

Kentucky Judicial Commission on  
**MENTAL HEALTH**  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2024





**Debra Hembree Lambert**  
Chair

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**Larry E. Thompson**  
Vice-Chair

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Dear Valued Partners,

It is my privilege to present the 2024 Annual Report of the Kentucky Judicial Commission on Mental Health (KJCMH). This year has been defined by growth, innovation, and continued dedication to improving how Kentucky responds to individuals and families impacted by mental health needs, substance use, and intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Building on the strong foundation established in previous years, the Commission has deepened its collaborative work with court partners across all three branches of government, community partners, and those with lived experience. Together, we are advancing systemic change that not only improves outcomes for individuals, but also strengthens families and communities across the Commonwealth.

In 2024, the Commission launched new initiatives such as the KJCMH Training Series, designed to provide Kentucky judges and court personnel with critical tools for understanding behavioral health issues in the courtroom. We also continued our Community Mapping Initiative, helping local jurisdictions identify resources, reduce barriers, and build tailored solutions that address the intersections of criminal justice, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems.

The achievements highlighted in this report are a direct result of the tireless efforts of our Commission members, workgroups, and community partners. I am grateful for their commitment to justice, compassion, and collaboration.

As we look to the future, the Commission remains steadfast in its mission to ensure Kentucky's courts and its partners are equipped to respond effectively and humanely to the complex needs of those we serve. Together, we are creating pathways to hope, healing, and stronger communities.

Sincerely,

**Debra Hembree Lambert**  
Deputy Chief Justice, Kentucky Supreme Court  
Chair, Kentucky Judicial Commission on Mental Health

**Larry Thompson**  
Chief Judge, Kentucky Court of Appeals  
Vice Chair, Kentucky Judicial Commission on Mental Health

# **Table of Contents**

- 6   *Community Voice in Action: The Impact of KJCMH's Statewide Town Hall Meetings***
- 10   *Recovery-Oriented System of Care Summits***
- 11   *Community Mapping Initiative***
- 13   *Behavioral Health Liaison (BHL) Initiative***
- 14   *Mental Health Courts***
- 15   *In Her Shoes – Domestic Violence Simulation***
- 16   *Seth's Law***
- 18   *KJCMH Training Series***
- 19   *Commission Committees***
- 21   *Workgroup Progress and Impact in 2024***
- 26   *Commission Membership***
- 42   *Closing Reflections***



# **The Impact of KJCMH's Statewide Town Hall Meetings**



*Participants gathered for the town hall hosted in Pikeville, Kentucky.*

In 2023, the Kentucky Judicial Commission on Mental Health (KJCMH) launched a first-of-its-kind statewide listening initiative, holding nine regional town hall meetings designed to center the voices of those most impacted by the intersection of behavioral health and the justice system. These forums—held in communities spanning from Pikeville to Paducah—were more than events; they were invitations for individuals, families, and professionals to speak directly to the state's decision-makers about what is working, what is not, and what must change.

Over the course of this ambitious initiative, the Commission heard from approximately 1,030 individuals, representing 83 of Kentucky's 120 counties and all seven appellate court districts.

Town halls took place in Owensboro, Covington, Ashland, London, Lexington, Paducah, Louisville, Pikeville, and Bowling Green, with attendance ranging from 70 to 190 participants per site. These community-driven conversations prioritized inclusivity and accessibility, offering both in-person and virtual participation options.

To complement the live forums, the Commission collected responses through an electronic survey. 276 attendees completed the survey, offering deep insight into their experiences across Kentucky's behavioral health and justice systems. Survey respondents answered for themselves or on behalf of someone with lived experience, allowing a range of perspectives to emerge.

## Who Was Heard: Demographics and Representation

- The majority of survey subjects fell into the age range of 25-55 (63%).
- The next most common age ranges were 18-24 (17%) and then under 18 (13%).
- The gender split of subjects was largely even, 45% men and 44% women. The remaining percentage of responses to this question came from survey professionals who reported that they worked with individuals of all genders.
- 71% of survey subjects were white, 8% were Black, and less than 1% identified as Hispanic or Latin.
- 11% of respondents either declined to disclose or did not answer the demographic questions.
- Notably, Black and Hispanic subjects were underrepresented compared to their presence in the justice system—a reflection of ongoing disparities in system engagement and voice.

When examining system satisfaction scores, two key disparities emerged:

- White subjects reported significantly more acceptable experiences than nonwhite subjects, with a 0.76-point higher average rating.
- Participants who had not experienced incarceration rated their experiences 0.69 points higher on average than those who had.

## Survey Response and Breakdown

Response Options	Percentage of Participants
I am a person with lived experience	24% (n = 67)
I am a family or friend of a person with lived experience	27% (n = 74)
Other:	
System Professional	22% (n = 60)
Has lived experience and is family/friends to someone with lived experience	12% (n = 32)
Has lived experience and is a system professional	2% (n = 5)
Is family or friends to someone with lived experience and is a system professional	6% (n = 16)
Has lived experience, is a family/friends to someone with lived experience, and is a system professional	5% (n = 14)
Declined to answer	3% (n = 8%)

## Interacted Systems

Survey participants identified a wide range of systems that individuals with lived experience encountered during their involvement with mental illness, substance use, or intellectual and developmental disabilities. These included services across the full continuum—from crisis response and incarceration to treatment and reentry. Respondents could select all applicable systems.

The most commonly reported interactions were:

- Outpatient services – 83%
- Inpatient services – 66%
- Courtrooms/virtual hearings – 58%
- Jail, detention, or prison – 55%
- First responders (police/EMS) – 53%
- 911 or crisis lines – 43%
- Diversion or probation programs – 42%
- Specialty Courts – 33%
- Pretrial Services – 32%
- Reentry or parole – 30%
- Out-of-home placement/foster care – 24%
- Court Designated Worker – 21%
- Guardianship – 20%



## **Five Statewide Themes Emerged**

Through analysis of 475 open-ended responses and stories, five consistent themes surfaced across geographic and demographic lines.

### **1. Sentencing and Diversion**

Participants across Kentucky voiced strong support for diversion and deflection programs that prevent unnecessary incarceration of individuals with mental health or substance use challenges. Many, however, shared frustration with the inconsistent availability or uneven implementation of such alternatives.

### **2. Involuntary Commitment of Adults**

There was widespread concern about 202A proceedings, Kentucky's legal process for involuntary hospitalization. Many attendees described a lack of public understanding, inconsistent court practices, and significant due process concerns. Reports of poor access to legal representation, unclear discharge planning, and emotional trauma for families highlighted the urgent need for reform in this area.

### **3. Behavioral Health Treatment in Detention Facilities**

Attendees consistently raised the alarm about the lack of adequate mental health and substance use treatment in jails. Stories detailed the disruption of medication regimens, lack of licensed clinicians, and the use of solitary confinement for individuals in crisis. Participants emphasized the critical need for trauma-informed care and clinical oversight in carceral settings.

### **4. Gaps in Adult Community-Based Care**

Throughout the state—but particularly in rural areas—participants described a scarcity of accessible community-based services such as outpatient treatment, crisis stabilization units, supported housing, and case management. Many described falling through the cracks after hospital discharge or court involvement due to the lack of follow-up support. The shortage of peer support specialists and inpatient SUD treatment beds was repeatedly mentioned.

### **5. Gaps in Juvenile Community-Based Care**

Families and youth advocates shared concerns about the lack of timely assessments, trauma-informed care, and early intervention services for children and adolescents. Gaps in communication between schools, courts, and mental health providers were a frequent frustration, with calls for stronger collaboration and wraparound services.



Deputy Chief Justice Lambert, Bell County Circuit Judge Keith Nagle and his wife, attorney Jennifer Nagle attending the town hall in London, Kentucky.

## Turning Insight into Action

The Commission moved swiftly to act on the data gathered from town halls.

### Engaging Missing Partners

In response to identified gaps, the Commission broadened its membership to include new partners from the fields of housing, education, peer support, child advocacy, and behavioral health. These additions ensure that the Commission's strategies are grounded in lived experience and reflective of Kentucky's diverse communities.

### Strategic Workgroup Assignments

The five core themes were assigned to appropriate KJCMH workgroups for immediate action. Each interdisciplinary workgroup was tasked with developing policy recommendations, tools, and best practices tailored to the theme they were assigned.

### Training and Capacity Building

The findings from the town hall meetings helped shape broader training and capacity-building efforts across Kentucky. These efforts were designed to support local communities in strengthening coordination, identifying resource gaps, and developing practical strategies for improvement.

One example included upcoming regional planning events, such as the Recovery-Oriented System of Care (ROSC) Summits, which are discussed later in the report. These initiatives aimed to ensure that the feedback gathered from communities led to meaningful, on-the-ground change.

These town hall meetings affirmed a foundational truth: lasting, equitable justice reform begins with listening to the people closest to the problem. Through this community-first approach, the Commission ensured that Kentucky's behavioral health and justice systems reflected the needs, experiences, and wisdom of those they served.

With over 1,000 individuals heard, hundreds of insights collected, and a roadmap grounded in lived experience, KJCMH led with purpose and partnership. Together, these efforts advanced a future where every Kentuckian has access to a justice system that is fair, compassionate, and responsive to behavioral health needs.

## Recovery-Oriented System of Care Summits

The Kentucky Court of Justice (KCOJ) recognized the urgent need to improve access to behavioral health treatment for individuals involved with the legal system. In 2020, with support from the State Justice Institute, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) partnered with the Crime and Justice Institute to conduct a statewide assessment of strengths, gaps, and opportunities across the justice and behavioral health systems. The resulting 2021 report, *Recovery-Oriented Systems of Care: Needs and Opportunities for Kentucky's Court System*, emphasized the value of local coordination, cross-sector collaboration, and timely access to care. It identified critical gaps, including the need for better integration of behavioral health services within the court system and more trauma-informed, culturally competent care for justice-involved individuals.



These findings created the foundation needed for the Office of Statewide Programs to begin implementing a Recovery-Oriented System of Care (ROSC) framework across the court system. This framework emphasizes responsive, community-driven solutions and equitable pathways to treatment. Feedback from the town halls directly shaped the ROSC Summit agenda, which focused on the challenges identified by communities, such as inconsistent communication between court and behavioral health professionals and a lack of resources in rural areas. These insights continue to inform broader training and capacity-building efforts across the Commonwealth.

