Kentucky can...

**Enact a state Earned Income Tax Credit to help families meet the basic needs of their children**

Kentucky children thrive when their parents can earn a living and meet their family’s basic needs. Nearly half of all Kentucky kids live in low-income families. A state-level refundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a proven approach to help low-income families keep the money they earn while reinvesting money into their local economy.

**The EITC is a temporary support to help families make ends meet and rise out of poverty**

- An EITC can only be claimed by people who earn income through work, and a state EITC would build upon the success of the federal EITC, which has kept more children out of poverty in the United States than any other program.
- The federal EITC has increased employment levels and reduced reliance on government supports, and state-level EITCs in other states have led to greater workforce participation.
- EITCs help families that experience temporary job loss or reduced hours stay on their feet.

**3 out of 5 recipients claim the federal EITC for only 1 or 2 years at a time.**

The EITC generates economic activity

Most EITC recipients spend the credit on local businesses, paying for things like groceries, school supplies, and car repairs.

The federal EITC injects **$933 million** into Kentucky’s economy. A state-level EITC at just 15 percent of the federal credit would inject an additional **$140 million** in local economies and businesses.

**A state EITC would improve the chances of success for 442,000 Kentucky children**

- Research shows a link between the federal EITC and improvement in children’s math and reading comprehension, as well as increased income when those children become adults.
- In states with state-level EITCs, we see healthier babies and better outcomes across the course of children’s lives.

**Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:**

Enacting a state refundable Earned Income Tax Credit to help families make ends meet
Kentucky can...

Increase child care supports to allow more parents to work, kids to thrive, and local economies to grow

Access to high-quality, reliable child care allows parents to get and keep a job, sets children up for success in school, and strengthens Kentucky’s economy. Yet, many Kentucky families struggle to afford any kind of child care, much less safe, high-quality care. Unstable child care translates into direct costs for employers through employee absenteeism, tardiness, and reduced productivity. As Kentucky promotes workforce development, child care assistance is critical to working parents’ success.

**Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:**

Increasing state funding for child care assistance to improve access to affordable, high-quality care that allows parents to work, children to thrive, and local economies to grow

While a recent increase in federal funding helped cover gaps in access to child care, additional state investment in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) would further boost a crucial support to employed parents who are struggling to make ends meet.

HALF of all Kentucky families live in a child care desert, meaning there are either no child care providers or an insufficient number of child care slots.

Adequate child care provider payment rates and increased eligibility for low-income, working families

Safe, reliable, and accessible child care centers that can succeed as small businesses

Parents can go to work knowing their children are safe and learning

Thriving families and local economies across the commonwealth

kyyouth.org/blueprintky
Kentucky can...

Ensure healthy food, active play, and limited screen time for children in licensed child care programs

All children, no matter where they live or receive child care, deserve healthy food and time for active play. Parents support clear and consistent standards in child care programs for food and beverages, active play, and screen time, and providers want to offer an environment that nurtures healthy children.

For kids to grow up healthy and ready to learn, all kids in licensed child care programs must:

✓ Be served fruits and vegetables, and water or milk
✓ Be physically active for at least one hour each day
✓ Keep time spent watching TV or in front of a computer or tablet to under 30 minutes

Kids need healthy food and drinks.
By providing healthy meals and snacks, children get the nutrients their bodies need to grow and minds need to develop. When kids are thirsty, water and milk are the best choices for good physical and oral health. Child care centers can leverage the Child and Adult Care Food Program to ensure they provide healthy meals and snacks.

Kids need time every day to play and be active.
Active play helps children build and improve motor skills, coordination, balance and control, hand-eye coordination, strength, dexterity, and flexibility—all which are necessary for children to reach developmental milestones.

Kids should not spend too much time in front of a screen.
A child's brain develops rapidly during the early years, and young children learn best by interacting with people rather than screens. Reducing screen time allows for more time to explore, spend time with books, engage in active play, and interact with caregivers and other children.

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:
Strengthening licensed child care program standards on healthy eating and drinking, active play, and screen time to support children’s healthy growth and development

kyyouth.org/blueprintky
Kentucky can...

Ensure children and families continue to access the health care they need

Kentucky has made strides to improve the number of children who have access to health coverage, including through Kentucky Children’s Health Insurance Program (KCHIP) and Medicaid.

KCHIP and Medicaid ensure children in low-income families receive access to health coverage that allows them to visit health care providers to address their physical, behavioral, oral, and vision health needs. While health coverage rates remain high, progress has stagnated; there are still at least 40,000 children and teens who need to be enrolled in health insurance.

