

Kentucky News Connection

October 1, 2019

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## Trainings Aim to Educate Kentuckians on Early Signs of Child Abuse

Nadia Ramlagan

LOUISVILLE, Ky. - Training sessions on how to recognize early signs of child abuse will be held this week in Louisville and Lexington. The events, run by Kosair Charities's "Face It" movement, are designed to educate social workers, early-childhood educators, emergency medical service providers and concerned community members on how to spot red-flag bruising on children.

Dr. Melissa Currie is a forensic pediatrician leading one of the trainings in Louisville. She said generally speaking, child abuse occurs as an escalation of violence over time.

"What that means for us is that, if we can learn to recognize the early warning signs - the more subtle bruising that happens sort of earlier in the process - we can intervene and help protect these children before the abuse escalates to near-fatal or fatal injury," Currie said.

The trainings will be held on Friday, October 4, and are free and open to the public. For more information, including information on available continuing-education credits, visit [FaceltMovement.org](http://FaceltMovement.org).

Keith Inman, president of Kosair Charities, said six years ago, his organization decided it was time to begin publicly addressing the state's child abuse epidemic.

"Well in Kentucky, we led the nation in incidents of abuse and neglect," Inman said. "So the fact that we're having these trainings and trying to get more people involved and more organizations involved - because, at the end of the day, child abuse is an adult issue."

Currie said one way to determine whether to be worried about a particular bruise on a child is the "TEN-four" rule.

"So, the T-E-N stands for torso, ears and neck, and the four means any child four years of age or younger," Currie explained. "And then the second part of that rule is any bruising anywhere on an infant who is not yet pulling up and taking steps."

Research shows far more children experience maltreatment than statistics convey. And Currie said this often can happen because medical or family-services providers miss subtle but important indicators early on.

"For us to help the public understand what kinds of bruises in children are normal and what kinds aren't normal is probably one of the most powerful things we can do to prevent child maltreatment," she said.

In 2018, there were more than 20,000 reports of suspected child abuse and neglect made to the state's Department for Community-Based Services from Jefferson County alone.

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## **Court to Hear Oral Arguments Related to KY Medicaid Work Rules**

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. - On Friday, the U.S. Court of Appeals for Washington, D.C., will hear oral arguments in a case concerning Gov. Matt Bevin's changes to Kentucky's Medicaid program, known as Kentucky HEALTH.

Earlier this year, a federal judge blocked the new rules, which would have required Medicaid recipients to work or volunteer for 80 hours a month in order to receive health coverage.

Betsy Stone, a health law fellow at the Kentucky Equal Justice Center, says the state of Arkansas instituted similar work requirements, and thousands of otherwise eligible people lost access to health care.

"Studies across the board show that people who receive health care and can work, do," she stresses. "They just got lost in an extra layer of bureaucracy that the state was paying to put into place, that really wasn't accomplishing what it was supposed to be doing."

The Kentucky Equal Justice Center, along with the Southern Poverty Law Center and others, are representing a group of low-income individuals challenging the Medicaid restrictions.

Stone adds that while the Department of Justice has asked for an expedited decision in these cases, the ruling could take weeks or months to be released.

Robin Ritter, who lives in Shelby County, is currently unemployed and has a host of medical conditions, including seizures and back problems. Her husband is disabled and she has a special needs daughter.

Ritter and her family rely on Medicaid for health coverage.

Last summer, Ritter received a letter from the state's Medicaid agency, informing her that to maintain health coverage, she would have to pay an \$8 premium and work a minimum of 80 hours a month.

"Fear came over me because if I have to work or if I have to volunteer, then it's going to put us in a major hardship because then I'm going to have to pay someone, somehow, to sit with my husband and my daughter," she states.

Stone says after oral arguments are heard on Friday, the court has three options.

"It could affirm the lower court's decision, so it can say the lower court was right and this program isn't going to work," she states. "It could reverse the lower court's decision and say the lower court was wrong, here's why, or alternatively it could remand the lower court and say, maybe, 'We disagree with a part of your decision and here's what we think that you should do next.'"