In 2024, the Office of Statewide Programs, through the Department of Specialty Courts partnered with KJCMH to host a seven-part ROSC Summit series across each of Kentucky's Supreme Court districts, engaging more than 1,000 participants, including judges, attorneys, behavioral health providers, state agency partners, and individuals with lived experience. The series provided an important platform for addressing the significant gaps identified in the 2021 assessment, with discussions focused on solutions to local challenges. Topics included cognitive impairment in the courtroom, trauma-informed engagement, harm reduction, and

coordinated systems mapping. The summits also addressed Kentucky's unique challenges, such as the disproportionate impact of substance use and mental health issues in rural areas and the need for a stronger, community-based support system.

A mixed-methods evaluation of the summit series affirmed strong engagement and the relevance of the content presented. Key findings included a consensus on the need for specialized training for court professionals on handling individuals with behavioral health issues, and a call for greater integration of mental health professionals within court settings and more collaborative approaches across systems. These insights are shaping future initiatives to improve the delivery of behavioral health services within the justice system.

The Commission continues to build on this momentum through regional community mapping events that align local needs with actionable strategies. These efforts, informed by the findings from the ROSC Summit and town hall discussions, aim to strengthen local partnerships and ensure that solutions are sustainable and tailored to each community's unique needs. Together, these efforts are advancing a justice system that listens, adapts, and ensures coordinated behavioral health support for all Kentuckians.

## Community Mapping Initiative



**Building upon the foundation of the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) and Upstream model mapping detailed in the 2023 Annual Report, KJCMH advanced its system reform efforts in 2024 through the launch of the Community Mapping Initiative. While statewide SIM and Upstream mapping provided a broad, system-level perspective, the Community Mapping Initiative was designed to bring those insights directly into Kentucky's local jurisdictions, empowering communities to develop tailored solutions.**

### Purpose and Model

The Community Mapping Initiative was developed in collaboration with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and represents the first judiciary-led model in the nation to integrate criminal justice, child welfare, and juvenile justice mapping into a single session. By combining elements of both SIM and Upstream approaches, the model allows communities to examine how individuals and families intersect with multiple systems and identify shared challenges.

The initiative's goals include:

- Resource Identification: Documenting community assets and pinpointing service gaps.
- Barrier Analysis: Identifying obstacles that hinder effective service delivery and coordination.
- Action Planning: Facilitating collaborative strategies that can be implemented locally to improve outcomes.

### 2024 Implementation

In 2024, NCSC provided specialized training to select staff from the AOC's Office of Statewide Services, bringing expertise in adult criminal justice, juvenile justice, and child welfare to guide discussions during community mapping workshops. This core team of facilitators will help to implement onboarding for additional facilitators in 2025.

Community mapping offers facilitated sessions that bring together judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, service providers, law enforcement, schools, community mental health centers, Cabinet partners, and individuals with lived experience. Each session produces a set of locally driven priorities, enabling communities to take ownership of the solutions developed.



Warren County Mapping Event held December 11-12, 2024.

## Key Themes Identified in 2024

In 2024, the KJCMH provided community mapping in six counties including Pulaski, Rockcastle, Johnson, Martin, Lawrence, and Warren. Across participating counties, several consistent themes emerged:

- Strengthening cross-system collaboration, particularly between child welfare and juvenile justice.
- Expanding early intervention and diversion options to prevent deeper system involvement.
- Improving access to behavioral health services, especially in rural areas with limited resources.
- Data sharing and transparency, ensuring that agencies can coordinate more effectively.
- Elevating the voices of families and individuals with lived experience, who provided critical insight into service barriers and opportunities.

## Statewide Impact

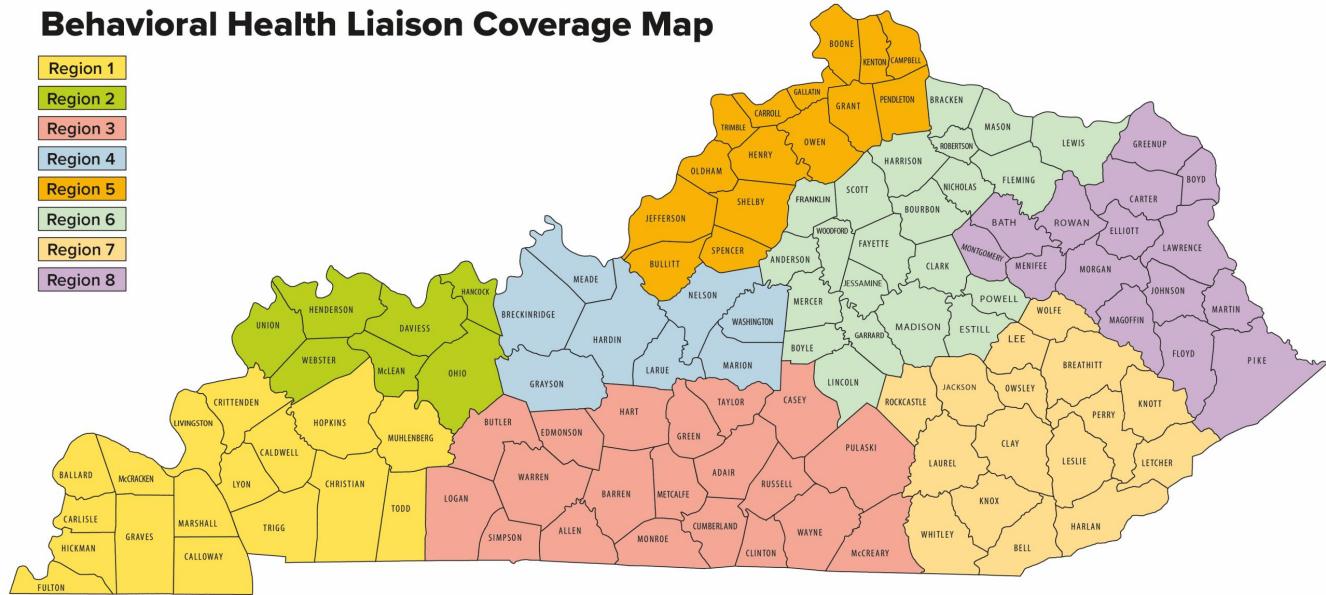
The Community Mapping Initiative has positioned Kentucky as a national leader in judicially led, cross system mapping. By 2024, the initiative had moved beyond planning into implementation and accountability, with Office of Statewide Programs supporting communities in tracking progress on their action plans. The initiative also enhanced the Commission's legislative and policy recommendations, as local priorities directly informed statewide strategies.

Through this work, the KJCMH has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that reforms are not only developed at the state level but also translated into meaningful local change. By equipping communities with tools to identify barriers, build partnerships, and design solutions, the Community Mapping Initiative has become a cornerstone of the Commission's effort to strengthen Kentucky's judicial and behavioral health systems.

## **Behavioral Health Liaison (BHL) Initiative**

The KJCMH identified a critical need to bridge gaps between the courts, community partners, and behavioral health resources. In response, AOC created the BHL position, which was funded through HB 264 in the 2024 Kentucky legislative session, to directly support the Commission's mission.

## Behavioral Health Liaison Coverage Map



BHLs serve as a vital link between courts, community partners, and state programs, aligning their eight regions with Community Mental Health Center catchment areas to ensure coordinated statewide coverage.

This structure supports a ROSC approach, providing justice-involved individuals and their families with streamlined access to services, resources, and supports.

The role of the BHL is multifaceted. These liaisons:

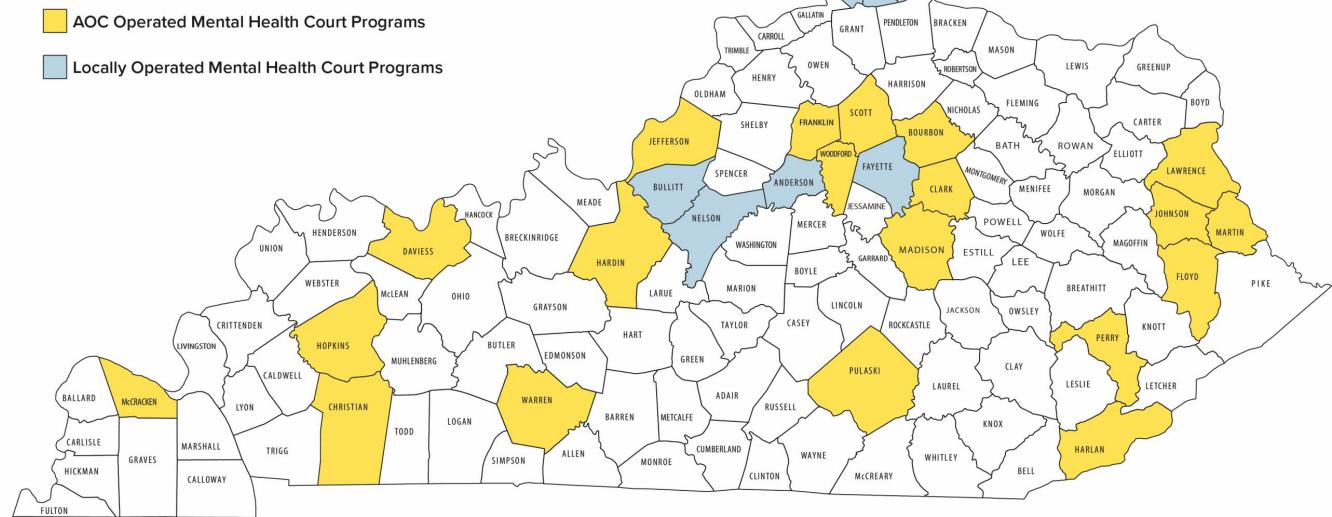
- Build strong relationships with local courts and community partners.
- Assist judges, court staff, and specialty court programs in identifying resources.
- Coordinate warm handoffs to treatment providers to keep individuals engaged in specialized care.
- Support the Office of Statewide Programs, including Family and Juvenile Services, Pretrial Services, and Specialty Courts.

Beyond their direct service role, BHLs also provide operational support to the KJCMH itself. They are trained facilitators for community mapping initiatives, enabling communities to identify gaps, streamline processes, and craft actionable strategies. They also contribute to the efficiency of Commission workgroups and committees, assisting with agenda development, logistics, and follow-up to ensure that the Commission's priorities are advanced effectively.