All children, especially those living in low-income and vulnerable families, need access to affordable health care to ensure healthy growth and development. Research has shown that children with health coverage are more likely to receive regular preventive care, such as well-child exams, and to stay connected to a primary care doctor.

Parents’ health—and access to health insurance coverage—affects the health and well-being of their children. The single best predictor of a child’s health coverage is their parents’ coverage. When parents are insured, they are more likely to be healthy so they can care and provide for their children, and children rely on their parents to sign them up for health insurance and to take them to their health care providers.

Kentucky can continue to improve children’s health coverage in three ways:

1. Continue to prioritize the Medicaid and KCHIP programs in the state budget.

2. Invest in initiatives focused on closing the remaining gap in coverage.

3. Ensure that any changes to the Medicaid program are simple to understand, participate in, and utilize to protect the health of children and their families.

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:
Prioritizing investments in child health coverage, initiatives to close the remaining gap, and ensuring children and families can continue to access the health care they need

96% of Kentucky children under age 19 have health insurance

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Kentucky can...
End the epidemic of e-cigarette use among youth so children and teens can grow into healthier adults

While youth cigarette smoking has declined in Kentucky, e-cigarette usage among children and teens surged from 2016 to 2018.

**What are e-cigarettes and what’s in them?**
- Battery-operated tobacco products with a cartridge or pod that contains a liquid
- May resemble cigarettes, cigars, or pipes, or they may be unique shapes and sizes
- The device heats the liquid that delivers highly addictive nicotine extracted from tobacco
- Flavorings, chemicals, and particles are inhaled into the lungs as an aerosol

**What are the known health risks of e-cigarette use?**
- Nicotine harms the developing brain and primes it for addiction
- Harmful secondhand emissions
- Increases risk for cough and wheezing and worsens asthma symptoms
- Particles and chemicals in aerosol can cause serious lung injury or disease

**Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:**
Protect kids’ health and development by enacting a tax on e-cigarettes, prohibiting tobacco sales to anyone under age 21, and strengthening state investment in tobacco use prevention and cessation programming

[Continued on next page]
As a recent 18-year-old, I have been asked by younger peers to purchase cheaper e-cigarettes...which is proof that price dictates what teens buy or ask to buy.

“I’m the only person I know that hasn’t hit on a JUUL. I’ve probably seen it three times today in the classroom.”

“For a device that’s small enough to fit between my thumb and pointer finger, it’s causing an epidemic of nicotine addicted teens.”

“They’re available and people think it’s cool.”

“As a recent 18-year-old, I have been asked by younger peers to purchase cheaper e-cigarettes...which is proof that price dictates what teens buy or ask to buy.”

End the epidemic of e-cigarette use among youth so children and teens can grow into healthier adults (continued)

Quotes from Kentucky teens

There are proven solutions to protect Kentucky children and teens from e-cigarettes and other harmful tobacco products.

1. Enact a tax on e-cigarettes equal to the current tax on other tobacco products

   In 2018, the Kentucky General Assembly increased the tax on cigarettes but not on e-cigarettes.

   Adding a tax on e-cigarettes equivalent to the current tax on cigarettes will:
   - Prevent e-cigarette use among youth
   - Lead current users to quit
   - Reduce future healthcare spending
   - Provide additional revenue for the state budget

2. Raise the minimum legal sale age for all tobacco products

   Tobacco 21 laws delay tobacco initiation because youth often rely on friends or relatives close in age to get tobacco products. By raising the age to 21, the likelihood of access through their peers decreases.

   An effective state Tobacco 21 law:
   - Defines tobacco products to include e-cigarettes
   - Requires tobacco retailer compliance
   - Does not include penalties for youth, which are counterproductive in reducing youth tobacco use and minimize the responsibility of the retailer to verify the age of the purchaser

3. Invest in tobacco use prevention and cessation programming to protect kids’ health now and make for a healthier Kentucky in the future.

3 out of 4 Kentuckians support adding a state excise tax on e-cigarettes
Kentucky can...

Prioritize school-based services that promote student safety, health, and well-being

Kentucky schools are safer when the focus is on connecting students with caring adults, addressing students’ behavioral health needs, and utilizing proven strategies to address other safety measures within school buildings. In 2019, the Kentucky General Assembly demonstrated their commitment to improving student safety, health, and well-being with passage of the School Safety and Resiliency Act.