More than 1.2 million people in the Commonwealth receive their health insurance through Medicaid.

10/20/19

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## Medicare, Employer-Sponsored Health Plan Open Enrollment Begins

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. - More than 3 million Kentuckians have the opportunity to enroll in or make changes to their Medicare coverage or employer-sponsored health plan during the next couple of months.

Medicare open enrollment begins now and ends on Dec. 7.

Paul Brophy, chief operating officer for UnitedHealthcare Kentucky, says enrollment season can vary for employer-sponsored plans.

"So each and every year, employers evaluate their own plans and then, they set aside typically a two to three-week period for their employees to evaluate what kind of changes they want to make to the plan that they're going to be offering from the employer's side," he explains.

For most people, changes made during this time will take effect in January 2020.

Brophy says anticipating life changes can help ensure people have the coverage they need down the road.

"We want to be sure people are sitting down with their families to consider, are there pending surgeries?" he states. "Is there a pregnancy where there's going to be a delivery sometime mid-year? Is there other planned medical care?"

Even if you don't expect to change plans, Brophy adds it's important to make sure your prescription costs will still be covered next year.

He points out that Medicare beneficiaries may be surprised to know that original Medicare doesn't cover prescription drugs or most dental, vision and hearing services. But many Medicare Advantage plans do.

Some health insurance companies have developed resources to help people sort through their options.

Brophy says UnitedHealthcare has a program called Navigate4Me.

"This program pairs people facing complex health issues with a single point of contact to help coordinate care, address claims issues, provide that support necessary to be sure they are going to the right quality provider and asking all of the questions necessary," he explains.

Brophy notes that Navigate4Me is not available in all UnitedHealthcare plans.

10/27/19

October 14, 2019

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## **KY Public Service Commission Gets Hundreds of Comments on Solar Value**

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. - Today, solar-energy advocates from across the state are hand-delivering hundreds of citizen comments to the Kentucky Public Service Commission, calling for fair rates for energy produced by solar panels. A bill signed by Gov. Matt Bevin earlier this year allows the commission to set rates for any solar power fed back to the electric grid beginning in 2020.

Kentucky Solar Industries Association president Matt Partymiller said the question now is what rates the public service commission will set.

"We look forward to working with the commission to arrive at a fair rate for Kentucky ratepayers and to ensure that solar is valued fairly as we move into a future that will include a lot more distributed generation," Partymiller said.

Partymiller, who is a solar-panel installer, said utilities are likely to advocate for rates that are well below the actual value of solar.

Andy McDonald is a member of the Kentucky Solar Energy Society. He pointed out that if the commission reduces the compensation for using solar panels, it could discourage homeowners and small businesses from making the pricey initial investment.

"Currently under net metering, if you generate a kilowatt hour of energy back to the grid, you get a credit equal to one kilowatt hour - and so in the future, like at nighttime, when you consume energy from the grid, you can use that credit to offset your bill," McDonald explained.

He added the commission's decision could also impact the state's solar industry, which employs more than 1,400 people. And he said input from Commonwealth residents is critical.

"They've said that they won't value comments that are just sent in by email the same as they will value comments that are submitted on paper," McDonald said. "And so, we've been gathering comments from people on paper and will be delivering them to the Public Service Commission."

Tuesday is the deadline for Kentuckians to submit comments on net metering to the commission. A public hearing will be held in Frankfort on November 13.

## Red-Tape Barriers Create Challenges for KY Children's Health Coverage

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. - Five thousand Kentucky children lost their health coverage between 2016 and 2018, according to [a new report](#) by the [Georgetown University Center for Children and Families](#).

While Kentucky's uninsured numbers aren't as high as those in neighboring states that didn't expand Medicaid, Emily Beauregard, executive director of the advocacy organization [Kentucky Voices for Health](#), said the trend is troubling.

