 years. On Monday, the Office of State Budget Director reported 14.6% growth over last year and noted that General Fund receipts totaled \$14.7 billion, exceeding the budgeted estimate by \$945.4 million. This is the second-highest revenue surplus ever – surpassed only by last year's record amount – and the budget surplus is expected to be even higher once the books are closed on spending later this month.

"We're seeing more jobs and better wages for Kentuckians, which allow more people to put food on the table and live the lives they want and deserve," Gov. Beshear said.

The Governor also noted that, once the books are closed later this month, the state's Rainy Day fund is expected to reach almost \$2.7 billion. When Gov. Beshear took office, that fund was at \$129 million.

Helping Kentuckians Save

Gov. Beshear continued to share resources for Kentuckians across the commonwealth to save money. Two new recourses the Governor added today are the Kentucky Prescription Assistance Program and a resource to help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan costs. The Governor also announced a one-stop website where individuals can access all the resources at governor.ky.gov/tipstosave.

Gov. Beshear Announces Additional \$12 Million for Western Kentuckians

Today, the Governor announced an additional \$12 million from the Team Western Kentucky Tornado Relief Fund to assist individuals impacted by the December 2021 tornadoes with specific unmet needs. This assistance is targeted at long-term recovery and will be managed with the assistance of local long-term recovery groups (LTRGs).

Eleven local LTRGs sought assistance from the fund. They will collect and evaluate the needs of their community members and submit individuals' needs to the Public Protection Cabinet. This collaboration will ensure that funding efforts are not duplicated and that those still in need of life essentials are getting assistance. Survivors wishing to apply for this assistance can contact their local LTRG.

Helping the City of Marion Address Water Shortage

The Kentucky Emergency Operations Center, the Kentucky National Guard, the Division of Water, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, the City of Marion and the private sector are coordinating daily to bring bottled and raw water to the city and to find short- and long-term solutions to the water emergency.

Leak detection and repair crews have identified and fixed waterlines, saving an estimated 100,800 gallons of water per day. The engineering will be done to complete a water connection from the City of Marion to the Sturgis Water Co., which will meet more of the city's water demand.

The Kentucky National Guard is continuing to distribute bottled water to those in need. To date, the guard has handed out more than 398,000 bottles of water provided by the state and through donations.

The volume of raw water hauled to Marion has increased to 120,000

gallons per day. That capacity will increase in the coming weeks. Additionally, a secondary source of raw water has been identified and the Kentucky Division of Water has confirmed the water quantity and quality are sufficient to meet water hauling needs.

988 Suicide and Mental Health Crisis Lifeline

Gov. Beshear said this upcoming weekend, Saturday, July 16, the easy-to-remember three-digit mental health crisis hotline, 988, will operationally launch in the commonwealth.

The move is part of a nationwide departure away from the 10-digit National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 800-273-8255, which remains available during the changeover to help those in need.

The 988 number will soon connect Kentuckians facing thoughts of suicide, mental health distress or an addiction crisis with compassionate and trained counselors who can help. The lifeline is available 24/7 and counselors respond to calls, chats or text messages from those seeking help as well as from Kentuckians who are concerned about a loved one who may need crisis support.

The Governor said that the state has been working diligently to implement the new number, which has been called the "911 of mental health."

"My administration has always prioritized mental health the same as physical health," Gov. Beshear said. "And with the launch of 988, we have made it easier for Kentuckians to reach out and get the assistance they need and deserve."

The Governor plans to join mental health partners at a news conference Monday at the Capitol to officially launch 988.

COVID-19 Update

Commissioner of the Kentucky Department for Public Health Dr. Steven Stack provided an update on COVID-19, noting that while hospitalizations, ICU bed and ventilator use all remain at some of the lowest levels we have seen since the beginning of the pandemic, the virus is still actively spreading in Kentucky. Approximately two-thirds of Kentucky counties are at a medium or high COVID-19 community level.

