

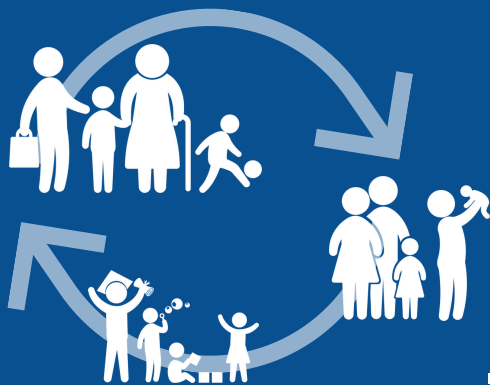
BLUEPRINT *for* KENTUCKY'S CHILDREN

The Blueprint for Kentucky's Children is a coalition of non-profit, public, and private organizations that stands on three pillars: thriving communities launch strong families, strong families launch successful kids, and successful kids launch a prosperous future for Kentucky.

2024 Blueprint for Kentucky's Children State Policy and Budget Priorities

These policy priorities can be implemented during the 2024 Kentucky General Assembly without being included in the state budget:

- ✓ Ensure compliance with tobacco-21 law by identifying retailers selling tobacco and nicotine products, requiring annual compliance checks, and penalizing those selling to kids.
- ✓ Exempt freestanding birth centers from certificate-of-need requirements to expand access to safe, equitable prenatal and delivery care.
- ✓ Reduce the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation and increase the safety of students by ensuring appropriate disclosures, checks, and training are complete for potential public and private school employees.
- ✓ Establish a process to automatically expunge an eviction from a family's record after they have been eviction-free for a reasonable amount of time, seal filings that do not result in an eviction, and prohibit minors from being named on eviction filings.
- ✓ Establish an interim joint taskforce on Kentucky's housing landscape to study the issue and create recommendations to address the housing crisis.
- ✓ Allow student teachers to be compensated for their work in the classroom.
- ✓ Propose amendments to child care zoning regulations to boost access to family child care homes.
- ✓ Establish the Employee Child Care Assistance Partnership (ECCAP) permanently to ensure a stable child care workforce.



BLUEPRINT *for* KENTUCKY'S CHILDREN

Kentucky kids and families need a strong state budget. Among the many budget priorities for the 2024 General Assembly, the Blueprint for Kentucky's Children hopes to see the following included:

✓ Health

- Increase investments in tobacco use prevention and cessation programming to curb use among youth and pregnant women.
- Ensure JUUL settlement funds are focused on mitigating youth nicotine addiction and preventing youth initiation.
- Boost investments in mental health reimbursement rates and bring Behavioral Health Service Organizations (BHSOs) and Behavioral Health Service and Multi-Specialty Groups (BHMSGs) on par with Medicare rates.

✓ Child Welfare

- Invest in children being raised by their relatives or fictive kin by dedicating funds to support subsidized permanent custody.

✓ Juvenile Justice

- Expand investments so communities can build a continuum of care that supports youth and their families in addressing the root causes of delinquent behavior and prevent ongoing involvement with the juvenile justice system.

✓ Education

- Allocate funding to support the student-teacher pipeline.
- Sustain funding for school-based mental health providers to improve access to services.

✓ Family Supports

- Invest in the supply of available, affordable housing by infusing state dollars into the state Affordable and Rural Housing Trust Funds.

✓ Child Care

- Maintain Child Care Assistance Program eligibility at 85% of State Median Income and the federally-recommended reimbursement rate.
- Base child care program reimbursement payments on enrollment rather than attendance, to align with new federal guidance.
- Implement a limited co-pay structure paired with maintaining a six-month transition period so that families can retain more income and still access benefits as they receive slight wage increases.
- Maintain scholarships, continue to cover costs of mandatory background checks, and persist with the implementation of the Family Child Care Home grant program to support early childhood educators.

Kentucky can...



Prevent youth initiation of nicotine products and protect kids from the harmful effects of vaping



Kentucky kids need healthy environments to learn, play, and grow, free from the harmful effects of nicotine products like e-cigarettes and vapes. Despite federal and state legislation to raise the legal purchase age of these products to 21, vaping among youth remains a concern in the Commonwealth.

Vaping among Kentucky youth:

- Kentucky prevalence of youth e-cigarette use continues to be higher than the national average.
- 17% of 10th graders and 24% of 12th graders surveyed reported using e-cigarettes in the past 30 days. When asked how they obtained their vapes, 23.6% said that they bought it from a store or tobacco retailer themselves.
- Despite only a fraction of the retailers in Kentucky receiving compliance checks in 2022, there were more than 400 documented instances of KY retailers selling tobacco to minors, with most only receiving a written warning.

