



For Immediate Release

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Contact:

Terry Brooks

502-235-2396

HB 225 Passes House; It Tackles Kentucky's Apartheid of Educational Opportunity

Statement by Terry Brooks, Executive Director, Kentucky Youth Advocates

"Today the Kentucky House of Representatives stood up for kids across the Commonwealth by passing House Bill 225, which seeks to change the culture of our society and ensure that each child has a fair chance to graduate from high school. Today's youth face an economy with daunting challenges and a highly competitive environment to find jobs. The best economic development tool is an educated workforce. Many adolescents who leave school early are entrenched in poverty and unemployment.

Raising the compulsory attendance age translates into raising the standards and expectations in Kentucky among students, parents, school employees and the business community. However, simply raising the mandatory attendance age will not keep students in school. All research points to the need for initiatives from investing more in early education and career-oriented programs to providing preventive measures and intervention strategies as detailed in HB 225.

Increasing graduation rates in Kentucky requires a multi-pronged approach and it is certainly much more difficult for school districts to address the problem when state law does not support the effort by allowing students to dropout before reaching graduation age. Increased attention to make students successful and graduate far outweigh the economic and social cost later – welfare, healthcare and the criminal justice system.

There is no dimension of this bill more crucial than the call to reform alternative education programs. Some 70,000 Kentucky students are in alternative programs; in fact, if alternative programs were a school system it would be the second largest in the state. While there are a few exemplars, those are stark exceptions to the norm. In far too many cases, alternative programs lack fiscal accountability, a focus on learning outcomes and professional standards for staff assignment. This idea will not require additional funds. Rather, it will ensure funds already dedicated to students are appropriately allocated. Alternative programs are more than a second-class chance for our most vulnerable students -- they are a kind of apartheid of educational opportunity that demands redress. HB 225 represents an important first step in tackling the bold and fundamental reform of alternative programs across the Commonwealth.

HB 225 is a call to action, a call to change, and a chance to step up and do our part. The message should be that it is no longer acceptable to drop out of high school and it is no longer acceptable for any Kentucky student to be relegated to an alternative system that lacks rigor and oversight. In what is sure to be a tough legislative session, this measure gives every legislator a chance to put good policy before partisan politics."

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***Kentucky Youth Advocates** is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.*