



**Issues/Program List for Withers Broadcasting
Paducah, Kentucky, Studios**

**WREZ-FM (Metropolis, Illinois)
WZZL-FM (Reidland, Kentucky)
WGKY-FM (Wickcliffe, Kentucky)
WRJJ-FM (LaCenter, Kentucky)**

The following programs are weekly broadcasts provided as timely and pertinent information or the community needs of Paducah, Kentucky, and the surrounding region in western Kentucky and southern Illinois.

Sundays at 5:00 am, the stations air InfoTrak.

Sundays at 5:30 am, the stations are Kentucky News Connection

Weekly program information can be found on the proceeding pages.



Call Letters: WILY-AM, WRXX-FM, WZZL-FM, WGKY-FM, WRJJ-FM, WMOK-AM, WREZ-FM, KGMO-FM, KREZ-FM, WKIB-FM, KAPE-AM, KJXX-AM, KYRX-FM, KBXB-FM, KRHW-AM, KBHI-FM, WDML

Weekly Public Affairs Program Time Aired: 5:00 AM

QUARTERLY ISSUES REPORT, JANUARY-MARCH, 2024

Show # 2024-01

Date aired: Sunday, January 7, 2024

Steve Elek, Senior Automotive Data Analyst at Consumer Reports

Mr. Elek shared results of Consumer Reports' newly-released annual car reliability survey, which found that electric vehicle owners continue to report far more problems with their vehicles than owners of conventional cars or hybrids. He said that on average, EVs from the past three model years had 79 percent more problems than cars powered by internal combustion engines. He outlined the most common problems cited by EV owners, and the potential reasons behind this trend.

Issues covered:

**Electric Vehicles
Consumer Matters**

Length: 8:44

Mariah M. Kalmin, PhD, epidemiologist, Health Policy Researcher at RAND, a nonprofit research organization

Dr. Kalmin was the lead author of a Rand study that found that spending on mental health services for children and adolescents has risen by more than one-quarter since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing to rise even as the use of telehealth services plateaued. She explained why telehealth care for mental health filled a critical need for pediatric patients, but added that it may not be appropriate in some cases.

Issues covered:

**Mental Health
Telehealth
Youth Issues**

Length: 8:41

Annie Korzen, social media personality, humorist, actor, author of "*The Book of Annie: Humor, Heart, and Chutzpah from an Accidental Influencer*"

Ms. Korzen explained how she accidentally became a viral star on Tik Tok in her 80s, why she enjoys interacting with younger people, and how she uses humor to cope with aging. She explained why she thinks younger people are starting to look to older women for wisdom and life instructions.

Issues covered:

**Aging
Social Media**

Length: 5:08

Show # 2024-02

Date aired: Sunday, January 14, 2024

Annie Grace, recovering alcoholic, author of "*This Naked Mind*," founder of the This Naked Mind community

Ms. Grace shared her personal experience of overcoming alcohol addiction by asking herself why she drank so much and doing research on the effects of alcohol. She explained how alcohol affects the body and the brain, and how quitting alcohol can restore the natural pleasure system. She also advised people who want to quit alcohol to be compassionate with themselves, and to treat drinking as a habit that can be changed with the right approach.

Issues covered:
Alcoholism

Length: 8:48

Nusrat Jung, D.Sc., Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering in the Lyles School of Civil Engineering at Purdue University

Prof. Jung led a study of Americans' typical morning grooming routines and found that several volatile chemicals are released when common hair care products are heated with flat irons or hair dryers. She said the chemicals linger in the air after use and may have dangerous effects on health. She recommends the use of a bathroom exhaust fan when using hair care products, and using the products less frequently.

Issues covered:
Personal Health
Environment
Consumer Matters

Length: 8:39

Eric Gehrie, MD, Executive Medical Director of the American Red Cross

The Red Cross announced this week that they are experiencing an emergency blood shortage, with blood inventory at critically low levels. Dr. Gehrie explained the reasons behind the current shortage and how listeners to sign up to make a blood donation.

Issues covered:
Blood Donations
Public Health

Length: 5:03

Show # 2024-03

Date aired: Sunday, January 21, 2024

Jared Walczak, Vice President of State Projects, Tax Foundation

More and more homeowners are struggling as property values across the nation are rising rapidly, and property taxes are following suit. Mr. Walczak said typical property valuations have risen 30% to 40% over the past three years. He explained that at least some homeowners who are already grappling with high inflation may get a brief reprieve, because property taxes typically take one to three years to catch up to home prices.

Issues covered:
Property Taxes
Inflation
Home Ownership

Length: 8:54

Satchin Panda, PhD, Professor in the Regulatory Biology Laboratory at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies

When and what we eat for dinner makes a significant difference in how we sleep. Prof. Panda explained how to determine the optimal time to have dinner. He said the most important factor in the dinnertime calculus is melatonin, the hormone that signals it's time to sleep. He also talked about the effect that highly processed food and carbohydrates have on sleep quality.

Issues covered:
Personal Health
Nutrition

Length: 8:29

Jas Booth, veteran, Founder of Final Salute, Inc, a non-profit organization that assists female veterans and their children who are struggling with homelessness

Ms. Booth shared her personal story of struggling with homelessness after her military career ended. She said her experience caused her to start Final Salute to help other women vets, especially those with children. She said her organization has helped more than 5,000 women veterans who are homeless or in domestic violence situations.