# Mental Health Courts

## Mental Health Court Program Locations

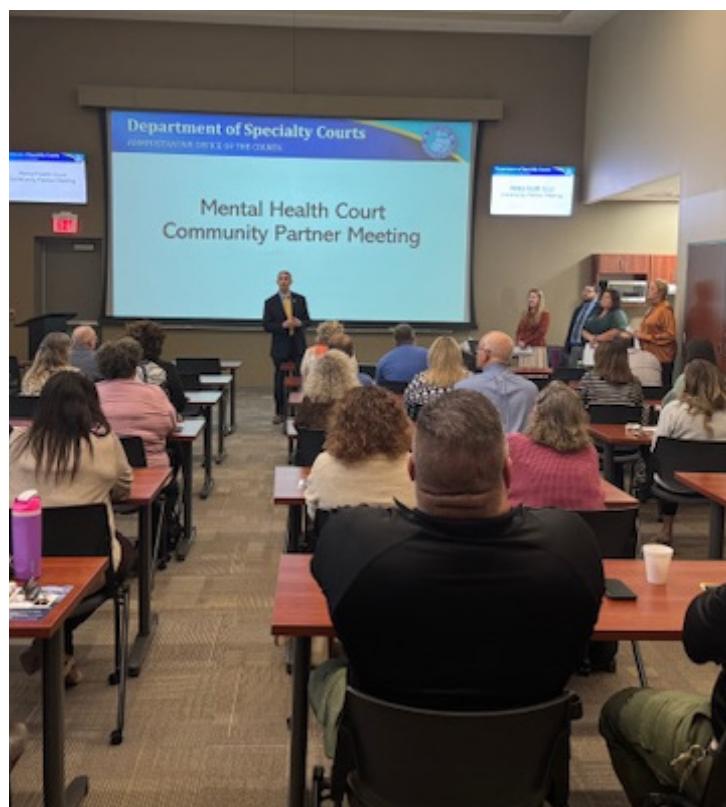


KJCMH's Court Responses Workgroup identified the expansion of Mental Health Courts (MHCs) as a priority to improve the way Kentucky courts respond to individuals with behavioral health needs. This recommendation was advanced by the Commission's Treatment and Access Committee and supported through legislative funding in 2024.

MHCs are specialized judicial programs that emphasize treatment and rehabilitation over traditional punitive measures. Using a problem-solving, non-adversarial, and multidisciplinary approach, these courts address the underlying mental health and co-occurring disorders contributing to criminal behavior. Their focus is on the individual's overall well-being, increasing access to treatment, recovery-oriented programming, and community-based supports.

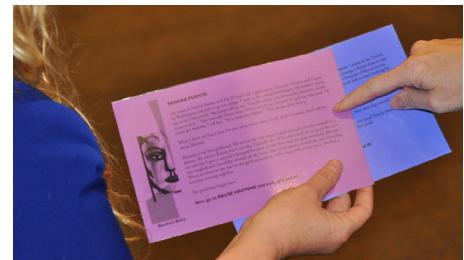
With Commission guidance and legislative support, the AOC expanded MHCs under the Department of Specialty Courts. In 2024, ten new programs were added in Christian, Clark, Floyd, Franklin, Harlan, Hopkins, McCracken, Perry, Pulaski, and Scott counties. This expansion means 27 of Kentucky's 120 counties now have access to an AOC-operated or locally run Mental Health Court.

In addition, Johnson, Martin, Lawrence, and Warren counties are operating Mental Health Diversion Initiatives alongside their MHCs, blending Pretrial Diversion with treatment-oriented alternatives. These programs strengthen collaboration between courts, treatment providers, and community partners, ensuring individuals are diverted into appropriate care and supports—ultimately improving outcomes for participants while enhancing public safety.



## In Her Shoes – Domestic Violence Simulation

As part of its commitment to strengthening Kentucky's court response to domestic violence, KJCMH, through its Domestic Violence Workgroup, participated in the In Her Shoes – Domestic Violence Simulation.



This nationally recognized exercise is based on the real-life experiences of survivors of domestic violence. Participants walk in the shoes of characters navigating abusive and controlling relationships, making difficult decisions about safety, resources, and survival. The 1.5-hour simulation, followed by a one-hour facilitated debrief, provides an immersive opportunity to understand the complexity of choices survivors face and the systemic barriers that impact their options.

- The importance of trauma-informed judicial practices that prioritize survivor safety, dignity, and empowerment.
- Renewed commitment to building collaborative, survivor-centered responses across courts and community partners.

By walking through these difficult scenarios, participants gained valuable insight into how judicial decisions and community responses can either strengthen or hinder a survivor's path to safety and stability.

### Impact and Takeaways

The simulation had a profound effect on participants, many of whom work daily within the justice system. Key takeaways included:

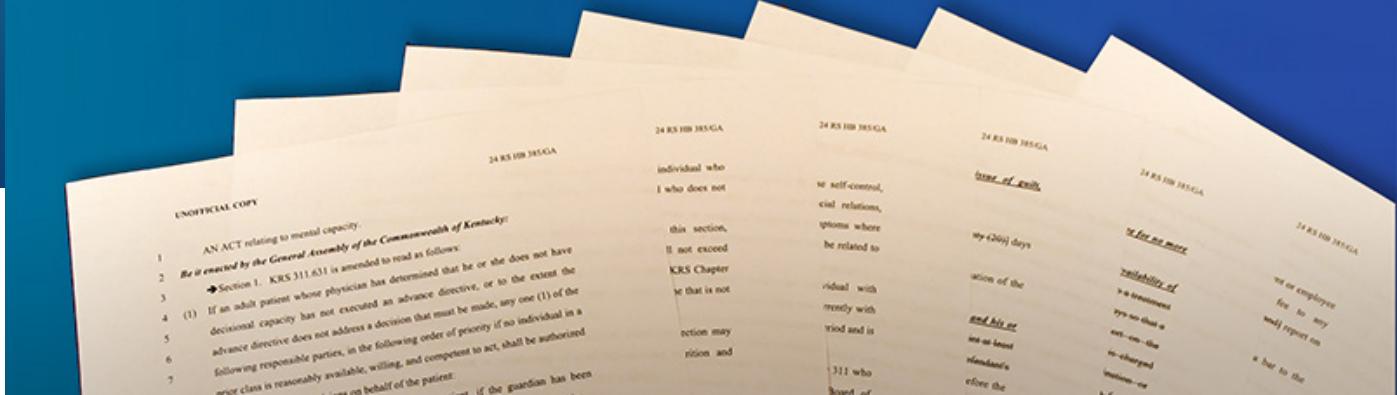
- A deeper appreciation for the emotional and logistical challenges that survivors encounter when seeking help.
- Recognition of how limited resources and systemic barriers can force survivors into unsafe or harmful choices.

### Acknowledgment

The Commission extends its sincere gratitude to AOC's Office of Statewide Programs – Violence Against Women Act Initiative for providing this powerful training opportunity. Their leadership in bringing innovative, survivor-focused learning experiences to Kentucky's courts continues to advance the state's ability to respond effectively to domestic violence.

# Governor signs Seth's Law, advancing mental health reforms in KY

*Passage was a legislative priority of the Kentucky Judicial Commission on Mental Health*



## Advancing Mental Health Reform Through Legislative Action

In 2024, Kentucky passed House Bill 385, more commonly known as Seth's Law. Seth's Law is a landmark legislative initiative and the first of its kind led by KJCMH. Seth's Law represents a major step forward in aligning Kentucky's judicial practices with the needs of individuals navigating mental health challenges, particularly in the areas of guardianship and competency to stand trial.

The legislation is named in honor of Seth Stevens, a respected attorney and passionate advocate who served on the KJCMH team before his untimely death by suicide in 2023. Seth was deeply committed to improving how the justice system treats individuals with behavioral health needs. The provisions within the bill reflect his vision and legacy, making the law not just a policy achievement, but a tribute to his enduring impact.

Seth's Law addresses two critical issues that emerged from both the Commission's town hall findings and the lived experience of Kentuckians across the state.

First, the law amends KRS 311.631 to improve the guardianship process for individuals lacking decisional capacity. Under the previous statute, healthcare decisions for these individuals often defaulted to state-appointed guardians, particularly when close family members were unavailable. This left many vulnerable people in the hands of individuals who may not have known them



personally or understood their values. Seth's Law changes this by adding "adult friend" to the list of individuals authorized to make medical decisions. This amendment empowers trusted friends or significant others to serve in that role, honoring personal relationships, alleviating strain on public guardianship systems, and promoting dignity and autonomy for individuals in crisis.

Second, the law significantly improves the competency evaluation process under KRS



504.080. Historically, individuals requiring a mental health evaluation to determine competency to stand trial were sent for inpatient assessments at the Kentucky Correctional Psychiatric Center (KCPC)—a process plagued by backlogs and lengthy delays. At times, individuals waited nearly a year for an evaluation, often while being held in jail. Seth's Law introduces an outpatient-first approach, allowing courts to order initial evaluations in jails, community-based settings, or via videoconference when appropriate. This reform is expected to reduce wait times from several months to just three to five weeks, easing the burden on inpatient facilities and helping ensure timely justice for both defendants and victims.

The reforms introduced in Seth's Law align Kentucky with national best practices, mirroring effective models used in states like Tennessee. More

importantly, they reflect the power of collaborative, cross-disciplinary reform—driven by the insights of community members, legal experts, mental health professionals, and those with lived experience. The law went into effect on July 15, 2024, and its implementation marks a meaningful shift toward more humane, efficient, and individualized treatment of people with mental health conditions involved in the justice system.

While Seth's Law is the Commission's first formal legislative success, it is also a foundational step in a broader policy agenda aimed at embedding behavioral health considerations into Kentucky's legal framework. It is the beginning of an ongoing commitment to transforming systems—not just through research and dialogue—but through action.

# KJCMH Training Series



## Official Launch in 2024

In 2024, the Kentucky Judicial Commission on Mental Health officially launched its Training Series, which will serve as a comprehensive and continually expanding suite of learning modules designed to strengthen how courts and communities respond to individuals with behavioral health needs and intellectual or developmental disabilities. Each component of the curriculum is developed in direct response to barriers identified by the Commission's multidisciplinary workgroups, ensuring that every module reflects real system gaps and provides practical, implementable solutions. Through this approach, the Training Series supports meaningful improvements in court practice, promotes collaborative problem-solving, and advances best practices across judicial and community settings.

The Training Series is intentionally designed to be accessible to a wide audience, including

judges, court personnel, attorneys, behavioral health providers, law enforcement agencies, and community partners. This broad inclusion affirms the Commission's commitment to whole-system learning and acknowledges that effective behavioral health response requires shared knowledge across all sectors. As part of this ongoing commitment, new trainings will continue to be developed and released as emerging needs are identified through Commission activities, statewide listening sessions, and front-line partner feedback.