Compliance with tobacco-21 law requires that we know where tobacco and nicotine products are being sold and that retailers comply with all federal, state, and local laws. Ensuring regular compliance checks take place and implementing escalating penalties for noncompliance will help keep these products out of the hands of Kentucky kids.

Evidence shows that states and localities that provide a mechanism to enforce current laws on the sale of tobacco and nicotine products see a reduction in sales to underage youth and see fewer youth initiating tobacco use for both cigarettes and e-cigarettes.

The impact of nicotine on kids and families:

- Nicotine use has been proven to amplify feelings of anxiety and depression.
- Students who use tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, cigarettes, cigars, and smokeless tobacco, are more likely to have lower grades.
- Young people who vape are much more likely to become smokers and are at higher risk for becoming dependent on other substances.
- Youth vaping can impact parent work performance, including reduced productivity and missed work time due to their child vaping.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solution:

Ensure compliance with tobacco-21 law by identifying retailers selling tobacco and nicotine products, requiring annual compliance checks, and penalizing those selling to kids.



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Kentucky can...



Reduce inequities in maternal mortality and expand access to safe and healthy prenatal and birth options

Ensuring that Kentucky kids have the best chance to thrive begins before they are born. Maternal health throughout pregnancy and delivery impacts both birth outcomes for babies and mother's health postpartum. Mothers need access to prenatal and delivery settings that offer equitable care and prioritize both their health and birth preferences.

Maternal Health Outcomes in Kentucky:

- Kentucky has among the most births resulting in C-sections in the nation at 34.7%, which significantly increases risk for maternal mortality.
- Kentucky's maternal mortality rate of 40.8 per 100,000 live births is significantly higher than the national rate of 17.4, and the rate among Black women in Kentucky is three times the rate of White women.
- More than 90% of maternal mortality cases in Kentucky are considered preventable.

Freestanding birth centers are health care facilities designed for childbirth, using a midwifery and wellness model. Birth centers offer a home-like environment, suitable for low-risk pregnancies and supported by qualified health professionals.

Benefits of Freestanding Birth Centers:

- Women that give birth in birth centers have fewer medical interventions and lower cesarean rates than those in hospital settings.
- Women who give birth in birth centers are more likely to initiate breastfeeding after birth.
- There are significant cost savings for mothers utilizing birth centers for delivery, particularly among Medicaid participants.

Although there are now more than 400 freestanding birth centers in 40 states and DC, Kentucky does not have any freestanding birth centers. Due to the lack of access to birth centers, women in Kentucky choose to cross state lines into Indiana and Tennessee to receive this care.

By removing the certificate-of-need requirement for freestanding birth centers, Kentucky can expand access to an alternative to hospital delivery in a safe environment.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solution:

Exempt freestanding birth centers from certificate-of-need requirements to expand access to safe, equitable prenatal and delivery care.



Kentucky can...



Ensure kids have a safe environment to learn, free from abuse

A safe learning environment is critical to students' health, well-being, and quality education. Students are in school over 6 hours per day, 180 days per year and their parents trust the teachers and school faculty to keep their children safe from abuse while providing essential knowledge to prepare them for adulthood.

By strengthening schools' ability to keep kids safe from adults with allegations or substantiations of sexual misconduct, we can prevent child abuse and promote a safe and caring learning environment.

Child sexual abuse by the numbers:

- In Kentucky in 2021, there were 831 victims of child sexual abuse substantiated.
- African American children face almost twice the risk for sexual abuse compared to their White peers.
- Sexual abuse is 2.5 times more likely among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth.
- Delayed disclosure of abuse and not disclosing abuse is very common of survivors, with just 26% of cases disclosed to adults and 12% of cases disclosed to authorities nationally.

Nationally, 10% of children are sexually abused.



Prevention Strategies to Keep Students Safe:

- Ensure public and certified nonpublic schools complete initial background checks and obtain reference checks of potential employees from previous employers.
- Require applicants to disclose if they have been the subject of actions regarding sexual misconduct in the past year.
- Ensure current child maltreatment prevention training for educators includes information about appropriate communications, sexual misconduct, and grooming.