Issues covered:
Homelessness
Veterans' Concerns
Domestic Violence

Length: 4:43

Show # 2024-04

Date aired: Sunday, January 28, 2024

Vijay Boyapati, Bitcoin expert, author of "*The Bullish Case for Bitcoin*"

Mr. Boyapati explained the basics of what bitcoin is and why many investors have an interest in it. He explained the recent government approval that allows ordinary investors to purchase bitcoin through spot bitcoin exchange traded funds and why it will expose bitcoin to a much bigger retail audience. He also outlined the most common misconceptions about the digital currency.

Issues covered:
Digital Currencies
Personal Finance

Length: 8:58

Laura Stack, founder of Johnny's Ambassadors, a Colorado-based organization that aims to educate teens, parents, and communities about the dangers of today's high-THC marijuana

Mrs. Stack why she founded Johnny's Ambassadors, after her 19-year-old son Johnny died by suicide after he became psychotic from using dabs, which are a potent marijuana concentrate. She explained how today's marijuana and THC products are drastically different than that of years ago. She says parents need to cast aside what they think they know about the drug and recognize that marijuana causes brain damage and mental health issues in ways that other substances do not.

Issues covered:
Substance Abuse
Parenting

Length: 8:15

Penelope Larsen, researcher and PhD candidate in the School of Exercise Science, Sport & Health at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia

Hitting the gym at night won't keep you tossing and turning all night, contrary to popular belief. Ms. Larsen led a recent study that found that evening high-intensity cycling didn't ruin sleep and may even reduce appetite. She said study participants also seemed to have more energy when exercise occurred later in the day, which could also debunk the belief that working out first thing in the morning is the optimal time.

Issues covered:
Personal Health

Length: 5:01

Show # 2024-05

Date aired: Sunday, February 4, 2024

Rachel Slade, author of *"Making It in America: The Almost Impossible Quest to Manufacture in the U.S.A. (And How It Got That Way)"*

The US has fallen from the top spot, to now the 10th largest manufacturing economy in the world. Ms. Slade discussed how America can revive manufacturing and why is it so important. She explained why manufacturing is vital for the country's independence, economy and innovation. She also talked about the impact of the great resignation, the resurging role of unions, and the new priority for a work-life balance among workers.

Issues covered:
Manufacturing
Economy
Government

Length: 8:43

Gary Taubes, journalist, author of *"Rethinking Diabetes: What Science Reveals About Diet, Insulin, and Successful Treatments"*

Diabetes affects one out of every nine Americans. Mr. Taubes believes that treatment approaches to diabetes need to change, with renewed focus on diet—particularly, fewer carbohydrates and more fat—over a reliance on insulin. He also criticized the role of the food industry in promoting unhealthy foods and influencing diabetes research. He said that the current diabetes epidemic is driven by overeating and obesity, and that the best way to prevent and treat diabetes is to avoid the poison, not take the antidote.

Issues covered:
Personal Health
Science

Length: 8:37

James Royal, analyst at Bankrate.com

Mr. Royal explained why Chat GPT and other artificial intelligences are very useful tools for financial planning and management. He outlined benefits and drawbacks of using AI for various tasks, like paying down debt, saving money, building a budget, and investing in the stock market. He noted that the key to using AI effectively is to ask the right questions and to understand how the AI's recommendations fit one's own financial goals and circumstances.

Issues covered:
Personal Finance
Artificial Intelligence

Length: 5:04

Show # 2024-06

Date aired: Sunday, February 11, 2024

Mariel Buqué, PhD, psychologist, author of *“Break the Cycle: A Guide to Healing Intergenerational Trauma”*

Many Americans are living with the effects of trauma and long-term stress. Dr. Buqué discussed scientific research that suggests that if trauma is not addressed, it can be genetically passed down from generation to generation, and even be transmitted to entire communities. She said most forms of abuse typically begin in childhood. She talked about therapeutic practices than can pass down strength instead of pain, thereby breaking the cycle.

Issues covered:

Length: 8:41

Mental Health

Child Abuse

Greg Hammer, PhD, recently retired professor at Stanford University School of Medicine, pediatric intensive care physician, pediatric anesthesiologist, author of *“GAIN Without Pain”*

Despite the pandemic, US life expectancy has increased slightly in the past 20 years. Dr. Hammer discussed what he terms the tripod of health: sleep, exercise and nutrition, and the latest science behind all three. He also talked about recent research into the longevity effects of intermittent fasting, dietary supplements and mindfulness and meditation.

Issues covered:

Length: 8:35

Personal Health

Longevity

Andreas Groehn, Director of the Berkeley Research Group

America’s roads are in bad shape and getting more wear than ever. Mr. Groehn discussed ways that road repairs and improvements may be paid for in the future, as a growing number of electric vehicle owners sidestep the gasoline taxes that currently finance road maintenance.

Issues covered:

Length: 5:00

Taxes

Transportation Infrastructure

Show # 2024-07

Date aired: Sunday, February 18, 2024

Bridget Freisthler, PhD, Professor in the College of Social Work at Ohio State University

Child abuse and neglect cases have been on the rise since the pandemic and its aftermath. Prof. Freisthler led a study of an alcohol control project in Sacramento. The program’s purpose was to reduce alcohol-related problems in two neighborhoods in the city, but it discovered an unexpected byproduct: in one of the neighborhoods, total entries into foster care were reduced by nearly 12%. She discussed factors behind child abuse and why she believes additional research is needed before trying to duplicate the program elsewhere.