"These trainings offer meaningful and accessible education for all who serve in the justice system and for our partners across Kentucky. They help ensure that our state moves forward with greater understanding, compassion, and accountability," said Deputy Chief Justice Elect Robert B. Conley.

The first two modules to launch the series were Understanding Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Communication Access for People with Hearing Loss in the Criminal Justice System: Challenges and Opportunities. These initial trainings set the foundation for the series by addressing critical gaps identified by both the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Workgroup and the Accessibility Workgroup. They offer essential knowledge on communication strategies, disability awareness, legal obligations, and practical steps that courts can take to improve access, inclusion, and procedural fairness.

Future modules will expand into additional areas identified across Commission workgroups. Topics currently in development include improved crisis response strategies, strengthening reentry supports, enhancing communication between courts and behavioral health providers, and increasing understanding of involuntary treatment pathways. The Commission is also preparing training materials tailored for rural regions where service shortages, transportation barriers, and resource limitations create unique challenges.

Beyond the content itself, the Training Series represents a cultural shift in how Kentucky approaches education within the justice system. It creates a shared learning environment between the judiciary and community partners and reinforces the value of consistent statewide training. As the series continues to grow, it will serve as both a training platform and a long-term tool for building a more informed, collaborative, and person-centered justice system.

## Commission Committees



*Larry Thompson, Chief Judge, Kentucky Court of Appeals and Vice-Chair for the Kentucky Judicial Commission on Mental Health recognizes Deputy Chief Justice Lambert as a 2024 recipient of the System of Care Champion award.*

KJCMH advances its mission through three standing committees that guide and oversee the work of its ten specialized workgroups. Each committee is chaired by a Commission member and is tasked with driving reform, fostering collaboration, and identifying solutions to improve how Kentucky's courts respond to individuals with behavioral health needs.

### Criminal Justice Committee

The Criminal Justice Committee is led by Judge Cole Adams Maier, Chair, with Judge John Tackett serving as Vice Chair. Through its four workgroups—Juvenile Justice, Competency, Reentry, and Prearrest/Diversion—the committee is dedicated to strengthening court and community responses for justice-involved individuals within the criminal system. The Criminal Justice Committee provides leadership on strategies to improve how the justice system addresses individuals with mental health needs, substance use, and co-occurring disorders. Its work emphasizes diversion, specialty courts, and

collaborative initiatives that prioritize treatment over incarceration. By bringing together partners from across the criminal justice continuum, the committee advances recommendations that enhance public safety while promoting recovery and rehabilitation.



*Judge Cole Adams Maier, Chair of the Criminal Justice Committee*



Judge J. Foster Cotthoff, Chair of the Civil and Family Justice Committee

## Civil and Family Justice Committee

The Civil and Family Justice Committee is chaired by Judge J. Foster Cotthoff with Chris Griffith serving as co-chair. Through its three workgroups—Guardianship and Commitment, Domestic Violence, and Dependency, Neglect, and Abuse—the committee works to strengthen court responses to individuals and families involved in Kentucky's civil and family justice systems. The Civil and Family Justice Committee focuses on civil court processes, child welfare, family law, and guardianship matters that affect vulnerable individuals and families. The committee has prioritized early intervention, family preservation, and system improvements that strengthen protective factors for children, families, and aging populations. Its work highlights the importance of collaboration between courts and community partners to ensure timely, fair, and compassionate judicial responses.

## Treatment and Access Committee

The Treatment and Access Committee is chaired by Amy Luttrell, with Secretary Eric Friedlander serving

as Vice Chair. Through its three workgroups—Strengthening Communities, Court Responses, and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities—the committee focuses on enhancing community systems beyond the courtroom, guided by a public health perspective. The Treatment and Access Committee leads efforts to expand access to behavioral health services across Kentucky and to integrate treatment resources into judicial



Amy Luttrell, CEO and President of Goodwill Industries of Kentucky, Inc and Chair of the Treatment and Access Committee addresses the Commission

processes. The committee's work emphasizes reducing barriers to care, strengthening cross-system collaboration, and building a robust continuum of services that address both immediate needs and long-term recovery. By aligning judicial practices with treatment resources, the committee ensures that individuals receive the support they need to achieve stability and avoid deeper system involvement.

## Workgroup Progress and Impact in 2024

In 2024, the ten workgroups of KJCMH worked diligently to advance the Commission's mission of improving the intersection of behavioral health and the justice system. Each workgroup engaged in sustained collaboration, examined best practices, and developed actionable strategies to improve court and community responses. The initiatives outlined below reflect a year of shared expertise, innovation, and dedication to meaningful system change.

### Competency Workgroup

The Competency Workgroup, led by Dr. Koleen Slusher, is concentrated on advancing reforms to Kentucky's competency evaluation process and ensuring smooth implementation of House Bill 385 (Seth's Law), a landmark measure that modernizes how the Commonwealth addresses competency evaluations in the justice system. While this annual report contains a dedicated section highlighting the broader efforts surrounding Seth's Law, the workgroup played a central role in operationalizing its provisions. Key priorities included creating new AOC forms—AOC-400 (Competency Hearing Order), AOC-401 (Examination Order – Outpatient), and AOC-402 (Examination Order – Inpatient)—formulating clear messaging for partners, developing targeted training materials, and establishing outcome measures to track the law's impact.

The group examined the need for a uniform approach for judges when rescinding competency evaluation orders, determining to revisit this after full implementation of Seth's Law. They reviewed recommendations from the Council of State Governments (CSG), explored Tennessee's process for refused outpatient evaluations, and considered legislative refinements to KRS 202C.



Quarterly Commission meeting

KCPC provided regular updates on waitlist status and operational impacts, while members developed legislative recommendations for the 2026 session. The workgroup also presented at the Kentucky Jailer's Association Conference, ensuring that justice and corrections partners were informed of the law's provisions and impacts. By year's end, they had prepared the "competency form package" for statewide use, equipping the courts and practitioners with the tools needed for consistent, effective application.

### Prearrest/Diversion Workgroup

The Prearrest/Diversion Workgroup, led by Steve Shannon, advanced multiple initiatives to strengthen diversion opportunities before individuals enter the justice system. A major focus was the role of police social workers, with members exploring best practices, reviewing operational models from across the state, and developing a white paper to advocate for their integration alongside enhanced jail services. The group examined multi-jurisdictional approaches, received a presentation from Chief Thompson on his agency's victim service specialist program, and reviewed strategies to fund and sustain these positions.

Members explored and provided feedback on Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) curriculum, attended the statewide CIT Conference held in March, and examined opportunities to expand CIT access for officers statewide. They prioritized mapping jail services through a comprehensive survey and received presentations from "Find Help Now" on treatment resource navigation, the Department



Damon Preston, Kentucky's Public Advocate, presents information around the Alternative Sentencing Worker Program

of Medicaid Services on crisis continuum models, and River Valley Behavioral Health on crisis collaboration and residential crisis programs. These efforts have positioned the group to deliver data-driven recommendations on both community-based diversion strategies and in-custody service enhancements.

## Juvenile Justice Workgroup

The Juvenile Justice Workgroup, led by Judge Lisa Jones, pursued improvements to Kentucky's juvenile justice system through legislative and system-mapping initiatives. Early in the year, members reviewed vaping survey results from court-designated workers and county attorneys and examined the State Interagency Council's program profiles for pro-social youth engagement.

Two subgroups were formed: one dedicated to legislative priorities and another focused on mapping-based system improvements. The Legislative Subgroup explored proposals to establish a minimum age of criminal responsibility and to adopt juvenile-specific competency standards. The Mapping Subgroup concentrated on expanding crisis stabilization units for youth, increasing statewide pro-social opportunities, and providing training for community-based service providers.

The workgroup reviewed the NCSC's Kentucky Statewide Juvenile Justice Upstream Mapping Workshop report and received a presentation from the University of Connecticut on the Mobile Response and Stabilization Services model. Together, these efforts aimed to ensure developmentally appropriate interventions and services are available to Kentucky's youth.

## Reentry Workgroup

The Reentry Workgroup, led by Erica Hargis, focused on identifying barriers faced by individuals transitioning from incarceration to community life and developing solutions to improve outcomes. Members examined systemic challenges such as housing shortages, transportation gaps, service disparities between prisons and jails, and access to critical records.

The workgroup received presentations from the Boyd County Reentry Program, the Reentry and Employment Services Branch, the Chamber Fair Chance Program, and Medicaid Services on the 1115 waiver to improve healthcare continuity. Additional presentations covered identifying reentry barriers across Kentucky from the Department of Corrections, DOC customs and procedures, and the First Day Forward Program, which helps individuals secure identification, benefits, and essential

needs upon release. Dr. Rebecca Asher provided research-based insights into reentry barriers. These inputs shaped the group's workplan, which now includes targeted training, housing and healthcare coordination, and collaborative efforts with the Prearrest/Diversion Workgroup on jail services mapping.

## **Guardianship and Commitment Workgroup**

The Guardianship and Commitment Workgroup is led by Stacy Tapke. Meeting in two distinct subgroups, the Guardianship and Commitment Workgroup addressed statutory, procedural, and resource-related challenges.

The Guardianship Subgroup conducted a statewide survey of county attorneys, judges, and circuit clerks to better understand guardianship practices, applied for a guardianship grant, and reviewed legislative recommendations to adopt person-first language by replacing the term "ward." Members also explored revisions to guardianship-related AOC forms, culminating in the release of AOC-798, the Order Terminating Disability and Restoring Rights, now available on the KCOJ website. They also examined the role of the guardian ad litem, access to court records for individuals under guardianship, and best practices for restoration of rights.

The Commitment Subgroup continued its work on refining KRS 202A, including drafting a process map to improve understanding of the statute. Presentations included Kentucky chapters of the National Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health America on advocacy and commitment programs; Amanda Chapman, a police social worker, on practical challenges in 202A cases; and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental, and Intellectual Disabilities on the State Plan Amendment 1915(i). Members also pursued a Medicaid policy review to ensure coverage suspension rather than termination for individuals admitted to institutions for mental disease.

## **Domestic Violence Workgroup**

The Domestic Violence Workgroup, led by Judge Denise Brown, organized into subgroups to focus on multidisciplinary teams, bench cards for judicial best practices, training and professional development, and domestic violence (DV) advocacy in schools. The bench card subgroup drafted guidance for

cases where petitioners seek to withdraw DV petitions, while the advocacy-in-schools subgroup pursued legislative strategies to strengthen school-based DV services and data collection on teen dating violence.