Kentucky can prioritize child safety in every environment, including schools, by ensuring unsafe adults in caregiving roles are held appropriately accountable.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solution:

Reduce the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation and increase the safety of students by ensuring appropriate disclosures, checks, and training are complete for potential public and private school employees.



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Kentucky can...



Give families a second chance at housing stability by making common sense changes to the eviction process



All kids deserve a safe and stable home, but the rising cost and availability of housing has made finding and staying in safe, stable housing difficult for 44% of Kentucky renters. For families with an eviction, the permanent mark it leaves on their record makes finding housing even more difficult and can force families out of their neighborhood, school district, and support systems.

To reduce the trauma, financial hardship, and housing insecurity associated with evictions, Kentucky can establish a protocol to automatically expunge evictions from a family's record once they have been eviction free for a certain amount of time, as well as seal filings that do not result in an eviction.

Evictions put kids at risk of negative health outcomes and toxic stress associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences:

- Research shows that children who had experienced evictions within the last five years were 43% more likely to be in poor health and 55% more likely to be at risk for developmental delays.
- Children younger than five make up only 9% of rental households, but represent 12% of those impacted by evictions.
- Because of the historical legacy of racially based housing policies, Black children are even more impacted with 1 in 4 Black children younger than five facing eviction every year.

Evictions disrupt every part of a family's life and once an eviction is filed, it remains on a person's record forever.

Eviction Filings per Day:

- Kentucky: 134
- Fayette County: 18.5
- Jefferson County: 57.2
- Kenton County: 7.9



Evictions are one of the few legal judgements that cannot be expunged. Any interaction with the legal system can have a negative impact on an individual's long-term economic security, which is why charges like bankruptcy, misdemeanors, and certain types of felonies can be expunged after a period of time.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solution:

Establish a process to automatically expunge an eviction from a family's record after they have been eviction-free for a reasonable amount of time, seal filings that do not result in an eviction, and prohibit minors from being named on eviction filings.



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Kentucky can...



Ensure every Kentuckian has access to safe, affordable, and stable housing

All kids need a place that is safe and stable to grow up in, while every parent and young person needs a place to live that is affordable given their income. However, rising housing costs, slowed construction, and natural disasters have made it increasingly difficult for families to find and afford safe places to live.

Kentucky can address both the housing shortage and affordability to ensure that families can find a place to live while also having the funds needed to pay for other necessities, such as food, transportation, and health care. Housing is also essential to grow and support Kentucky's workforce.

- Kentucky has seen significant job growth, but many communities do not have the housing needed to support this increase in jobs. According to a recent survey, 64% of Kentucky employers indicated difficulty recruiting and retaining employees due to challenges with securing stable housing.
- The construction of new housing grows the workforce by creating new jobs and generating significant revenue for local communities. Research has found that building 100 single-family homes generates \$28.7 million in local income, \$3.6 million in taxes and other revenue for local governments, and 394 local jobs in just the first year.

Research suggests that Kentucky is short 89,000 units of affordable housing.

The housing shortage has been made worse by natural disasters in Eastern and Western KY, which have destroyed over 10,000 units of housing. Many of the families whose homes were destroyed do not have the money to rebuild, with 6 in 10 of the homes destroyed in EKY being owned by families making less than \$30,000 a year.

By convening an interim, legislative taskforce dedicated to housing, Kentucky can:

- Thoroughly evaluate the housing landscape, including supply, homelessness, evictions, landlord-tenant relations, zoning, multi-family housing, safety, and affordability.
- Explore innovative solutions to best support residents and local communities.
- Present recommendations to the 2025 Kentucky General Assembly to address the housing needs of Kentucky residents.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solution:

Establish an interim joint taskforce on Kentucky's housing landscape to study the issue and create recommendations to address the housing crisis.



Kentucky can...



Increase the quality and retention of teachers by investing in the student-teacher pipeline

Kentucky students need classrooms supported by high-quality teachers, and educators need support as they train to join the workforce. A recent report shows the magnitude of shortages in Kentucky reaching all schools and subjects, declines in enrollment and teacher prep programs, and emergency certifications doubling over the last three years.

To combat this crisis, Kentucky can provide financial support for the student-teacher pipeline.

There are many pathways to the classroom whether it be through a traditional higher-education program, local routes to certification, or even emergency certification. Student teachers that are in traditional pathways -- which include the majority of the workforce -- are required to do the work of a full-time educator without pay, whereas many alternative and emergency certifications can do the work of a full-time teacher and receive commensurate pay.