Issues covered:

Length: 9:27

Child Abuse & Neglect

Alcohol Abuse

Foster Care

Megan Henly, PhD, Research Assistant Professor in the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire

Older Americans, low-income workers, and people with disabilities are over-represented in rural parts of the US. But enrollment in federal and state programs in these regions tends to be low. Prof. Henly discussed the numerous barriers to getting information about, and enrolling in, programs like Social Security disability and retirement benefits, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Medicaid health insurance program, and what can be done to reduce the problem.

Issues covered:

Length: 7:46

**Government Assistance
Disabilities
Rural Concerns
Aging**

Jared W. Magnani, MD, cardiologist at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Associate Professor of Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh

Formal education typically occurs in early life, and yet it appears to influence cardiovascular health for decades, according to a study led by Dr. Magnani. He found that that on average, cardiovascular disease strikes later in life for individuals with progressively higher education levels. He discussed results of his study and the potential reasons behind them.

Issues covered:

Length: 5:10

**Personal Health
Education**

Show # 2024-08

Date aired: Sunday, February 25, 2024

Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH, founder of the nonprofit Foundation for Art & Healing, author of *“Project UnLonely: Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection”*

Dr. Nobel said loneliness has increased dramatically since the pandemic. He outlined the three types of loneliness. He also discussed the negative health consequences—both mental and physical—of loneliness or isolation. He said the answer to loneliness is connection through activities like creative expression and serving other people. He believes it all begins with being aware of loneliness and having the courage to address it.

Issues covered:

Length: 9:33

**Mental Health
Personal Health**

Elizabeth Comen, MD, Medical Oncologist specializing in breast cancer at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, Assistant Professor of Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College, author of *“All in Her Head: The Truth and Lies Early Medicine Taught Us About Women's Bodies and Why It Matters Today”*

Dr. Comen said centuries of medical care often dismissed women's health problems as hysteria, but the term used today is anxiety. She said 80% of autoimmune diseases are found in women but the illnesses are often not properly diagnosed, and research in the area is woefully lacking. She also said concussions or even strangulations are often not recognized as domestic abuse by emergency room physicians. She offered three tips for women to advocate for themselves.

Issues covered:
Women's Health
Domestic Abuse
Mental Health

Length: 7:47

Stephanie L. Bonne, MD, Assistant Professor of Surgery, Director of the Hospital Violence Intervention Program at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School

Dr. Bonne led a study of injuries caused by glass-topped tables. She said the furniture causes thousands of injuries each year, many requiring significant surgeries and long hospital stays. She said the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission requires tempered glass for products like doors and car windshields but it is voluntary for horizontal surfaces.

Issues covered:
Home Safety
Government Regulation
Consumer Matters

Length: 5:01

Show # 2024-09

Date aired: Sunday, March 3, 2024

James E. Rogers, PhD, Director of Food Safety Research and Testing, Acting Head of Product Safety Testing at Consumer Reports

Plasticizers--used to make plastic more flexible and more durable--are so widely used that today, they show up inside almost every American's body. Dr. Rogers talked about Consumer Reports' recent tests, which found that nearly all foods contain phthalates and bisphenols, often at very high levels. He talked about the potential health consequences, and offered steps for consumers to try to reduce their exposure.

Issues covered:
Food Safety
Personal Health
Consumer Matters

Length: 8:14

Harvey Miller, PhD, Professor of Geography at Ohio State University

Prof. Miller led a recent study that examined the circumstances behind who is found at fault when cars hit pedestrians in an urban area. He found that pedestrians were more likely to be blamed when they were crossing busy highways where crosswalks were few and far between. In congested downtown areas, where there were more marked intersections with pedestrian crossings, drivers were more likely to be found at fault. He believes that street and highway designs should be re-imagined, to put a greater emphasis pedestrian safety.

Issues covered:
Traffic Fatalities
Government

Length: 8:54

Marilyn Horta, PhD, Research Scientist in the Social-Cognitive and Affective Development Lab in the Department of Psychology at the University of Florida

Each year, older adults lose more than \$28 billion to financial scams targeting the elderly. Nearly three-quarters of that money is stolen by people the elderly adult knows – people they trust. Prof. Horta shared results of her study that found that older adults have a harder time overcoming their first impressions of people's trustworthiness when that trust is violated, potentially leaving them more open

to deception and scams. She offered suggestions for seniors to recognize changes in behavior in relatives or friends who may not have their best interests at heart.

Issues covered:
Scams/Crime
Senior Citizens

Length: 5:03

Show # 2024-10

Date aired: Sunday, March 10, 2024

Angela Fagerlin, Ph.D., Chair of Population Health Sciences at University of Utah Health, Research Scientist with the VA Salt Lake City Health System's Informatics Decision-Enhancement and Analytic Sciences (IDEAS) Center for Innovation

Dr. Fagerlin was the senior author of a study that found that 60 to 80 percent of people surveyed are not honest with their doctors about information that could be relevant to their health. She explained why people are sometimes reluctant to be truthful with their doctors, and why that can be a dangerous practice.