Presentations from state and national experts, including the Center for Safe Schools and the Kentucky Department of Education, provided data and insight into best practices. The multidisciplinary team subgroup reviewed existing DV resources, explored examples of resource mapping, and evaluated interactive platforms for information-sharing. This work led to the drafting of a framework for improving communication and collaboration among service providers and court professionals engaged in DV cases.

## **Dependency, Neglect and Abuse Workgroup**

The Dependency, Neglect and Abuse Workgroup, led by Judge Marcus Vanover, worked to enhance collaboration between courts and child welfare partners, clarify the role of treatment providers, and strengthen training for attorneys in these cases. Efforts included drafting a bench card to outline treatment provider roles and limitations, developing a best practice guide for courts and child welfare agencies, and revising the DNA training curriculum to better equip new attorneys on mental health and trauma-related issues.

The group planned a second Relationships Matter training series, with topics ranging from compassion fatigue and professionalism to Medication for Opioid Use Disorder, Adverse Childhood Experiences, and high-acuity youth. Members also received a presentation on the Supporting Kentucky Youth program, which informed their ongoing development of tools to promote better system coordination and improved family outcomes.

## **Strengthening Community Response Workgroup**

The Strengthening Community Response Workgroup, led by Wes Butler, pursued strategies to expand behavioral health access in both community and correctional settings. Members completed a survey on Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) and reviewed the EmPATH Model of emergency psychiatric care and the services of



*Dr. Silas Sessions, Executive Director, Office of Kentucky Veterans Services, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs*

Crossroads Crisis Center. They explored primary care integration for MOUD, heard from Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers on addressing healthcare disparities, and reviewed the “Find Help Now” treatment locator tool.

Additional presentations from the Department for Medicaid Services on peer support billing and jail service billing models, the Division of Budgets and Financial Management on Medicaid providers for justice-involved youth, the Kenton County Detention Center on jail screenings and mental health assessments, and QRT National on multidisciplinary “situation tables” informed the workgroup’s priorities. Legislative recommendations were discussed, and the workplan was reviewed to ensure focus on areas of greatest impact, including collaboration with the Prearrest/Diversion Workgroup on the statewide jail survey.

## ***Court Responses Workgroup***

The Court Responses Workgroup, led by Judge Stephanie Burke, advanced efforts to expand and support MHCs, Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT), and other therapeutic court programming across Kentucky. Members explored statutory reforms

to KRS 202A, including psychiatric deterioration provisions, and reviewed barriers in Casey’s Law such as financial burdens on petitioners and difficulties securing evaluators.

The group also examined challenges to driver’s license reinstatement and served as the advisory body for the Mental Health Diversion Initiative, which aims to increase diversion opportunities statewide. Legislative recommendations were developed, and the workgroup continued to assess programming that promotes treatment over incarceration, ensuring that the justice system’s response to behavioral health needs is both humane and effective.

## ***Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Workgroup***

The Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Workgroup, led by Crystal Adams, focused on improving justice system responses to individuals with IDD through education, legislative advocacy, and enhanced communication access. Key initiatives included developing an “Autism in the Courts” approach, reviewing and providing feedback on CIT training curriculum, and examining self-identification models like the Light My Way Program and Yellow Dot Program to improve first responder awareness.

The group worked extensively on legislative recommendations to protect parental rights for individuals with disabilities, culminating in support for Senate Bill 26. A training series was developed and recorded, covering communication access, IDD system overviews, and statutory frameworks such as KRS 202B. By integrating data from the courts and special education systems and collaborating with national partners like The Arc, the workgroup advanced practical tools and policy changes to better support individuals with IDD in Kentucky’s courts.

Collectively, these ten workgroups exemplify the Commission’s commitment to building collaborative, informed, and innovative solutions at the intersection of behavioral health and the justice system. Their combined efforts in 2024 have laid the groundwork for continued progress, expanded access to services, and improved outcomes for individuals, families, and communities across the Commonwealth.

## **Acknowledgment and Farewell to Outgoing Commission Members**

**This year, KJCMH extends its deepest appreciation to the Commission members whose terms of service have concluded. Their dedication, insight, and leadership have left a lasting impact on the Commission's efforts to transform Kentucky's judicial response to individuals with mental health needs, substance use disorders, and intellectual and developmental disabilities.**

**Linda Avery**, Calloway  
Circuit Court Clerk

**Stacy M. Bruner**, Trimble  
County Circuit Court Clerk

**Denise Clayton**, Kentucky  
Court of Appeals Chief  
Judge (ret.)

**Katie C. Comstock**\*,  
Director, Administrative  
Office of the Courts

**Melony Cunningham**,  
Executive Director, NAMI

**Jim Daley**, President,  
Kentucky Jailer's Association

**Stefanie Ebb Kingsley**

**Dominic English**, Contractor  
Supervisor, Office of the  
Commissioner

**Laurie Givens**, Director,  
Administrative Office of the  
Courts

**Nancy Hale**, President and  
CEO, Operation UNITE

**Kerry Harvey**\*, Secretary,  
Justice and Public Safety  
Cabinet

**W. Bryan Hubbard**, Chair  
and Executive Director,  
Kentucky Opioid Abatement  
Advisory Commission

**Sarah Johnson**, Director of  
Addiction Services, Kentucky  
Department of Corrections

**Marta Miranda Straub**,  
Commissioner, Department  
for Community Based  
Services

**Wendy Morris**,  
Commissioner, Department  
for Behavioral Health,  
Development and  
Intellectual Disabilities

**Jenny Oldham**, Hardin  
County Attorney

**Berl Perdue**, Clark County  
Sheriff

**Joe Ross**, Logan County  
Attorney

**Phil Sammons**, Past  
President, Kentucky  
Association of Counties

**Tony Wilther**

\*Executive Committee  
members

Throughout their tenure, these members contributed to shaping policy recommendations, strengthening cross-system collaboration, and advancing innovative practices that will continue to guide the Commission's work for years to come. Their willingness to engage in difficult conversations, champion reform, and bring the perspectives of their agencies and communities into the decision-making process has been invaluable.

As we recognize their service, we also celebrate the many achievements that bear their imprint—whether in the development of statewide training initiatives, the drafting of statutory recommendations, the creation of new tools for judges and court professionals, or the advancement of programs that expand access to treatment and services. Each member leaves behind a legacy of progress and a strong foundation upon which future work will be built.

The Commission extends its heartfelt gratitude to these outgoing members and wishes them continued success in their professional and personal endeavors. Their contributions will remain an enduring part of the Commission's history, and they will always be considered part of the Commission family.

## Commission Membership



The KJCMH is comprised of dedicated leaders from across the Commonwealth who bring their experience, expertise, and passion to the work of transforming Kentucky's judicial and behavioral health systems. Commission members represent the judiciary, state and local government, community organizations, service providers, and individuals with lived experience—each playing a vital role in advancing meaningful reform. The Commission offers its profound gratitude to these members for their unwavering commitment to collaboration, innovation, and system change. Their service reflects a shared vision of creating a more compassionate and effective response for individuals and families across Kentucky.

## Executive Committee

### *Debra Hembree Lambert*

Deputy Chief Justice Debra Hembree Lambert was elected to the Supreme Court of Kentucky in November 2018. Prior to that she served as a Judge at the Kentucky Court of Appeals. Deputy Chief Justice Lambert also served as a Circuit Judge in the Family Court Division for the 28th Judicial Circuit. While a Family Court judge, she created the first drug court in the area, beginning both a juvenile drug court and family drug court. For many years, Deputy Chief Justice

Lambert volunteered in middle schools, dedicating ten weeks each semester to work with at-risk children and families. Today, she volunteers as a certified suicide prevention trainer. In 2022, former Chief Justice Minton appointed Deputy Chief Justice Lambert as Chair of the Commission on Mental Health. In September 2024, her fellow justices elected her as Chief Justice of the Commonwealth for a four-year term that started on January 7, 2025.

### *Hon. Larry Thompson*

Kentucky Court of Appeals Chief Judge Thompson has served as a judge in the Commonwealth of Kentucky for 30 years. He began his career in 1995 as a district judge in Pike County. In 1999, he was elected to the circuit bench, family court division, where he served for 20 years. Judge Thompson was elected to the Court of Appeals in 2018, where he now serves as Chief Judge.



### **Russell Coleman**

Russell Coleman was elected Kentucky's 52nd Attorney General. Born in Paducah, Coleman was raised in Mayfield and then rural Daviess and Logan Counties. Over the last 20 years, Coleman has taken on violent crime and deadly drugs at the highest levels of law enforcement. He earned his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Kentucky. In 2017, he was nominated to be the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Kentucky. Coleman previously served as an Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney in Oldham County and as Senior Advisor and Legal Counsel to U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell. Currently, he serves on the Kentucky State Police Foundation Board.

### **Eric Friedlander**

A lifelong Kentuckian, Secretary Friedlander represents the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. In this capacity he oversees the departments for Public Health, Medicaid Services, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, and more. He has been with CHFS for over 30 years and has worked in numerous roles across the Cabinet. He is the former Chief of Resilience and Community Services for Louisville Metro. Before his professional career, Friedlander earned a bachelor's degree from Antioch College.

### **Keith Jackson**

In February 2024, Keith Jackson was appointed Secretary of the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, after serving as deputy secretary for over two years. His priorities include creating safer communities, protecting law enforcement, reducing recidivism, seeking justice for victims, fighting addiction, and expanding youth rehabilitation. Before joining the Cabinet, Secretary Jackson was the Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs. He served the U.S. Army Reserve, in numerous leadership capacities, for 27 years. In 1991, he began his public service career with the Lexington Fire Department. In June 2012, he made history by becoming the first African American appointed Chief of the Lexington Division of Fire and Emergency Services.

### **Zach Ramsey**

Zach Ramsey is the director of the Administrative Office of the Courts. Prior to joining the Judicial Branch, Zach Ramsey was a program management and technology consultant. He was more than 25 years of experience in government healthcare and is a licensed Kentucky attorney. He previously served in state government for 12 years before moving to the private sector, first as assistant general counsel for the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and then director of the Medicaid Integrity Program. He received his bachelors from Purdue University and juris doctorate degree from the University of Kentucky College of Law.