Current trends in Kentucky show:

- A decrease in teacher pipeline over the past five years, including enrollment in post-secondary education programs.
- An increase in teacher vacancies in elementary, middle, and high schools.
- An increase in alternative certification routes, specifically teachers on emergency certification.



Kentucky's traditional education routes do not allow student teachers to receive direct compensation for their time in the classroom teaching students, despite a growing body of research that associates the traditional pathway with better student outcomes.

Student Teacher Pay in Action:

- Current states that offer student-teacher stipend programs include Colorado, Michigan, Oklahoma, in some North Dakota local districts, and Pennsylvania.
- Innovations in Georgia, Texas, and Tennessee to allow teachers to receive pay.
- Recommended for adoption in Indiana and Kentucky by Teacher and Superintendent Associations.

The amount of time required for student teaching eliminates the ability for other work. Providing stipends to student teachers empowers aspiring educators, nurtures a high-quality learning environment, and alleviates financial burdens. A stronger teacher pipeline also means a stronger educational foundation and outcomes for Kentucky's students.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solution:

Allow student teachers to be compensated for their work in the classroom and allocate funding to support the student-teacher pipeline.



Kentucky can...



Ensure high-quality child care environments to support working families and early childhood learning

Kentucky families need affordable, high-quality child care to support workforce participation and the future prospects of our children. Working families are making tough decisions about staying in the workforce while paying exorbitant child care costs or quitting their jobs to stay home with their children.

Over the last several years, Kentucky has worked diligently to increase child care subsidies and help child care programs remain open during an unsure financial climate. In order to maintain the current level of child care support, kept afloat by temporary federal aid, Kentucky will need a significant investment in the state biennium budget.



Enhance the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to Boost Workforce Participation

By broadening child care access, Kentucky parents can go to work knowing their child is safe, cared for, and learning.



Address Child Care Workforce Shortages and Promote Collaboration

Kentucky can have a more robust child care infrastructure by mitigating child care teacher shortages, promoting the development and success of family child care homes, and supporting the early childhood workforce.

- Over 20% of Kentucky child care providers risk closure post-federal pandemic relief.
- 23% of child care programs could accommodate 50+ more children with full staffing.
- 21% of child care programs could serve 21-50 more children each.
- 79 of Kentucky's 120 counties are child care deserts, where families have limited or no access to care.

40% of working mothers are negatively impacted by unreliable child care, many resigning from their jobs as a result.

When parents leave their jobs, that often leads to:

- unstable housing
- food insecurity
- unreliable transportation
- enrollment in other family support programs to meet basic needs

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solutions:

- Maintain CCAP eligibility at 85% of State Median Income and the federally-recommended reimbursement rate.
- Base program reimbursement payments on enrollment rather than attendance, to align with new federal guidance.
- Protect CCAP access for all child care center employees to ensure a stable child care workforce.
- Implement a limited co-pay structure paired with maintaining a six-month transition period so that families can retain more income and still access benefits as they receive slight wage increases.
- Support early childhood educators by maintaining scholarships, continuing to cover costs of mandatory background checks, and persisting with the successful Family Child Care Home grant program.
- Establish the Employee Child Care Assistance Partnership (ECCAP) permanently.
- Propose amendments to child care zoning regulations to boost access to family child care homes.



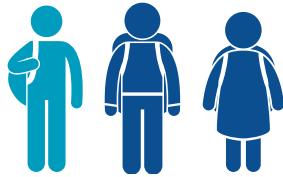
Kentucky can...



Invest in mental health supports to meet the needs of children in their schools and communities

Meeting the mental health needs of Kentucky kids is critical to ensure they can thrive in their schools and communities. Although youth mental health was a growing concern prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of mental health issues have significantly increased in recent years. The latest data indicates 16% of Kentucky kids are facing anxiety or depression, as effects of the pandemic linger.

One in three Kentucky high school students reported poor mental health during the height of the pandemic.



Kentucky students need access to mental health services in a setting that works for them. For many families, this includes utilizing mental health services provided at their child's school or in their community at a BHSO or BHMSG.

Adequate funding for youth mental health is needed to ensure quality providers are available to meet the needs of kids, wherever they are seeking care, to promote academic success and overall health.

- **School-based mental health service provider** is a licensed or certified school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, or other qualified mental health professional.
- **School-based services (SBS)**, including mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) services, have been shown to improve both health and academic outcomes.
- **Behavioral Health Service Organization and Multispecialty Groups (BHSO and BHMSGs)** serve more than 16,000 Kentucky kids in more than 110 counties.