Issues covered:
Personal Health

Length: 7:29

Teresa Gil, PhD, psychotherapist, author of "*Women Who Were Sexually Abused As Children: Mothering, Resilience and Protecting the Next Generation*"

Dr. Gil estimates that there are approximately 21 million mothers in America who experienced childhood sexual abuse. She discussed how that trauma may affect their own parenting. She talked about the value of strong mother-daughter relationships, spiritual beliefs, and therapy in coping.

Issues covered:
Sexual Abuse
Parenting
Mental Health

Length: 9:40

Jennifer Emond, PhD, member of the Cancer Control Research Program at Dartmouth College's Norris Cotton Cancer Center, Assistant Professor in the Department of Biomedical Data Science, Geisel School of Medicine

Advertising works, and Dr. Emond's study found that kids who were exposed to TV ads for high-sugar cereals were more likely to subsequently eat the cereals they had seen advertised. She talked about the effect this may have on diet quality and childhood obesity, and offered suggestions to parents on how to maintain control of TV watching, particularly for small children.

Issues covered:
Parenting
Obesity
Consumer Matters

Length: 4:51

Show # 2024-11

Date aired: Sunday, March 17, 2024

David Rein, PhD, Senior Fellow at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago

Dr. Rein led a recent study of hearing loss rates, and found that where a person lives and their occupation have a surprising impact. He found that the occupations most associated with hearing loss besides mining were in retail and restaurant settings. Rates of hearing loss are higher among men, non-Hispanic whites, and residents of rural areas, and increases significantly starting at age 35. He talked about the reasons behind the study's findings, along with the societal stigma of wearing hearing aids.

Issues covered:

**Personal Health
Aging**

Length: 8:50

Christy Faith, author of "*Homeschool Rising: Shattering Myths, Finding Courage, and Opting Out of the School System*"

Ms. Faith is a work-from-home mom who also homeschools her children. She discussed the rapid growth of homeschooling in the aftermath of the pandemic, and the reasons families choose to do it. She talked about the wide array of private and public resources available to homeschoolers, and the biggest challenges families face. She also addressed concerns about socialization for children who are homeschooled.

Issues covered:

**Education
Parenting**

Length: 8:31

Marceé White, MD, Board-Certified Pediatrician, Medical Advisor for Safe Kids Worldwide, Medical Director of the Children's National Mobile Health Program

Accidental medicine poisoning sends a child under 6 to the emergency room every nine minutes, and every 12 days, a child dies. Dr. White outlined most common poisoning scenarios and the steps that parents of small children must take to avoid a tragedy.

Issues covered:

**Child Safety
Parenting**

Length: 5:04

Show # 2024-12

Date aired: Sunday, March 24, 2024

Michael Redlener, MD, Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine of Mount Sinai

Dr. Redlener led a study that found that emergency medical service (EMS) systems are not consistently providing optimal care, based on new national standards of quality, for patients who call 911. He explained the significant differences in EMS care he found in comparing urban, suburban, and rural services. He explained why the unnecessary use of lights and sirens, which he found is common in rural areas, is a dangerous practice.

Issues covered:

**Emergency Services
Public Health**

Length: 8:12

Chelsey Goodan, academic tutor and mentor, author of *“Underestimated: The Wisdom and Power of Teenage Girls”*

Teenage girls struggle with a wide variety of issues. Ms. Goodan outlined the most common things that concern teenage girls, and why they are reluctant to share them with their parents. She offered advice to parents to improve dialogue with their daughters, through listening and asking non-judgmental questions. She also talked about the value of sports in helping girls find their voices and power.

Issues covered:
Teenager Concerns
Parenting
Mental Health

Length: 9:12

Jeff Ostrowski, Analyst at Bankrate.com

A recent legal settlement may change how Americans buy and sell homes. Mr. Ostrowski explained how the changes may affect commission expenses and home prices. He said the changes will take effect in July 2024, and while there may be a learning curve for consumers, the end result will be greater transparency, and the ability to negotiate with real estate agents to reduce commission costs.

Issues covered:
Home Ownership
Consumer Matters
Legal Issues

Length: 4:58

Show # 2024-13

Date aired: Sunday, March 31, 2024

Charles L. Marohn Jr, land-use planner, municipal engineer, author of *“Escaping the Housing Trap: The Strong Towns Response to the Housing Crisis”*

Housing costs have risen dramatically in the past few years. Mr. Marohn talked about the tension between housing as a financial product versus basic shelter. He advocated for a new approach that can rapidly produce housing on a local scale in response to local needs. He said that regulations, financial incentives, and cultural expectations often undermine organic efforts of urban renewal, and that approaches should be changed to allow neighborhoods to undergo incremental change over time.

Issues covered:
Housing
Community Development
Government

Length: 8:53

Sanja Jelic, MD, critical care medicine specialist and sleep researcher at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons

Obstructive sleep apnea affects about 25% of adults, and it often goes untreated. Dr. Jelic discussed the condition and the most common treatment, CPAP machines. She has led several studies that have determined that, contrary to long-held medical beliefs, the machines do not lower a patient’s risk of heart disease, which is about two to three times higher than average. She said obesity is by far the biggest risk factor for sleep apnea. She noted that a recent study said the worldwide estimate of those with sleep apnea totals roughly 1 billion, compared to 1.2 billion with high blood pressure.