### **Margaret Forsee**

Margaret Forsee was elected Owen County Circuit Court Clerk in 2012, having started in

the office in 1991 as a deputy, bookkeeper, and chief deputy clerk. She holds an associate degree in business from Lexington Technical Institute. Margaret is President of the Kentucky Association of Circuit Court Clerks (KACCC) and serves on its Executive, Benevolence, Education, and Legislative Committees, as well as the Circuit Court Clerk Conduct Commission. She is a member of the Owen County Chamber of Commerce and Owen County Republican Party, a past treasurer of the Owen County 4-H Council, and a Sunday School teacher at Owenton First Baptist Church. Margaret and her husband, Brian, have two children, Morgan (Adam) and Preston (Maggie), and two grandchildren, Luke and Hudson.

### **John. D. Minton, Jr. (ret.)**

John D. Minton Jr. of Bowling Green was elected to the Supreme Court of Kentucky in 2006 and reelected to another eight-year term in 2014. His fellow justices elected him for a four-year term as Chief Justice in 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020. He is only the second chief justice in Kentucky to be chosen to serve four terms. Chief Justice Minton was in private practice for 15 years before serving as a circuit judge from 1992 to 2003 and a court of appeals judge from 2003 to 2006.



# Commission Members

## Van Ingram

Van Ingram joined ODCP in November 2004 with the mission of coordinating Kentucky's substance abuse control efforts. Ingram served with the Maysville Kentucky Police Department for more than 23 years, the last six as Chief of Police, and was named "Kentucky Chief of the Year" in 2001. He is a certified law enforcement instructor and has trained officers across the state on a variety of topics for Chiefs, Sheriffs, and command staff.



## Crystal Adams

Crystal Adams, Director of the Division of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DDID), has been with DDID since 2016 and with the Cabinet for Health



and Family Services (CHFS) since 2014. Prior to CHFS, Crystal worked at a community mental health center for 12 years. Currently, she works with state facilities; coordinates crisis and other state-funded programs, as well as the PASRR program; and manages the administration of SCL and Michelle P. waivers. She graduated from Georgetown College with Bachelor of Arts degrees in Psychology and Sociology and graduated from University of Wisconsin-Platteville with a Master of Science degree in Criminal Justice, with a specialization in Victim and Offender Services.

**Senator Julie Raque Adams**  
Senator Julie Raque Adams represents Kentucky's 36th Senate District in eastern Jefferson County. She is the Chair of the Licensing, Occupations and Administrative Regulations Committee. Senator Adams serves as the Co-Chair of the newly formed Medicaid Oversight and Advisory Board. Additionally, Senator Adams is a member of the Banking and Insurance Committee, Health Services

Committee, State and Local Government Committee, and the Administrative Regulation Review Subcommittee.

## Whitney P. Allen, Jr.

On August 4, 2021, Governor Andy Beshear appointed Whitney Allen as Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Veteran Affairs. Commissioner Allen is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel with 25 years of combined military service. Before assuming his current position, Allen was the Chief of Staff and Deputy Commissioner of the Department. He is an advocate for veteran benefits and inclusion in the workforce.

## Rebecca Pender Baum

Dr. Pender Baum is an Associate Professor of Counselor Education at Murray State University and the owner of Bluegrass Family Counseling, LLC. Before becoming a professor, she worked as a counselor with children, adolescents, and adults at Family Services Alliance of Southeast Idaho. She has been a licensed counselor for 14 years and has served in state, regional, and national level counseling leadership positions.

## Cameron Blau

Judge Cameron Blau was elected judge of the 17th district court in November 2016. Prior to his judicial career, Judge Blau practiced as a general practitioner and as Chief Assistant County Attorney in Campbell County, and as city attorney for Silver Grove. In 2010, Judge Blau won Assistant County Attorney of the year, and in 2011, he attained an award in the Protection of Elders at Risk of Abuse in Northern Kentucky.



### **Terry Brooks**

Terry Brooks assumed leadership of Kentucky Youth Advocates in 2005, creating policy solutions for Kentucky's children around juvenile justice, early childhood education, K-12 education, health, child welfare, and economic well-being. Prior to his current position, Brooks spent twenty-five years as a public-school administrator. Additionally, he served as Senior Director of Education Reform for Boston-based think tank Community Training and Assistance Center.

### **Denise DeBerry Brown**

Judge Denise DeBerry Brown was elected Family Court Judge in 2014 and reelected in 2022. Judge Brown currently presides as Jefferson Family Recovery Court Judge. Prior to her time in the judiciary, Judge Brown worked as a prosecutor with the Commonwealth Attorney's Office and as a juvenile prosecutor with the Jefferson County Attorney's Office before beginning private practice. Judge Brown presided over the first Family Recovery Court (FRC) in Kentucky. She currently serves as the Chief Family Recovery Court Judge in Jefferson County and serves on the FRC Executive and Advisory Boards.

### **Stephanie Pearce Burke**

Judge Stephanie Pearce Burke has served in Jefferson County since her election in 2010. She is President of the Kentucky District Judges Association and an Advisory Board member for the Claude W. Pettit College of Law at Ohio Northern University. She presides over Jefferson County's Misdemeanor Drug Court and Kentucky's first Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) program for seriously mentally ill adults.

### **Phillip Burnett, Jr.**

Colonel Phillip Burnett, Jr. is a 28-year veteran of the Kentucky State Police. He has held every sworn rank within the agency and was appointed Commissioner of Kentucky State Police by Governor Andy Beshear in April 2021. A Bell County native, Commissioner Burnett attended Union College in Barbourville, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in science and a teaching certification before joining the Kentucky State Police.

### **Shawn Butler**

Shawn Butler has served in law enforcement for 37 years, with 15 of those years as a police

chief. For the past four years, Butler has served as Executive Director for the Kentucky Association of Police, overseeing the operation of the association and its employees. Additionally, he is a member of the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council, which provides training to officers in the commonwealth.

### **Wesley Butler**

Wesley Butler is a healthcare attorney based in Lexington, Kentucky. His practice focuses on advising healthcare providers on matters that implicate safety, quality, and reimbursement. Wes previously served as General Counsel for Kentucky's Health Cabinet and has served as a Special Justice to Kentucky's Supreme Court. Wes has also worked with the International Justice Mission and traveled to India to assist attorneys investigating child slave labor. He is serving on the Commission as a representative of the Kentucky Hospital Association.

### **J.D. Chaney**

J.D. Chaney is the Executive Director/CEO of the Kentucky League of Cities. He has spent more than twenty years advocating for Kentucky's cities in legislative, judicial, and executive matters. J.D. holds a law degree from the University of Kentucky J. David Rosenberg College of Law, a Master of Business Administration degree from Eastern Kentucky University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Economics from the University of Montana. J.D. resides in Richmond with his wife, Colleen, and their two daughters, Adaleen and Evaleen.



### **Christopher Cohron**

Judge Christopher Cohron currently serves as Circuit Court Judge for the First Division of the Eighth Judicial Circuit, which encompasses Edmonson and Warren Counties. Prior to becoming a Circuit Judge, Cohron served as the Commonwealth's Attorney for the Eighth Judicial Circuit from 2005-2022. Chris has served on numerous commissions and task forces regarding the Courts and Criminal Justice System over the last two decades.

### **Matthew Cole**

Kentucky Commissioner Matthew Cole enlisted in the U.S. Army after high school, serving in

Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Following his military service, he attended the University of Kentucky. Matt's career began in the automotive industry, where he specialized in contracts and procurement with YH America, Inc., before transitioning to Ruggles Sign Company as Purchasing Manager, overseeing premium storefront signage for multiple Fortune 100 companies. In 2009, he joined the Finance Cabinet and later became Senior Operations Manager for Xerox. In 2015, Matt accepted the role of Assistant Director of Driver Licensing in the Transportation Cabinet, advancing to Director in 2016 and Commissioner in 2020. He resides in Versailles with his

wife, Laura, and their two children, Reagan and Alex.

### **Andrew Cooley**

Dr. Andrew Cooley is a psychiatrist affiliated with Eastern State Hospital at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. Dr. Cooley obtained his medical degree from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in 1987. He is certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology in both Psychiatry and Forensic Psychiatry.

### **J. Foster Cotthoff**

Judge J. Foster Cotthoff has served as District Judge for Christian County since his



election in 2014. He serves on statewide committees dealing with Pretrial Release/Services, Civil Law Reform, RESTORE, Search Warrant Reform, and the Implementation of SB90. He is a graduate of the National Judicial College's "Leadership for Judges" program in Reno, NV, and currently presides as the Veterans Treatment Court judge in Christian County District and Circuit Courts.

### ***Cookie Crews***

Cookie Crews was named commissioner of the Kentucky of Corrections in May 2020 after 36 years with the department. A native of the town of Hardy in Pike County, Cookie Crews began her Corrections career in January 1984 as a correctional officer at the Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women. She held many positions including sergeant, classification and treatment officer, and unit administrator. She was promoted to deputy warden at Luther Luckett Correctional Complex. In 2012, she was promoted to administrator of the Health Services Division, providing

administrative oversight for the entire medical mission of the department.

### ***Lisa DeJaco Crutcher***

Lisa DeJaco Crutcher is the CEO of Catholic Charities of Louisville, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization that carries out the social ministry of the Catholic Church in central Kentucky. Before assuming this role in April 2017, Lisa spent 17 years in private practice at Wyatt, Tarrant & Combs LLP. A sixth generation Louisvillian, Lisa holds degrees from Furman University (B.A.), St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology (M.A.), and the University of Virginia School of Law (J.D.).

### ***Raoul Cunningham***

Raoul Cunningham was elected President of the Louisville Branch NAACP in 2004 and President of the Kentucky State Conference of the NAACP in 2014. Cunningham attended Howard University. He serves on the Kentucky Advisory Committee for Help America Vote and was inducted into the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame in 2003 for his civil rights

activities, which have spanned from 1957 to the present day.

### ***Lesa Dennis***

Lesa Dennis was appointed Commissioner of the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) on June 16, 2023, and has more than 28 years of experience with the agency. She has served in a variety of roles over the years, beginning her career as a frontline social worker with the department in Eastern Kentucky. Commissioner Dennis oversees statewide programs in child and adult protection, foster care and adoption, public assistance, child care, state guardianship, and other human services that support Kentucky's most vulnerable citizens. She earned her bachelor's degree in social work from Morehead State University and her master's degree in social work from the University of Kentucky. Throughout her career, she has been dedicated to serving vulnerable populations and leading DCBS initiatives that engage families and community partners in a process where every voice matters.

### ***Casey Ellis***

Casey Ellis is the appointed Executive Director of the Council of Area Development Districts





and the Kentucky Association of District Directors. He is the former Chair of the KCADD and served on the Board of the Northern Kentucky ADD. He has held several local government positions including County Judge/Executive and Magistrate in Owen County as well as sitting on the Owenton City Council.