Kentucky can continue that progress by:

Providing funding for requirements of the School Safety and Resiliency Act
- Trainings for school staff on how to recognize and respond when students have experienced trauma
- Trainings for students and school staff on suicide awareness and prevention
- Trainings for School Resource Officers on trauma-informed action, youth mental health, diversity and bias, and working with students with special needs
- Safety improvements of school buildings that meet evidence-based structural recommendations

Ensuring school districts have the information and resources to implement the Free Care policy

With recent federal approval, school districts are now able to bill Medicaid for health services provided to Medicaid eligible students within the school building, an opportunity known as Free Care. School districts can use this new funding stream to connect students with physical and behavioral health screenings, counseling, immunizations, and dental care. Kentucky can ensure school districts have the information and resources needed to leverage this opportunity to improve student health and well-being.

Boosting investment in Family Resource and Youth Service Centers

Family Resource and Youth Service Centers (FRYSCs) enhance student success by making referrals to health and social services, connecting families to afterschool care, supporting kinship caregivers, and more. They are integral in providing tools for families to remove barriers to student learning. For a school to be eligible for a FRYSC, 20% or more of enrolled students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. While the number of students receiving free lunch has risen, the FRYSC-per-student allocation has not kept up.

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:

Providing funding for requirements of the School Safety and Resiliency Act, ensuring school districts have the information and resources to implement the Free Care policy, and boosting investment in FRYSCs
Kentucky can...

Create safe and nurturing learning environments by eliminating the use of corporal punishment in schools

Kentucky students need learning environments that are safe and nurturing. Across Kentucky, school districts are shifting their focus to how to best serve children who’ve experienced trauma, but several districts still allow the use of corporal punishment, or physical force, as a form of discipline. For children in schools that use corporal punishment, the classroom can become an environment that instills fear, anxiety, and distrust.

Quick facts about corporal punishment in schools in Kentucky:

- While the number of children in Kentucky experiencing corporal punishment at school has fallen, there were **284 incidences in the 2018-19 school year**.
- 60% of Kentucky school districts already explicitly prohibit the use of corporal punishment.
- Boys receive corporal punishment much more often than girls.
- Students with disabilities are slightly more likely to receive corporal punishment.

Corporal punishment reinforces using physical aggression as a way to address unwanted behavior and creates a threatening atmosphere that permeates school culture, which leads to immediate impacts on the child’s physical and mental health and long-term impacts that result in negative behaviors, such as aggression and delinquency, along with poor educational outcomes, such as dropping out.

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:
Eliminating the use of corporal punishment in schools to create safe and nurturing learning environments for students
Kentucky can...

Ensure the safety and success of children by strengthening the homeschool enrollment process

In most cases, parents choose to homeschool based on the needs of the child or their family beliefs. Sometimes there are circumstances where parents or caregivers choose to avoid the oversight of a school or child protective services because of allegations of child abuse or neglect or ongoing issues with school truancy. We want to ensure that all kids who are being enrolled in homeschool are safe and receive the education they deserve.

**5 steps to ensure safe, education-focused homeschool settings for Kentucky students:**

1. Establish a school and notify the local superintendent of schools that they have established this school and of their intent to homeschool their child(ren)
2. Report the names, ages, and place of residence for each student in attendance at this homeschool location
3. Subject to background checks to ensure they are not an offender of a relevant violent crime such as domestic violence, have not been convicted of a sex crime, and do not have a finding of child abuse or neglect
4. Provide proof of educational attainment in the form of a high school diploma, transcript, or GED certificate
5. Confirm the child(ren) entering the homeschool setting has not received a truancy summons

Currently, there are minimal steps for a parent or caregiver to take to begin homeschooling:

Additional requirements of the parent or caregiver would strengthen the process of establishing a homeschool setting and ensure the child is safe and set up for educational success:

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:

Ensuring adults providing K-12 educational instruction in the home setting meet minimum educational and safety requirements, and that the child being enrolled in homeschool has not received a truancy summons
Kentucky can...

**Strengthen our commonwealth’s efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect**

Too many Kentucky children are victims of abuse or neglect each year. While Kentucky has made strides to improve the foster care system for children who have experienced abuse or neglect, more can be done to prevent maltreatment and strengthen families.

When children have experienced — or are at risk of experiencing — abuse or neglect, investing in programs that target prevention or family preservation can serve as a catalyst to safely keep families together or reunite families.