The Impact of Mental Health Disorders

- In 2020, 35.6% of Kentuckians age 12-17 who had depression did not receive any care in the previous year.
- Without treatment, children with mental health issues are at increased risk of school failure, contact with the criminal justice system, dependence on social services, and even suicide.
- Children who have experienced four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are 32x more likely to have learning and behavioral problems.
- Kentucky is among 37 states that allocate funds specifically for services related to student mental health in their state budgets.
- Kentucky's Medicaid reimbursement rates for mental health services lag behind all of our bordering states, in some cases by more than 35%.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solution:

Improve the health and well-being of students by sustaining funding for school-based mental health providers and increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for mental health services.



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Kentucky can...



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

Kentucky was one of the first states to adopt and implement the federal Family First Prevention Services Act in 2018. This initiative aimed to keep kids in family-based placements when possible while in the state's custody or to prevent children from entering it. When children cannot remain safely with their parents, relatives and close family friends often step up to help raise them. This family-based placement is commonly known as kinship care—or in the case of a close family friend raising children, fictive kin care.

DCBS reports that there are over 1,000 children in relative or fictive kin placements in Kentucky with an additional 436 in relative foster care.

Placing children with relatives or family friends can:

- Maintain connections to culture, traditions, and siblings
- Help to reduce the trauma and stress associated with being placed in foster care
- Lead to fewer behavioral and mental health challenges and educational disruptions

Kentucky provides financial assistance to relative or fictive kin caregivers who choose to become certified foster parents through DCBS.

However, after it is clear that permanency with a relative is the end goal, there is little to no support available after custody is granted to a relative foster parent and they continue to raise the children in their homes, often until age 18.

Federal funding allows relative and fictive kin foster parents to take custody and ensure permanency for children in their care by providing funds for:

- Children and youth who have been in foster care with a relative who is a licensed foster parent for at least six months
- Those whom reunification with their parents or adoption are not appropriate permanency options

In 41 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and 11 tribes, a "Guardianship Assistance Program" is approved to distribute financial supports to those who choose to accept custody of their relative child after 6 months of stepping in as a relative or fictive kin foster caregiver. **Kentucky has yet to follow.**

Adopting a similar assistance program would provide increased financial assistance to Kentucky kinship families. It would help promote families remaining together while decreasing the number of children in foster care, further assisting the state in its ongoing implementation of the federal Family First Act.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solution:

Invest in children being raised by their relatives or fictive kin by dedicating funds to support subsidized permanent custody.



Kentucky can...



Prevent juvenile justice involvement and strengthen youth outcomes



Every child deserves to grow up feeling safe and supported, and to be equipped with the tools they need to thrive in adulthood. This is especially true for kids who are involved, or at risk of involvement, with the juvenile justice system. Research consistently shows that the formal court process and incarceration at a young age is traumatic, negatively impacts their development and education, and traps them in an increasingly difficult maze of problems.

When a child gets in trouble, they need interventions that address the root causes of their behavior.

Historically, Kentucky has failed to provide justice-involved kids, their families, and their communities with a comprehensive system of care that addresses many of the factors that drive juvenile delinquency. By creating a continuum of interventions, communities can implement a long-term solution that holds kids accountable and connects them to the resources needed to prevent future or further delinquent behavior.

Detention alone does not improve public safety.

- Kentucky data shows that children who complete a diversion program – meaning, their case was resolved outside of a formal court setting – are less likely to recidivate (1 in 5) compared to children whose cases are referred to formal court (1 in 3).
- It can cost an average of \$588 per day to incarcerate one child compared to approximately \$75 per day for diversion.
- Research also shows that children who complete these programs have a higher likelihood of completing high school, attending college, and earning more income in adulthood.

The goal of diversion is to reduce further involvement in the court system by providing programs based on education, treatment and accountability.

A diversion agreement provides tools to manage behavioral issues, including prevention and education programs; service learning projects; community service; restitution; curfew; school attendance; counseling; and treatment.

By supporting the development of a robust continuum of interventions with a demonstrated track record of effectiveness – that could include anything from educational support to career and housing services to mentoring programs – we can ensure that children and their families are supported before or during any involvement with the juvenile justice system and provide them with tangible services to keep them on the right track.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solution:

Expand investments so communities can build a continuum of care that supports youth and their families in addressing the root causes of delinquent behavior and prevent ongoing involvement with the juvenile justice system.



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