### ***Kelly Foster***

Kelly A. Foster, EdD, is a Kentucky native and brings 30 years of dedicated service to public education in the Commonwealth. Her career has included roles as a teacher, principal, and instructional supervisor, where she has worked tirelessly to support student success across the state. Since 2013, Dr. Foster has served as the Associate Commissioner of the Office of Continuous Improvement

and Support at the Kentucky Department of Education. In this capacity, she leads initiatives aimed at fostering excellence and equity in education, ensuring all Kentucky students have access to high-quality learning opportunities.

### ***Jim Flynn***

Dr. Jim Flynn serves as Executive Director of Kentucky Association of School Superintendents (KASS), where he provides professional assistance and leadership and leads the Association's advocacy efforts. Dr. Flynn served 16 years as Superintendent of Simpson County Schools where he was recognized as the 2015 Kentucky Superintendent of the Year. He previously served as a high school principal, assistant principal, and science teacher.

### ***Rebecca Frost***

As the Facility Director for Western State Hospital, Rebecca Frost is the first woman and nurse to be named director in the facility's history. She has a Master of Science in Nursing and a Master of Business Administration with a focus in Healthcare Management. During her time at Western State Hospital, Frost has functioned as a direct care nurse, Quality Performance Coordinator, Nurse Executive, and Associate Facility Director for Clinical Services.

### ***Todd Gray***

In July of 2019, Todd was elected by the KBC Mission Board to become the Executive Director-Treasurer. Before that, he served with the Kentucky Baptist Convention as a Regional Consultant in the West Kentucky

region. He also served as Team Leader for Evangelism, Church Planting, and Collegiate Ministry for KBC. He has completed both Masters of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

### **Tyler Green**

Floyd District Judge Tyler Green brings with him a deep commitment to improving outcomes for individuals navigating mental health and substance use challenges in the justice system. Judge Green currently presides over both the Drug Court and Mental Health Court in Floyd County. He also serves on the Commonwealth's Specialty Courts Certification Board and the Judicial Advisory Board, reflecting his ongoing dedication to recovery-oriented judicial practices. His work emphasizes compassion, accountability, and connection to community-based supports.

### **Christopher Griffith**

Christopher Griffith is a Clinical Director at the Christian Appalachian Project and has worked with them since 1996. Griffith has served as President of the Kentucky Mental Health Counselors Association in 2017 and served eight years on the Kentucky Board of Licensed Professional Counselors, two of them as chair. Griffith obtained his master's degree in Mental Health Counseling and his bachelor's degree in psychology at Eastern Kentucky University. He resides in Paintsville.

### **Nan Hanley**

Nan Hanley is the Deputy Director at the Kentucky Access to Justice Commission. She has worked in the non-profit sector for the past

30 years, including the Access to Justice Foundation and the Office of Kentucky Legal Services Programs. In addition to her duties as the Deputy Director, at the Commission, Ms. Hanley organizes and coordinates both statewide and regional CLE training events for legal aid staff.

### **Erica Hargis**

Erica Hargis is the director of the Division of Probation of Parole underneath the Department of Corrections. Before her current position, Hargis started with the Department of Corrections in 2009, rising to become Assistant Director for the newly created Division of Reentry Services in March 2018. Hargis graduated from Western Kentucky University with a bachelor's degree in psychology and criminology, followed by a master's in justice administration from the University of Louisville in 2010.

### **Glenda Harrison**

Glenda J. Harrison is the Executive Director of the Kentucky Access to Justice

Commission. Prior to assuming this position, Ms. Harrison served as Advocacy Director for Legal Aid of the Bluegrass for 10 years. Ms. Harrison attended Northern Kentucky University's Chase College of Law, earning her Juris Doctor in 1982. She graduated from Florida State University with a bachelor's degree in psychology in 1972.

### **Jim Henderson**

Jim Henderson is the Executive Director/CEO of the Kentucky Association of Counties (KACo). As the voice for Kentucky's 120 counties, KACo represents the interests of more than 1,500 elected county officials across the Commonwealth. Additionally, KACo provides training and education, insurance, financing services, research and legal assistance, and other services to counties and their political subdivisions. Prior to joining KACo in 2018, Henderson served as Simpson County Judge/Executive for nearly two decades.





### **Tanisha A. Hickerson**

Tanisha A. Hickerson is a Jefferson County District Court Judge in Louisville, Kentucky. Judge Hickerson serves as Chair of the Criminal Justice Commission; member of the Opportunity Network, a program for successful reentry after incarceration; and member of the Charles W. Anderson, Jr. Bar Association. Judge Hickerson earned her bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Louisville and earned her Juris Doctor from the University of Kentucky Rosenberg College of Law.

### **Yvette Hourigan**

Yvette Hourigan is the director of the Kentucky Lawyer Assistance Program, which provides confidential assistance to all Kentucky law students, lawyers, and judges with mental health issues. Ms. Hourigan is a licensed

attorney, a Certified Employee Assistance Professional, and an Adult Peer Support Specialist. Ms. Hourigan is the 2023-2024 chair of the ABA Commission on Lawyers Assistance Programs. She is a national leader in the Lawyer Wellbeing movement focusing on mental health issues like substance use disorder, depression, and suicide prevention.

### **Lindsey Jasinski**

Dr. Jasinski has been with UK Healthcare since 2010, serving in various clinical and leadership roles. She has served as Director of Psychology Services at Eastern State Hospital, Director of Substance Abuse Treatment Services in the Department of Psychiatry, and currently chief administrative officer of Eastern State Hospital and UK's EmPATH unit. She completed her PhD in

Clinical Psychology in 2010 and master's in health administration in 2021, both from the University of Kentucky.

### **Lisa Payne Jones**

Judge Jones has presided over Daviess Circuit Court, Division II since 2019. She presides over Adult Drug Court and Mental Health Court. Previously, she served on the district bench from 2001-2019, where she served on the Juvenile Justice Task Force, the Juvenile Oversight Council, Juvenile Court and Family Court Rules Committees, and the RESTORE Leadership Team.

### **William "Bo" Leach**

Judge William "Bo" Leach has served as Judge of the 23rd Judicial District since 2009. Prior to taking the bench, he practiced law with the firms of Davis & Neal, and Davis Law in

Richmond and Irvine. Additionally, he was the Chief Assistant Estill County Attorney, a Child Support Enforcement Attorney for the Cabinet of Health and Family Services, and he was an Adjunct Professor at Eastern Kentucky University.

### ***Lisa Lee***

Lisa Lee is the Commissioner for the Department for Medicaid Services, serves as Program Director for the Kentucky Children's Health Insurance Program, and oversees Kentucky's State Based Exchange, kynect. She has over 25 years of experience with Medicaid and Children's Health programs. Much of her career has been spent in Kentucky government, specifically with the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. During her tenure, Commissioner Lee has served in a variety of roles within the Department for Medicaid Services, including Member Services Representative, Director of Provider Services, Policy Analyst, Deputy Commissioner, and Commissioner. Additionally, Commissioner Lee served as the President of the National Association of Medicaid Directors (NAMD) from April 2024 to April 2025. She currently serves as the Immediate Past President on the Board of Directors for NAMD, as well as being a member of the Child and Family Health Steering Committee for the National Association of Health Policy and a Health Policy Advisor for the Congressional Budget Office.

### ***Jennifer Leibson***

Judge Jennifer Leibson is a judge in Jefferson District Court, where she previously presided over the Mental Health dockets for a period of two years. She was

also the immediate past judge over Jefferson County's Mental Health diversion docket. Prior to being elected, she worked for the Jefferson County Attorney's office where she was the Division Chief over the Mental Inquest and Guardianship Division for six years.

### ***Joshua Lindblom***

Joshua Lindblom is the Hardin County Jailer and currently serves as the President of the Kentucky Jailers Association. In addition, he chairs the association's Legislative Committee, contributing to policy and legislative efforts statewide. A Kentucky Colonel, Joshua has been an active member of the Valley Creek Volunteer Fire Department for 24 years and is also a member of the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #40 in Elizabethtown. Before his election as Hardin County Jailer in 2019, Joshua dedicated his career to public service, working at the Hardin County Detention Center and the Hardin County Sheriff's Office. His extensive experience reflects his commitment to the safety and well-being of his community.

### ***Rabbi Shlomo Litvin***

Rabbi Shlomo Litvin and his wife serve as directors of Chabad of the Bluegrass, eastern Kentucky's branch of Chabad Lubavitch, the largest worldwide Jewish organization. Litvin and his wife, emissaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, also run Chabad's Jewish Student Center at the University of Kentucky. Litvin serves as a Chaplain for the Kentucky General Assembly, on multiple state commissions and boards, and as Chairman of the Kentucky Jewish Council. He also volunteers as a religious guide for inmates and hospital patients across Kentucky. Rabbi Litvin is a graduate of



Louisville Jewish Day School and Tomchei Tmimim in Israel.

### ***David Livingston***

Scott County Magistrate David Livingston currently serves as president of the Kentucky Association of Counties (KACo), having been sworn in during KACo's 49th annual conference. David Livingston is in his fourth term representing Scott County's 7th District. Prior to his role at KACo, he served as president of the Kentucky Magistrates and Commissioners Association. Additionally, he is a member of the KACo Insurance Agency Board and the Unemployment Insurance Board. He graduated Georgetown College is an executive with Houchens Insurance Group. David Livingston is passionate about local government and strives to make a positive impact not only in Scott County but also across the Commonwealth.

### ***Amy Luttrell***

Amy Luttrell is President & CEO of Goodwill Industries of Kentucky, which assists people to find pathways out of poverty. Luttrell has served local Goodwill organizations in four states, returning to Kentucky in 2014. During her career she



has held leadership roles in assisting people with mental health issues, substance use disorders, intellectual disabilities and those who are unhoused. She serves on the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce board, the Employment First Council, and several other boards and committees.

### **Cole Adams Maier**

Judge Cole Adams Maier is the Chief Circuit Court Judge of the 25th Circuit, Madison and Clark Counties. Before her appointment and election as a Circuit Court Judge, she was elected to the District Court bench in the 25th District. Judge Maier is the presiding judge for Clark Circuit Court Drug Court (a certified drug court) and the 25th Circuit Mental Health Court. She recently served as the Co-Chair for the Specialty Court Certification Advisory Committee and is currently a member of the Specialty Courts Judicial Advisory Committee.