Issues covered:
Personal Health

Length: 8:30

Pam Mueller, graduate student, Department of Psychology, Princeton University

Laptops, tablets and other electronic devices are commonplace in today's classrooms. But Ms. Mueller co-authored a study that found that taking notes by typing, rather than writing, interferes with students' ability to process and remember information. Her research indicated that students who take notes with pen and paper recall more material and perform significantly better in class.

Issues covered:
Education

Length: 4:51

Kentucky News Connection

January 2, 2024

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Report: KY lawmakers increasingly fast-track bills, reducing transparency

Nadia Ramlagan

Kentucky lawmakers convene this week for the 2024 legislative session, and a new report finds state representatives are increasingly fast-tracking legislation while eroding citizen participation.

The League of Women Voters of Kentucky analysis finds lawmakers are replacing original versions of bills with last-minute substitute versions, leaving little or no time for citizens to review or comment before a committee vote.

Janie Lindle - a member of the League's Task Force on Legislative Transparency - said the tactic often guts the original language of a bill, and hijacks it for a completely different purpose.

"What we really saw was - starting in 2002, but especially escalating from 2014 to 2022," said Lindle, "there have been just this increasing rush on certain bills that do become law, and people can't participate."

House Bill 10, passed in 2022, eliminated the sharing of pre-filed bills on the Legislative Research Commission's website - meaning citizens can no longer preview pending legislation, and subsequently have less time to consider or participate in discussions on the bill during the months before the session starts.

According to the report, last year 32% of bills that passed the Kentucky House and 24% that passed the Senate were fast-tracked in ways that cut out the public's voice.

There's also been an increase in lawmakers holding full House or Senate floor votes the day bills get committee approval, shrinking the amount of time even the most engaged citizens have to contact their legislators - in some cases down to a few hours.

Lindle said Kentuckians have the right to have time to fully understand the text of a bill, and voice their opinion on it.

"Citizens deserve to participate in anything that affects them," said Lindle. "So the deliberation of legislation that's going to affect us as part of the democratic principle, that if you're going to be affected by it, you get to have a voice in it."

Lindle said advocates want the General Assembly to take steps to strengthen opportunities for citizen participation - including by ensuring there are three bill readings after committee hearings, making substitute bills available online in advance of a committee meeting, and allowing at least one day between final action or floor votes on bills.

Support for this reporting was provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Kentucky News Connection

January 8, 2024

1/14

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

In Eastern KY, a vision for sustainable manufacturing

Nadia Ramlagan

Manufacturers in Kentucky employ around 13% of the state's workforce, and advocates said the state's Appalachian region could bolster its economy by turning itself into a green manufacturing hub.

Dana Kuhnline, program director for ReImagine Appalachia, said manufacturing in the clean energy sector would create good jobs and help build local economies, as well as help curb climate change.

"What can we manufacture in Appalachia?" Kuhnline asked. "How can we reuse shuttered facilities, like closed steel facilities and shuttered coal plants? And what are sustainable products that Appalachia could become a hub for, that we could make in this region?"

At an upcoming virtual summit hosted by ReImagine Appalachia, being held Jan. 16-17, experts will break down how Appalachian communities can take advantage of federal funding opportunities related to climate infrastructure.

Kuhnline noted Congress has passed a number of bills in the last couple of years, paving the way for new investments in the region.

"There's a lot of new money for land remediation," Kuhnline pointed out. "Cleaning up old coal mines, cleaning up orphan oil and gas wells. There's going to be a whole funding stream set aside for improving environmental issues; that includes replacing lead pipes. There's also money for increasing the number of trees and urban improvement projects."

She added increased federal funding for natural infrastructure as a solution to soak up carbon, prevent flooding and repair damaged mine-lands provides an unprecedented opportunity to create new jobs for workers left behind, returning citizens, and communities hit hard by the opioid crisis.

Kentucky News Connection

1/21

January 15, 2024

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Peer support specialists help deaf Kentuckians access mental health care

Nadia Ramlagan

Kentuckians who are deaf or hard-of-hearing face many challenges in accessing mental healthcare, and a new program aims to address the problem.

Nearly 700,000 - or 16% - of Commonwealth residents are deaf or hard of hearing, according to the state.

Brad Leedy - chief operating officer with Bridgehaven Mental Health Services - said the program, a partnership between Bridgehaven and the Kentucky Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, has trained eight deaf individuals to be peer support specialists - all of whom have struggled with depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and other diagnoses.

He said they'll work with fellow Kentuckians in need of mental health services.

"Our goal is to reach out to that community," said Leedy, "because we know it's an underserved community in our state."

Leedy added that the peer specialists will host a series of free virtual discussions over the next several weeks, focused on the challenges deaf and hard-of-hearing people can face in getting mental-health care.

He said peer services can be requested, even if an individual is working with another provider in the state. Contact Leedy at 'BLEedy@bridgehaven.org' for information on the sessions.

Marcie Timmerman, executive director of the group Mental Health America of Kentucky, pointed out that providing mental-health care for this population goes beyond access to American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters.

"There's a very different culture amongst the deaf and hard of hearing, and you need that cultural competence," said Timmerman. "Not just ASL, right? You need the competence to go with it."

Research shows among deaf adults, rates of diagnosed depression or anxiety disorder are significantly higher and occur at an earlier age compared to hearing adults - and only a small number of deaf patients receive a medical interpreter.

The advocacy group DEAFlead runs a 24-hour video crisis line for FaceTime or video users of American Sign Language.