**Kentucky can invest in the following programs to keep kids safe:**

- **Kentucky Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents (K-STEP) and the Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Team (START) programs.** Substance abuse is a major factor for over half of children removed from their homes by child protective services due to abuse or neglect, especially infants and toddlers. K-STEP and START are proven to help parents achieve sobriety while safely caring for their children.

- **Home visitation programs.** Parenting is tough and the lack of knowledge of how to handle typical child behaviors can make it more stressful. When parents enter evidence-informed home visitation programs, like the Health Access Nurturing Development Services (HANDS) program, early in the pregnancy, the effects are dramatic—increases in adequate prenatal care, lower rates of preterm birth and low birth weight, and lowered incidence of child abuse. Increased supports for evidence-informed home visitation programs will allow for participation incentives in locations where child abuse and neglect case substantiations are high to reach parents who feel overwhelmed and prevent maltreatment from ever occurring.

- **Professionals who respond to child abuse and neglect with forensic services and assessments.** When child abuse or neglect occurs, children need access to the best care in order to recover and heal and for their case to be investigated. The forensic pediatric teams based out of Kentucky’s medical schools, as well as the 15 child advocacy centers across the commonwealth, rely on state funding to provide critical services for all children who have experienced maltreatment. An increase in funding to support these programs will allow for our most vulnerable children to get access to the services they need.

- **Kentucky’s safety net programs to meet families’ basic needs.** Kentucky can protect current investments for families by ensuring that safety net programs, including financial assistance for basic needs, such as food and health care, are not modified in ways that keep children in need of these supports from receiving them.

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Kentucky can make commonsense changes to state policy that would protect kids and help kids who have experienced abuse or neglect:

- Close the gaps in fingerprint background checks and better protect children in foster care by requiring foster care agencies to screen their employees for criminal charges.

- Modify the mandated reporting law to disallow “chain of command” procedures within public and private agencies. These problematic policies allow child abuse to be reported to supervisors rather than directly to proper authorities, which slows response time and undermines mandatory laws.

- Close a gap in state law that allows agencies to report a suspected incidence of child abuse and neglect to their own agency, to ensure a report of child abuse and neglect is properly investigated and communicated to the appropriate agencies when child maltreatment is suspected of an employee of a reporting agency.

- Remove the clergy-penitent privilege exemption in the child maltreatment reporting law to ensure that if abuse is disclosed or suspected by any adult, that abuse is reported to the proper authorities.

- Strengthen the current statute of limitations timeframes for misdemeanor physical and sexual abuse offenses to accommodate for delayed abuse disclosure. If a child experiences abuse, research shows that many wait years, some well into adulthood, to disclose their abuse.

- Develop a communications mechanism between medical professionals and DCBS to ensure the adequate protection of children at risk of abuse and neglect.

- Allow children transitioning out of foster care who have not been adopted to safely reunify with their birth parents by creating a path to reinstatement of parental rights. We must do more to ensure children in foster care nearing the age to transition out of care are connected to a permanent, stable home with a family.

**Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:**

Strengthening Kentucky’s efforts in child abuse and neglect prevention by investing in programs that keep kids safe and families together and making commonsense changes to state law that would protect kids and help kids who have experienced maltreatment heal.
Kentucky can...

Prioritize investments for children who have experienced abuse and neglect by supporting kinship caregivers

When children cannot remain safely with their parents, relatives and close family friends often step up to help raise them. This situation is commonly known as kinship care—or in the case of a close family friend raising children, “fictive kin.”

Kinship care has substantial benefits for kids:
- Reduce trauma often faced upon removal from their home
- Experience fewer behavioral and mental health problems and educational disruptions
- Maintain connections to culture, family traditions, and siblings

Many kinship caregivers are grandparents raising one or more grandchildren. Kentucky children raised by grandparents have a lower median family income than the state’s general population and are likely to struggle financially, with a quarter of all grandparents raising grandchildren living in poverty. When grandparents or other relatives or close family friends take in a child who has experienced abuse or neglect as a result of Department of Community Based Services (DCBS) intervention, it is often without notice or preparation. Undertaking the full-time responsibility for raising a child who has experienced trauma often includes physical, emotional, social, legal and financial challenges for the caregiver.

Kentucky has two opportunities to provide commonsense resources to support kinship families:

1. Kentucky provides a one-time financial support, known as the Relative Placement Support benefit, to those caring for a child who has experienced abuse or neglect to purchase essential items, such as clothing, bedding, formula, and school supplies. Currently, even those eligible are not receiving this support. The commonwealth can invest in this crucial support and ensure DCBS connects kinship caregivers with it to help ease the transition for child and caregiver.