"These kids have access to coverage; they're just not enrolled," she said, "so what that tells us is that the enrollment system is getting harder. We haven't been able to put our finger on exactly what's happening, but we have heard that there's identity-verification and income-verification processes that are just more complicated than they used to be."

Beauregard said lawmakers should be taking a close look at the state's enrollment system for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to ensure that families aren't falling through bureaucratic gaps.

Dr. Deborah Stanley, medical director of [HealthFirst Bluegrass](#), a community health center in Lexington, said minor problems in early childhood such as speech difficulties or trouble seeing, if left untreated, can grow worse as children get older.

"Children whose parents don't have insurance and are worried about accumulating large bills and don't come in early are going to let things go that maybe aren't really impacting the child greatly at the time," she said.

Stanley said working at a community clinic allows her to see patients regardless of their insurance status, but added that many health-care providers can't afford to do so.

"If I were in a small town in rural Kentucky, and I'm working really hard to pay my nurse, my front-line person, and turn the lights on and pay my rent," she said, "it's really hard to take in a lot of uninsured patients because I've got to pay the bills at the end of the month too."

Kentucky children younger than age 6 are more likely to lack health coverage than older kids. That runs counter to the national trend, according to an analysis of census data by the Georgetown Center.

The report is online at [ccf.georgetown.edu](http://ccf.georgetown.edu), and a state-specific data hub is at [kidshealthcarereport.ccf.georgetown.edu](http://kidshealthcarereport.ccf.georgetown.edu).

## Appalachian Communities Say Prison Jobs are "Phantom Promise"

Nadia Ramlagan

*By Alison Stine*

*Broadcast version by Nadia Ramlagan*

*Reporting for the YES! Media-Kentucky News Connection Collaboration*

WHITESBURG, Ky. - Big Sandy hides on a big hill. If you're not looking for the federal prison, you'll miss it easily. At first, all that can be seen above the soaring Kentucky cliffs, jagged granite dotted with green scruff, are lights. They look like the lights for a high school football field, or maybe a mall. Then the guard towers loom into view. You can't see the razor wire from the road.

Construction on U.S. Penitentiary Big Sandy finished in 2002, one of three federal prisons built in eastern Kentucky since 1992. Plans for another federal prison, in rural Letcher County, Kentucky, appear to have fallen through; in June, the U.S. **Federal Bureau of Prisons withdrew its plans for Letcher** after an outcry from the community-and a federal lawsuit expressing concern both over the environmental issues of building the prison on a former coal mine site, and the fact that the public had not been able to weigh in.

In the scramble to "save" Appalachia as the coal industry collapsed, prisons-many housing incarcerated individuals transferred from distant states-have been presented as an antidote to the joblessness and poverty plaguing parts of the region, especially the more isolated rural areas. Prisons are big projects with hefty price tags, and they bring pledges of "jobs, jobs, jobs." But more often, prisons do not deliver promised local employment, at least not initially, and carry with them a host of other issues.

**Inez, Kentucky**, the town nearest Big Sandy, has a population of less than 900. Multiple storefronts on East Main Street are empty, one with large pane windows covered in flaking white paint. There's a hardware store, a rural health clinic. The pawn shop at the edge of town has a row of ATVs parked out front, near a stack of tires and a few old wagon wheels. A sign says "We Buy Gold." It's unclear how many locals work at the prison.

Despite Big Sandy's promise of local jobs, the largest industry employing people in Inez is still oil and gas extraction, and less than a third of the town's total population is employed anywhere at all.

Kentucky has 12 state prisons, plus five federal prisons. The Virginia state prison in Big Stone Gap is just across the state line. In March 2019, the number of people under the jurisdiction of the Kentucky Department of Corrections **reached more than 24,000**, though there were **not enough beds** for all of them.

Kentucky has the **ninth-highest incarceration rate** in the nation, so much so that Kentucky radio station WMMT began producing a radio show, "Calls from Home," in the early 2000s.

The program reaches into seven prisons, **broadcasting messages from inmates' families**. WMMT is housed within Appalshop, Kentucky's media, education, and arts center within Letcher County.