More information is on the group's website, or by video-calling 321-800-3323.

Kentucky News Connection

January 25, 2024

1/28

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Rural electric co-ops in Kentucky poised to receive federal funds

Nadia Ramlagan

Rural electric co-ops in Kentucky have submitted more than 60 proposed projects to a federal grant program called Empowering Rural America, which is aimed at helping rural communities transition to clean and affordable energy.

Under the Inflation Reduction Act, the program will funnel nearly \$10 billion toward projects that help rural communities shift to clean and renewable energy.

Chris Woolery, energy projects coordinator with the Mountain Association, said the state's more than two dozen co-ops are focused on projects that reduce carbon emissions and energy costs for consumers.

"I think you're going to see proposals that are solar, distributed solar, or utility-scale solar with a little bit of battery storage mixed in," said Woolery. "Because of the way that the grants are set up, they're going to prioritize greenhouse reductions and affordability for end users. "

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has so far received hundreds of proposals nationwide for rural electric cooperative funding.

Woolery said at current funding levels, only a small portion of projects will receive cash, despite high demand.

According to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, funding all of the projects would require at least twice the current funding amount.

Woolery explained that unlike investor-owned utilities, rural electric co-ops provide reliable electricity to their member-owners - who can vote on leadership and have a say in major operation decisions.

"They have similar or lower rates than investor-owned utilities," said Woolery. "But they'd been shut out in many ways from clean energy, because they weren't able to access tax credits."

One study found that across the country, cooperatives have been working to transition to clean energy - with the share of renewable energy increasing from 17% of generation in 2016 to 22% of generation in 2021.

Eastern Kentucky Power Cooperative says it has proposed a number of projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by adding renewable resources, integrating them into the grid and improving energy efficiency for consumers.

Kentucky News Connection

January 30, 2024

2/14

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Experts: KY's drinking water, wetlands at risk

Nadia Ramlagan

Kentucky has rapidly lost its wetlands over the past few decades, and advocates say the recent gutting of federal protections for marshes and other ecosystems saturated by water could imperil local drinking water quality.

Michael Washburn, executive director of the Kentucky Waterways Alliance, explained wetlands provide natural large-scale water filtration, serve as carbon sinks, and act as buffers during flooding events. He said the rollback of federal protections leaves little recourse for advocates working to address the issue through state-level policy change.

"The Kentucky Legislature has effectively tied its own hands," Washburn insisted. "They can't actually do anything to make water quality any better, because they've constrained themselves to being no more proactive than what federal law permits, which is a problem."

Under a controversial U.S. Supreme Court decision last spring, only wetlands with a continuous surface connection to larger waterways are federally protected from industrial pollution discharge or dumping.

Washburn added it's difficult to restore wetlands after they've been eroded.

"Kentucky has already lost probably more of its native and natural wetlands than any other state in the southeast, maybe even in the country," he continued.

The Kentucky Waterways Network is a new statewide coalition that aims to tackle the issue locally. Washburn said the network is working to help communities draft and implement watershed protection restoration plans, provide water sampling training, and is offering grants to help address pollution.

"There are 90,000 miles of waterways in Kentucky, which is a staggering amount. It's the most waterways of any state in the continental United States. We're only exceeded by Alaska," she said.

Around 3.5 million Kentuckians rely on surface-water sources, which include nearly 700 drinking-water systems statewide, according to the University of Kentucky Geological Survey.

Kentucky News Connection

February 6, 2024

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Despite funding limbo, more Kentuckians rely on Community Health Centers

Nadia Ramlagan

The bulk of federal funding for Community Health Centers expires next month, and health advocates say they're worried about the impact on Kentucky communities.

Molly Lewis, CEO, Kentucky Primary Care Association, said about one in five Kentuckians accesses health services through a community health center, which doesn't require insurance or hefty payments. She said centers ensure residents can access medical, dental and behavioral health, but typically go further to cater to the needs of the communities they serve.

"Expanded hours, or for that health center to also be the provider within the schools, taking care of children, and really develop that relationship," she continued.

Lewis added the demand for centers in the Commonwealth has jumped by 45% over the past several years. Nationwide, health centers have struggled to hire staff to reduce workforce shortages and shore up essential health care services.

Paloma Hernandez, president and CEO at Urban Health Plan and board chair of the National Association of Community Health Centers, said centers continue to face serious workforce challenges, and notes that without proper funding to recruit and retain health-care professionals, she expects staffing levels will further shrink.

"So we have people who need care, we have not enough providers, so we don't have enough providers to provide the care that we have. And so we're in this predicament, she explained."

Community Health Centers employ around 400,000 and produce more than \$85 billion in economic output in the communities where they operate, according to the National Association of Community Health Centers.

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Climate Corps initiative could speed up reforestation of abandoned mine lands

Nadia Ramlagan

A Biden administration program called the American Climate Corps aims to hire and train 20,000 people in conservation, climate and clean energy jobs.

Still in the early stages of development, groups in Appalachia say the program could potentially steer a significant number of young people in the region into well-paying jobs.

Brendan Muckian-Bates, policy and advocacy associate for the Appalachian Citizens Law Center in Whitesburg, said Kentucky's Appalachian region has struggled with continuing flood disasters and other climate change impacts over the past decade. He believes the climate corps could bring much-needed funding to reforest and revegetate former mine sites.