"Currently, all active variants in Kentucky continue to be Omicron variants," Dr. Stack said. "BA.5 has become the predominant variant nationwide at about 65% of the total COVID sequenced, and Kentucky is seeing a similar pattern. BA.5 does not appear to cause increased hospitalization or death, but it is causing more reinfections because previous strains confer less immunity to BA.5."

For the greatest level of protection against COVID-19, the Governor and Dr. Stack encouraged unvaccinated Kentuckians to get vaccinated and for vaccinated Kentuckians to get boosted if they haven't already.

Nine out of 10 Kentuckians under 60 who have died from COVID-19 in the past year were unvaccinated, and two-thirds of Kentuckians over 60 who died from COVID-19 in the past year were unvaccinated.

Kentucky Crosses Into New Era of Driver Licensing

By Jim Gray, Secretary of the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

FRANKFORT, Ky. (July 18, 2022) – The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet has delivered its fair share of big, bold and transformative infrastructure projects over the years. On June 27, 2022, we crossed a significant milestone by completing one of the largest statewide initiatives in our recent history that surprisingly didn't involve roads or bridges.

Driver licensing issuance shifted from a decentralized model in each county to a centralized regional model managed by the Transportation Cabinet (KYTC). With that change came new modern conveniences and more card options than ever before.

The move can be traced back to the passage of the federal REAL ID Act prompted by the 9/11 attacks that involved fraudulent licenses. The Act introduced strict application and security requirements for states to offer new REAL ID license versions to curb fraud.

The majority of Circuit Court Clerks collectively asked KYTC to take over REAL ID issuance and their licensing functions to allow them to focus on court duties. The shift required an overhaul of the licensing process and a lengthy task list to find new office spaces, hire and train staff and reimagine how to modernize licensing.

The Transportation Cabinet introduced new service options to reduce the number of trips to a regional office, like online and mail-in renewal, plus the choice of an eight-year credential. In counties without a regional office, Popup Driver Licensing staff will make periodic visits based on the county population to bring licensing services to communities. By the end of August, at least one visit will have been made to every eligible county.

There are currently 31 regional offices across the state. Some locations will later move to a permanent site within the same city.

With the REAL ID enforcement deadline less than one year away and a legislative charge to complete the transition by the end of June, our goal was to expand access as soon as possible. We understand this is a significant change for Kentuckians. That's why licensing is our only business at regional offices, and we're committed to fine-tuning the process to make the licensing experience a positive one.

Kentuckians may visit any regional office location, regardless of where they live, to request, renew or replace credentials. While all driver testing will continue to be scheduled with and conducted by Kentucky State Police, they now have a presence at most regional offices.

We encourage Kentuckians to visit drive.ky.gov to compare services offered in-person, online and by mail. Also, be sure you're REAL ID ready by visiting realidky.com. Starting May 3, 2023, you'll need a REAL ID license or another form of federally-accepted ID, like a passport, to use at airport security checkpoints, military bases or federal buildings that require ID (like the White House).

Artists Can Apply for Kentucky Crafted Through Aug. 15

The Kentucky Arts Council is now taking 2022 applications for the Kentucky Crafted Program.

Kentucky Crafted is an arts marketing program that provides assistance to visual and craft artists through networking, promotional and sales opportunities and business training.

The purpose of the program is to support professional visual and craft artists and promote a diverse selection of high quality art in Kentucky.

In addition to being added to the Kentucky Crafted Directory, adjudicated visual and craft artists are eligible to exhibit at the Kentucky Crafted Market and other events sponsored by the program.

Visual and craft artists who do original work in any medium, are full-time residents of Kentucky and are 18 years of age or older are eligible to apply. Applicants should have a well-developed body of work and some marketing experience.

Potential applicants should read through the complete application guidelines prior to starting their application.

The deadline to apply is Aug. 15, 2022, 4:30 p.m. Eastern time.