2. Respite care, a temporary break from the ongoing responsibilities of caregiving, can provide a much-needed opportunity to help caregivers balance caring for the child with caring for themselves. Foster families already receive respite care resources, and Kentucky can offer those same options for safe, affordable respite care to kinship caregivers.

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:
Prioritizing kinship and fictive kin care by investing in critical financial and respite care supports
Kentucky can...

Hold parents accountable in ways that minimize the impact of parental incarceration on children

Children need their parents to care for them and work to meet their basic needs. Unfortunately, in Kentucky 13 percent of children have had a parent separated from them due to incarceration—the 2nd highest rate in the nation. Parental incarceration has been referred to as a “shared sentence” due to the short and long-term effects it has on children’s physical health, mental health, and educational achievement. Children experiencing parental incarceration need a system of justice that will hold their parents accountable and reserve incarceration for those who pose a risk or threat to public safety.

Kentucky can improve the system by:

1. Limiting the use of money bail for people who commit low-level or non-violent crimes

For people who have committed less serious offenses and do not pose a risk to public safety, limiting the use of money bail would avoid incarceration simply because the person could not pay their bail. People who are not deemed a risk to public safety and who are likely to return to court could then continue to work and care for their children. When their parents are jailed, children are more likely to be placed with a relative, family friend, or in foster care – a system that is already strained.

2. Utilizing Family Recovery Court programs to support parents in achieving sobriety while safely caring for their children

Family Recovery Court is a voluntary program for parents who are involved with the Department for Community Based Services and the court system due to addiction. The family-centered case management services hold parents accountable while ensuring they focus on achieving and maintaining sobriety, enhancing their parenting skills, and safely reunifying with and caring for their children.

Given Kentucky’s increase in women locked up for low-level drug offenses and housed in county jails with limited access to substance abuse treatment, this would be a better intervention for mothers with drug charges and for their children.

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:

Minimize the impact of parental incarceration on children by limiting the use of money bail for people who commit lower level or non-violent offenses. Also, address the addiction crisis and its impact on families, the foster care system, and criminal justice system by utilizing state funds to establish Family Recovery Court pilot projects in select Kentucky communities.
An efficient and effective youth justice system holds kids accountable, helps them grow up to become contributing members of their community, and increases public safety. Just as a bicycle works best when it uses the right gear for the terrain, our juvenile justice system should use different responses for different situations.

Kentucky is leading the way in youth justice system reforms in so many ways, but our state has been stuck in a single gear when it comes to the mandatory transfer of youth to adult court for certain offenses.

Using the right gear for the situation keeps Kentucky moving forward.

When judges have the discretion to decide how to handle these cases, the courts can respond more quickly and more effectively. Keeping children who get in trouble within the youth justice system when appropriate means:

- Speedier trials
- Most cost-effective and developmentally-appropriate responses
- Better access to rehabilitative supports and services

But Kentucky is stuck using a single gear.

The mandatory transfer of children to adult court for certain offenses means:

- More time in detention awaiting trial
- Judges who are not familiar with the juvenile court system
- Court records are not confidential
- Higher likelihood to commit crimes in the future

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:

Expanding court discretion by eliminating the mandatory transfer of youth age 14 and older to adult court for situations involving a firearm.
Kentucky can...

**Establish a minimum age of jurisdiction to prevent children from entering the maze of the juvenile justice system**

Kids are kids, and we do not expect them to act like tiny adults. Young children who get in trouble need responses and interventions that address the root causes of their behavior, and the juvenile court system is not the place to do that. The formal court process can be traumatic, negatively impact a child’s development, and trap children in an increasingly difficult maze of problems.

**Kentucky has begun to make commonsense shifts in how we respond when young children get in trouble. We can continue that progress to ensure safer communities and brighter futures for kids.**

**The best solutions address root causes of behavior**

- Parents and other caring adults play a critical role in ensuring healthy development and supporting positive behaviors
- When children and their families have access to mental health treatment and therapy services, they can develop positive coping skills and build stronger family connections

**Currently, the juvenile justice system operates like a complex maze with many points of entry, making it easy to get in but very difficult to get out.**

Entering the juvenile court system can:

- Expose kids to trauma
- Disrupt their development and education
- Have roadblocks to exiting that ultimately can lessen employment opportunities and increase the chances of incarceration as adults

**Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:**

Establishing a minimum age that a child can be charged with an offense and connecting the child to family-focused services to prevent children from entering the maze of the juvenile justice system