A prison is not like a factory. Its massive size doesn't automatically mean jobs, especially not for a local workforce without the specialized training needed to be a corrections officer, or CO-and especially not in a federal prison, which has additional qualifications. **Work as a federal corrections officer** requires a college degree, or three years of work experience.

November 14, 2019

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## Early On, Student Loan System Leaves Borrowers Struggling to Repay

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. - Nearly 25% of federal student loan borrowers default within five years of starting the repayment process, according to a new report by **The Pew Charitable Trusts**.

Most of those borrowers showed signs of financial distress almost immediately when it came time to start repaying their student loan debt, the report says.

Sarah Sattelmeyer, who manages The Pew Charitable Trusts' project on student borrower success, says the student loan system is outdated, confusingly complex, and often undermines borrowers' efforts to repay their debt.

"So, we know that before they even enter repayment, some groups are more likely to struggle," she points out. "For example, counterintuitively, those who owe the least and often less than \$10,000, default at higher rates than those with higher balances."

In Kentucky, defaults are especially concentrated among low-balance borrowers.

More than 40% percent of people in student loan default in the Commonwealth borrowed less than \$5,000 while enrolled in community college, according to data by the **Association of Community College Trustees**.

Sattelmeyer points out that some segments of the population are more likely to default than others.

"Recent research does indicate that African-American borrowers have higher rates of default than others," she states. "So, this problem needs solutions that include the repayment system, but go above and beyond it."

Because defaulting on student loans can have serious long-term financial consequences, Sattelmeyer says the government needs to come up with effective ways to help struggling borrowers.

"But a huge barrier in this space is that there's a lack of data to help us develop evidence-based solutions," she points out.

The U.S. Department of Education reports that currently about 20% of student loan borrowers - that's more than 1 million people - are in default, and millions more are behind on their payments.

## **Report: 2020 Census Count Could Affect KY Progress on Child Well-being**

Nadia Ramlagan

LOUISVILLE, Ky. - Fewer children in the Commonwealth are living in poverty compared with 2012, according to **new county-level data**.

Dr. Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, the organization that analyzed the data, said more children are in families that have enough food, are covered by health insurance and are graduating from high school. He said he thinks the state is making good progress, but added that the work can't stop.

"We also can't be naive, however, when we live in a state where nearly half of kindergartners are entering school not prepared to learn," he said. "When the trend line is going in the wrong direction, when it comes to kids transitioning out of foster care being reunited safely with their parents, there is still a lot of work to do."

According to the report, the number of Kentucky children in foster care continues to increase, with nearly 47 out of every 1,000 placed in foster care. Thirty-six percent of children exiting foster care reunify with their parents. the report said.

The report also highlighted the importance of counting children in the 2020 U.S. Census. In 2010, Brooks said, the most undercounted group of citizens in Kentucky was children younger than age 5, meaning the state lost more than \$12 million per year in funding for a variety of programs.

"We're talking about Medicaid; we're talking about Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, school lunch programs, support for children with special needs, Head Start, foster care, child care," he said. "It covers the gamut."

Keith Sanders, executive director of the **Lawrence and Augusta Hager Educational Foundation**, chairs the Daviess County **Complete Count Committee**, tasked with spreading the word about the census and motivating residents to participate. He said local towns and cities should understand that community dollars depend on the census count.

"Population is one of the major metrics used in determining how much funding goes into a particular program," he said. "There are others as well. So, the number of people in your community is a big factor in the amount of funding that comes into it to address community needs."

While children are the most likely group to benefit from federal programs, he said, they also are the most likely to be missed in the count.

The county databook is online at [kyyouth.org](http://kyyouth.org).



## Toxic Chemicals Known as PFAS Detected in KY Drinking Water

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. - Chemicals called PFAS (short for *per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances*) have been found in Kentucky's drinking water.

Known as emerging contaminants, PFAS are found in the Teflon in non-stick cookware, food bags, some brands of dental floss and in fire fighting foam.