"The American Climate Corps can have -- on this region in particular -- could have wide-ranging impacts," Muckian-Bates stressed. "Between the region's growing outdoor recreation and tourism economy, as well as supporting the native ecosystem and stream quality."

According to the group Appalachian Voices, mountaintop removal mining has already destroyed more than 500 mountains encompassing more than 1 million acres in Central and Southern Appalachia.

Annie Regan, director of digital communications for ReImagine Appalachia, said not only could the initiative bring jobs to a region hard-hit by the opioid crisis and unemployment, but participants will also receive paid training, opening the doors to opportunities for employment in both the public and private sectors.

"Of course we want younger folks to have these jobs too, and to have pathways to apprenticeship and pre apprenticeship programs and working with our unions," Regan emphasized.

The climate corps is modeled after the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Depression-era program launched by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to alleviate high unemployment among young men. The White House said the Climate Corps will attract people from diverse backgrounds and disadvantaged communities to work in climate-related industries.

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KY crisis aversion bill would help decrease gun violence, advocates say

Nadia Ramlagan

New legislation under consideration by Kentucky lawmakers would allow police to confiscate guns from people whose family members are concerned about their mental health, by petitioning for a Crisis Aversion Rights Retention Order.

Senate Bill 13 would also create an Office for Safer Communities.

Cathy Hobart - the chapter leader of Kentucky Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America - said the bill is aimed at preventing tragic situations from happening, especially in cases where others suspect possible suicide, homicide, or a mass shooting.

"If they thought there really was an immediate danger, they would petition a judge to administer the protective order," said Hobart. "And, this is really a way to protect the gun owner in those times of crisis."

The Commonwealth continues to have some of the weakest gun laws in the country. According to Everytown USA, Kentucky ranks 40th among states for rates of gun violence.

According to Kentucky Youth Advocates, in 2020 91% of homicide deaths occurred in children between ages 1 and 17, and around 66% of these deaths involved firearms.

Hobart said gun-violence legislation in previous years has been slow to move through the Legislature, but she remains hopeful.

"For the first time," said Hobart, "our legislators are talking about gun-violence prevention in a way that they haven't, in the last five years, since I've been involved in the movement."

This April marks the one-year anniversary of the Old National Bank Shooting in Louisville, where a 25-year-old man killed five of his work colleagues, and critically injured a police officer.

A Louisville Metro Police Department report revealed the gunman's mental-health struggles and his intent to commit a mass shooting.

Kentucky News Connection

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Kentucky Power rate hike: What eastern KY residents, businesses should know

Nadia Ramlagan

Many eastern Kenuckians will see their monthly energy bills increase by around \$8 per month, after a ruling last month by the state's utility regulator greenlighting rate hikes for homeowners, renters, and businesses in the region.

The Public Service Commission struck down an initial request for an 18% rate hike for homeowners.

Seth Long, executive director of the nonprofit Homes Incorporated, said he is grateful regulators decided to cap the increase, but small businesses will see their rates spike about 10%. He is worried about the economic impact on local communities.

"This is one of the most difficult regions in the country to run a small business," Long asserted. "I'm very concerned about our small businesses in Eastern Kentucky and this rate hike."

Kentucky Power said a dwindling population and loss of industrial customers in its service region are driving up rates. Residents can file public comments on the company's outline of its plans for the next 15 years through Kentuckians for Energy Democracy.

According to state data, eastern Kentucky residents already pay the highest average energy bill in the Commonwealth, at around \$187 per month.

Josh Bills, senior energy analyst for the Mountain Association, said his organization's clients - businesses, nonprofits and local governments in the region - will pay an additional \$600,000 per year for their electricity, on top of taxes and surcharges. He added ratepayers need more resources to deal with the unique challenges facing eastern Kentucky, including investments in renewable energy.

"In combination with a lot of home-energy improvements, efficiency improvements, having policies where customers can cost-effectively offset their loads so that load is available to others," Bills outlined.

The Public Service Commission also approved a provision which would extend the amount of time customers have to pay their bills from 15 days after billing to 21 days, and it approved language limiting when residential customers can be disconnected for nonpayment.

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Kentucky dentists expect more child tooth decay if "opt out" fluoride bill passes

Nadia Ramlagan

A bill moving through the Kentucky Legislature would make fluoride treatment in drinking water optional for local municipalities.

House Bill 141 would remove a mandate that currently requires Kentucky towns with three thousand or more residents to add fluoride to their drinking water.

Health advocacy groups and even some dental insurers have voiced opposition to the legislation.

Whitney Dietz is a dentist with practices in Davis and McCracken counties. She said she expects tooth-decay rates to rise tremendously, particularly among children, if the bill becomes law.

"We see maybe three cavity events per child if there's no fluoride," said Dietz. "It's about eight cavity events per child, in one study. So, when I heard that our state government was considering making this optional, I was flabbergasted. I was absolutely shocked."

The bill's supporters, including co-sponsor state Rep. William Lawrence - R-Maysville - have called fluoride, quote, "forced medication."

They argue the legislation aims to give local governments the ability to choose whether or not to fluoridate the water supply.

Dietz said, post-pandemic, the number of pediatric dental providers in the state has dwindled - and challenges in dental health providers' ability to participate in Medicaid and Medicare have worsened the problem.

She said she regularly reviews charts for hundreds of kids doing volunteer work in communities and schools.