There is evidence that PFAS can accumulate in the body over time, and are linked to cancer and disruption of the thyroid and immune system.

John Mura, executive director of the office of communication for the Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet, says this is the first time the state has tested for PFAS in drinking water.

"Like everyone else, we have seen the growing literature that these compounds are a health concern," he states. "So six months ago, the **Department for Environmental Protection** decided that it would do a statistically valid sampling of Kentucky's drinking water plants."

Scientists tested 81 municipal water treatment plants supplying drinking water to around 50% of Commonwealth residents. At least one out of the eight different PFAS and related substances tested for were found in 41 plants.

For decades, Chemours - a Dupont-spinoff company - dumped PFAS from its West Virginia plant into nearby waterways, including the Ohio River.

Samples taken from drinking water that draws from the Ohio River tested positive for PFAS. However, Mura says levels of the chemicals remain low in Kentucky.

"The EPA has set a lifetime health advisory level on two compounds of PFAS of 70 parts per trillion," he points out. "Our results show no samples - and we took 648 samples - and we had no results that came close to that."

Mura says state officials will be developing a strategy for continued monitoring of PFAS and testing of potential upstream sources.

Several states, including North Carolina and Vermont, have issued health advisories for PFAS in drinking water, and are working to place stricter limits on PFAS contamination beyond the Environmental Protection Agency's recommended 70 parts per trillion.

December 3, 2019

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## Report: Retirement Security Critical for Hiring Quality Teachers

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. - Defined benefit pensions are a major factor for recruiting and retaining new teachers in the Commonwealth, and according to **new research by the National Institute on Retirement Security**, more than 96% of teachers say whittling away pensions would drastically affect the state's ability to attract new teachers to the profession.

Laura Adams is a fourth-generation teacher in Henry County. She said finding new recruits for open teaching positions at her school has been a challenge.

"It has just dried up. We just do not have people going into the profession, because they perceive that it's under attack," Adams said. "They perceive that their retirement may not be there for them, and so they don't even want to start. And that is really unfortunate because I have a 6-year-old daughter. I'm truly worried about who is going to teach her when she's in high school."

The study also found 74% of teachers in the Commonwealth would be better off in retirement with a defined benefit pension compared with a 401(K).

Brent McKim is president of the Jefferson County Teachers Association. He said the 6,000 teachers he represents are worried about their future and that of their newly hired colleagues.

"They know that that will make a difference in whether or not the newly hired teacher in their building is high-quality or not," McKim said.

Some studies have indicated that few teachers stay in the profession long enough to qualify for a defined benefit pension. But the **National Institute on Retirement Security report** found in Kentucky, more than 60% of teachers work in the school system for 20 years or more - long enough to earn their retirement income.

Adams said people outside of the profession may think teachers are getting a handout in the form of a pension. But she said that's a damaging misconception.

"Of course, I know, and all the other teachers I work with know, we put 13% of our paychecks into the system every month. So, it really is something that we're vested in," Adams said. "And I think a lot of politicians have maximized that misconception."

She added that shifting to a 401(k) plan would likely increase turnover among experienced teachers, and put more pressure on already strained staff.

12/15

# Kentucky News Connection

*A statewide news service for Kentucky*

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December 12, 2019

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## Bill Would Create Statewide KY Mental Health First Aid Training Program

Frankfort, KY – State Rep. Kim Moser, R-Taylor Mill, has pre-filed 2020 legislation that would create a statewide Mental-Health First-Aid Training Program, aimed at curbing deaths from suicide and substance abuse. Comments from Moser; and Ben Chandler, CEO of the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky.

**Intro:** A House Republican from Taylor Mill has pre-filed a bill that would create a statewide Mental-Health First-Aid Training Program. State Representative Kim Moser says the idea is to increase knowledge about the nature of depression and substance-abuse disorders, reduce stigma and empower communities to properly help someone experiencing a mental-health crisis.