"I'm seeing kids with bombed-out non-restorable permanent molars," said Dietz, "kids that are in pain, kids that have abscesses."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, community water fluoridation has saved states an estimated \$6.5 billion a year by reducing dental treatment costs - including tooth restorations and extractions, and indirect economic losses, such as loss of worker productivity.

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New EPA clean air rules to help strengthen air monitoring in KY

Nadia Ramlagan

Groups working to improve air quality in Appalachia are applauding the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to strengthen ambient air quality standards.

Federal regulations set rules for the number and amount of air pollutants people can be exposed to, nationwide. The amount of fine particulate matter has been set at 12 micrograms per cubic meter as an annual average for the past decade.

Willie Dodson, central Appalachian field coordinator for Appalachian Voices, explained the new rules lower this standard from 12 to nine micrograms per cubic meter. He believes the change will save lives.

"These are communities in Eastern Kentucky that are impacted by 'fugitive' coal mine dust coming off of coal trucks and surface mines," Dodson pointed out. "In Winchester and in Covington, they're impacted by other industries."

So-called "fugitive dust," industrial soot and vehicle exhaust each contain a cocktail of chemicals but they all contribute to levels of fine particulate matter, or PM 2.5, in the air. Through the Upper South and Appalachia Citizen Air Monitoring Project, Kentucky volunteers are using fine particulate matter monitors to track levels in their communities.

Dodson emphasized Appalachian Voices will analyze the local data and produce quarterly reports for each participating community. He added local air monitoring can be used to help ensure the new regulations are being met and fill in gaps in data collection in rural regions lacking EPA air monitors.

"What we're hoping to do is raise a red flag, to compel the EPA to then place one of its air monitors in these sorts of communities," Dodson stressed.

Research shows prolonged exposure to air pollution can aggravate asthma, decrease lung function, worsen respiratory symptoms like irritation of the airways, coughing or difficulty breathing, and cause premature death.

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KY bill would limit renewables, keep aging power plants longer

Nadia Ramlagan

Kentucky House lawmakers are considering a bill that could make it harder to close aging coal-fired power plants.

At the Kentucky Resources Council, Program Attorney Bryon Gary said the bill is part of the larger legislative effort to tip the state's energy planning process in favor of the coal industry.

He explained Senate Bill 349 would create a new "energy planning and inventory" commission tasked with reviewing utilities' plans to retire their aging plants.

"To artificially limit what resources a utility can build," said Gary, "and to artificially require them to keep running power plants that are well beyond their useful life and incredibly expensive to run, is just going to make the problem worse."

The bill's sponsor, state Sen. Robby Mills, R-Henderson, and supporters say the change is needed to ensure the state has a reliable power supply.

Kentucky has several aging coal-fired power plants from the 1970s and 1980s that are no longer economically competitive and are set to be decommissioned within several years.

President of LG&E and KU Energy John Crockett said creating the new commission isn't in customers' best interest.

"It's a group that's almost entirely without expertise in generating or distributing electricity," said Crockett. "And it's designed to promote and perpetuate coal generation outside of a traditional 'least cost reasonable' analysis that has served Kentucky well for decades."

Gary added the bill also would impose a six-month deadline for the state's utility regulator to make decisions for certain types of cases.

He said this could silence voices from low-income communities and other groups affected by rate hikes.

"And would weaken the due process protections for all parties involved," said Gary, "by shortening the timeline for things that are essential to make sure that cases are fully heard and vetted, such as discovery and a hearing and briefing of all the parties."

The Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet and the Public Service Commission warn the bill doesn't allocate funds to cover costs related to the new commission.

They're also concerned about the bill's time limit for fuel adjustment clause proceedings, which help return millions of dollars in utility bill refunds to Kentucky customers.

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KY parents say reliable, affordable child-care linked to better mental health

Nadia Ramlagan

More parents in Kentucky are switching jobs, delaying major purchases, cutting back on essential needs, and going into debt in order to afford child care, according to a new survey from the Kentucky Center on Economic Policy. Parents, especially mothers, in the Commonwealth say the financial stress and uncertainty around of child care is impacting their mental health.

Keshia, a parent in Knox County, said she struggled with postpartum depression, and notes having access to child care, even just a few days a week, allows her time to focus on her well-being.

"I put him in day care twice a day, twice a week. So that gives me time to focus on my work and to focus on my mental health and to be a better mother for him," she explained.

According to a recent survey of more than 1,300 parents in the Commonwealth, they continue to face anxiety and stress over what might happen if they lose care. More than 70% said they won't be able to find alternative care arrangements, or may have to use less safe care for their children. More than half said that if they lost their child care, they would be forced to leave their job to stay home with their kids, or wouldn't be able to provide for their family.

Lisa Leonard is a grandparent in Daviess County who gained custody of her now 17-year-old grandson when he was a toddler. She said her grandson qualified for a Head Start program, which allowed her to keep working full-time, adding that many kinship caregivers face financial pressures that can contribute to chronic stress and anxiety.

"If it hadn't been for the availability of Head Start, I truly don't know what I could have done. I lived so far out in the county, and didn't know anybody around me," she said.

Most Kentucky parents shell out hundreds of dollars per week for child care, even with assistance, according to the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy. The state faces a \$330 million loss in money for child-care centers when American Rescue Plan Act funding expires this year.