:10 *"This is really putting a tool in the hands of everyday people and folks who are working with those individuals who are really most at risk. "*

**Tag:** The free training program would be available to all individuals, but is geared toward educators, first responders and law enforcement. The bill will be considered during the legislative session that starts early next year.

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**Second Cut:** Moser says the program would be run by the state's Cabinet for Health and Family Services, and paid for through a trust fund.

:22 *"And the trust fund will specifically fund Mental Health America or a similar evidence-based training program and suicide-prevention program. The trust is going to be set up so that it can accept funds from state and federal allocations, but also grants and private donations."*

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**Third Cut:** Former Democratic congressman Ben Chandler now heads the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky. He believes the legislation will save lives.

:21 *"We don't understand mental health as well as we should. We don't recognize it sometimes when we see mental-health problems. We have a particular problem in underserved rural areas. So you don't have very many mental-health professionals in those areas, so we need to inform and educate other people, particularly teachers in the schools."*

**Tag:** According to the United Health Foundation's America's Health Rankings, 24 percent of Kentucky adults say they have been told they have a form of depression, and the state ranks 49th in the country for the number of

December 18, 2019

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

## **KY Health Officials Report First Flu-Related Deaths**

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. - Four people in Kentucky have died from the flu, and health officials say this year they expect an increase in flu cases across the Commonwealth. The Kentucky Department for Public Health also reports more than 1,600 laboratory-confirmed flu cases since early August.

Acting state epidemiologist Dr. Doug Thoroughman said he expects this flu season to stretch out, lasting longer than last year's.

"We're definitely seeing an earlier onset, with higher numbers this year than we saw in previous years," he said, "and we've now had two more deaths, so we've got six deaths to date; and our first pediatric death was reported Friday."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last year the nation experienced the longest flu season on record. In Kentucky, there were 196 flu-related deaths, including two children. So far, Kentucky's flu activity is considered "moderate," according to the **CDC's weekly Influenza Surveillance Report**.

The flu is an upper respiratory infection caused by a virus that spreads through sneezing and coughing. Thoroughman said many people still underestimate how deadly it can be.

"It's something to be taken seriously, because it kills anywhere between, like, 15,000 and 30,000 people a year in the United States," he said. "Generally, that's really young children or very old folks, people that have more immune-compromised systems."

He said new strains of the flu emerge every year, most originating in Southeast Asia.

"In Asia, there's a lot of mixing between people and pigs and birds," he said, "and so, the strains genetically mutate every year, and we have different types coming out. And they have different characteristics; some are more deadly, some spread easier."

The most effective steps to prevent flu, Thoroughman said, are to wash your hands frequently, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, and stay home when you are sick.

The CDC weekly report is online at [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov).

## Survey: More People Susceptible to Holiday Scams

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- Holiday scams aren't what they used be. Technology is making fraud harder to spot, and according to a **new survey by AARP**, nearly 20% of participants failed a simple quiz designed to test their ability to recognize the red flags of holiday scams.

Gary Adkins is a retired state prosecutor who specialized in felony and securities fraud. He said some scams are more common than others.

"I think there's a lot of areas that citizens of the Commonwealth get scammed in, involving the gift cards, involving the package delivery," Adkins said.

He said Kentuckians can report suspected scams to AARP's **online Fraud Watch Network** or by calling 877-908-3360 to get help if you believe you've been a victim of a scam.

According to the report, only 30% of people say they've done background research on a charity before giving money. But of those who did, half decided not to proceed with a donation based on what they learned.

Adkins said the Kentucky attorney general's office maintains a database of vetted charities in the state.

"It is very difficult for folks to spot these things many times because they think they're dealing with reputable individuals," he said.

Adkins said charity-rating sites such as **Give.org** and **CharityNavigator.org** also are good resources to check on whether a group asking you for money is legitimate.

"Other than an organization that you feel comfortable with, that you have a way of finding out how the money is being used," he said.

You can also contact a charity directly and ask. The AARP report said more than 1 in 3 adults believe they've been asked to donate to a charity or cause that most likely was fraudulent.