### **Katherine Marks**

Dr. Katherine Marks serves as the Commissioner for the Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. As a behavioral scientist, Dr. Marks serves as a steward of the departmental mission to promote health and well-being by facilitating recovery for people whose lives have been affected by mental illness and substance use; support people with intellectual or other developmental disabilities; and build resilience for all. Previously, Dr. Marks served as the Kentucky Opioid Response Effort Project Director, leading state, community, and organizational-level strategies to address the overdose epidemic. Dr. Marks received a doctorate in Experimental Psychology from the University of Kentucky.

### **Cora McNabb**

Cora McNabb, Executive Director of the Office of Vocational

Rehabilitation, graduated from Indiana University. Prior to taking a state position with the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, she worked in the nonprofit environment for 14 years. She has over 30 years of experience in the field of rehabilitation in the areas of workforce initiatives, management/administration, and grant writing. For most of her career, she has provided direct oversight of employment programs for individuals with disabilities.

### **David Meade**

Speaker Pro Tempore David Meade has served in the House of Representatives since 2013. Meade is serving his third term as Speaker Pro Tempore. Prior to his election to Speaker Pro Tempore, Meade served as House Majority Caucus Chair. Meade is an outspoken advocate for Kentucky children and families, sponsoring multiple legislative packages aimed at improving the

state's foster care and adoption programs as well as services to families in crisis.

### **Amy Hale Milliken**

Amy Hale Milliken is the 2022-2023 President of the Kentucky Association of Counties. She attended Western Kentucky University and Salmon P. Chase College of Law, beginning her career as a prosecutor in 1996 as an Assistant Warren County Attorney. Amy was elected Warren County Attorney in November 2004 and has consistently served in the Office through multiple terms. Amy is the first woman to be appointed and elected as Warren County Attorney.

### **Kimberly Moser**

Representative Kimberly Moser has served in the Kentucky General Assembly since 2017 and has chaired the Health Services Committee since 2019. She founded and served as the Director of Drug Control Policy in Northern Kentucky from 2014-2018, and she currently serves on the Northern Kentucky Drug Control Policy Board. Prior to her legislative experience, Representative Moser obtained degrees from Spalding University and the University of Kentucky. She also served years as a NICU and flight nurse.

### **Dan Mosley**

Dan Mosley is the president of the Kentucky Association of Counties (KACo), having taken the oath of office during KACo's 50th annual conference in Louisville. Elected to public office in 2014, Mosley is a lifelong Harlan Countian serving his third term as judge/executive. As a member of NACo's Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities initiative and the NACo Opioid Solutions



Leadership Network, Mosley has worked with regional and national leaders on issues relevant to the Bluegrass State.

### **Kevin R. Mullins**

Judge Kevin R. Mullins is Kentucky's 47th Judicial District Court Judge, serving Letcher County. Judge Mullins has set forth to implement practices that promote substance use treatment for justice-involved individuals. In 2018, he helped create the Community Liaison Program which promotes early identification and linkage to treatment services statewide. Collectively, the Community Liaison Program has assisted 20,501 individuals in obtaining inpatient residential treatment for substance use disorders.

### **Melissa Moore Murphy**

Judge Melissa Murphy was appointed to her position in 2020 and elected to the same position in November 2022. Prior to her experience as a judge, Judge Murphy worked as an Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney in Fayette County and as a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney for the U.S. Attorney's Office. Judge Murphy

obtained a bachelor's degree from the University of Kentucky in 1998 and a law degree from the University of Kentucky Rosenberg College of Law in 2001.

### **Patrick Padgett**

Patrick Padgett is the CEO/Executive Vice President of the Kentucky Medical Association (KMA). Prior to serving as the CEO, Mr. Padgett was the Director of Socioeconomic Affairs/Staff Counsel for the KMA. Originally from Somerset, Mr. Padgett is a graduate of the University of Kentucky and the University of Kentucky Rosenberg College of Law. Prior to joining the KMA staff, he served two tours in the United States Navy Judge Advocate Generals Corps.

### **Rebecca K. Phillips**

Rebecca K. Phillips has served as the Circuit Judge for the 37th Judicial Circuit since 2006. Throughout her tenure, Judge Phillips has presided over Drug Court, establishing a program that has expanded to provide access to Circuit and District Court participants in Carter, Elliott, and Morgan Counties. Judge Phillips is a Special District Judge for



Drug Court and was a member of the RESTORE Leadership Team. Before taking the bench, Judge Phillips was in private practice.

### **Damon Preston**

Damon Preston has worked as a public defender for more than 30 years and has served as Kentucky's Public Advocate since 2017. After graduating from Transylvania University and Harvard Law School, Damon began his legal career as a public defender with the Legal Aid Society in New York City before joining Kentucky's Department of Public Advocacy in 1997. He has represented indigent accused clients in twenty-four Kentucky counties and before the Court of Appeals and Supreme Court of Kentucky.

### **Brenda Rosen**

Brenda Rosen, MSW, CSW, ACHP-SW, is the Executive Director of

the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) - Kentucky Chapter. With forty years in the social work profession, Rosen has worked in mental and physical healthcare, taught social work on the college level for 10 years, and considers her advocacy work with NASW-Kentucky Chapter as the culmination of all her social work experience.

### **Steve Shannon**

Steve Shannon is the Executive Director of the Kentucky Association of Regional Programs, Inc. (KARP). KARP is a trade association of eleven (11) of the fourteen (14) Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs), which are the behavioral health public safety net of all Kentuckians. Mr. Shannon has been at KARP since 1997 with exception of two (2) years during which time he served as a Division Director and then Deputy Commissioner of the

Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities.

### **Jonathan Shell**

Jonathan Shell, a fifth-generation farmer, was elected Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner on November 7, 2023. He and his father operate Shell Farms and Greenhouses in Garrard County, where they raise cattle and grow flowers, corn, and pumpkins. Shell's administration aims to secure a bright future for Kentucky agriculture, focusing on "food, faith, and family." Previously, Shell served as the youngest member of the Kentucky House of Representatives, becoming the state's first Republican House Majority Floor Leader. During his time with the House of Representatives, Shell developed and executed legislative strategies to pass policies into law that focused

on job creation and support for farmers. He lives in Lancaster with his wife and their four children, and he serves as Sunday School Director at Pilot Knob Missionary Baptist Church.

### **Koleen Slusher**

Dr. Koleen R. Slusher, DSW, LCSW, serves as the facility director at Kentucky Correctional Psychiatric Center (KCPC), which operates as Kentucky's sole forensic psychiatric hospital. Previously, Koleen served as the division director of behavioral health at the Department for Behavioral Health and Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (BHDID) where she was the co-principal investigator for statewide grants and oversaw the funding and programming aspects of behavioral health services.

### **Shain Stephens**

Sheriff Shain Stephens was elected as the Harrison County Sheriff on May 20th, 2014. He was sworn into office on August 1st, 2014, following the early retirement of his predecessor, Sheriff Bruce Hampton. Sheriff Stephens began his law enforcement career in 1988 as an officer with Kentucky Vehicle Enforcement. In 1994, he transitioned to become a trooper with the Kentucky State Police. During his time with the Kentucky State Police, Stephens served in various roles, including positions at The Kentucky State Police Academy, as a D.A.R.E Officer, and as a Public Affairs Officer for KSP Post Six in Dry Ridge, Kentucky.

### **Tom B. Stephens**

Tom Stephens became CEO of the Kentucky Association of Health Plans (KAHP) in January 2021. Previously, he served as Secretary



of the Kentucky Personnel Cabinet, where he managed the state's largest self-funded health insurance plan, led workforce planning initiatives, and oversaw a \$1.6 billion annual payroll. His private sector experience includes roles as Corporate Counsel for Alltech and founder of Stephens Enterprises, a consulting firm specializing in business solutions and legal services. He also co-founded the Gilroy Group, focusing on residential real estate management and investment. A graduate of Tulane University and Loyola University School of Law, Tom was selected as a U.S. Presidential Management Fellow, concentrating on regulatory compliance and maritime law. He is also a recent graduate of the GLI Health Enterprise Network Fellows Program.

### **John Lindsay Tackett**

Judge John Tackett is a graduate of the University of Chicago and the University of Kentucky Rosenberg College of Law. Judge Tackett was a trial and appellate attorney, who formerly practiced law with Phillips, Parker, Orberson, and Arnett LLP and then owned his own law office. Elected to the bench in 2018, Judge Tackett

currently serves as Fayette District Court Judge and presides over a nationally recognized Fayette Mental Health Treatment Criminal Diversion Court.

### **Stacy Tapke**

Stacy Tapke was elected to Kenton County Attorney in 2014 after serving 10 years as an Assistant County Attorney, where her duties included representing the Commonwealth in guardianship jury trials and assisting families with Casey's law and mental health petitions. She is the first woman in Kenton County's history to hold this office. She is a former president of the Kentucky County Attorney's Association and former member of the Kentucky Prosecutors Advisory Council.

### **Diane Thompson**

Diane has 55 years of continuous service in the Nelson Circuit Clerk's office. She was appointed and served under Chief Justice Robert Stephens as Chair of the Staffing Task Force and continued that role under Chief Justices Lambert and Minton as well. She was also commissioned as a charter member of the Governor's Council on Domestic Violence. Diane was elected President of



the KY Association of Circuit Court Clerks (KACCC) in 1995-1996 and again in 2007-2008. Diane has served in many leadership roles on her mission to help citizens on the front line. Currently, she serves on the KACCC President's Advisory Council, Education Committee and as Chair of the KACCC Technology Committee.

### ***Jordan Turner***

Jordan Turner serves as the Boone County Attorney. She earned her bachelor's degree in Speech Communication from Northern Kentucky University in 2005 and graduated from NKU Chase College of Law in 2008. Jordan has previously served as an Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney and a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney. She has also worked with a faith-based nonprofit human rights organization in Washington, D.C., which investigates and

prosecutes human trafficking cases overseas.

### ***Marcus Vanover***

Judge Marcus Vanover has been a Family Court Judge since September 2013. He has served as a judge for Adult Drug Court and currently presides over Family Recovery Court. Prior to taking the bench, Judge Vanover served as an Assistant Pulaski County Attorney from 2005 to 2013. In this role, he was responsible for prosecuting dependency, neglect, and abuse cases; juvenile drug court; adult guardianship cases; and involuntary hospitalization cases for mental illness, mental retardation, and Casey's Law petitions.

### ***Thomas Vicini***

Thomas Vicini, President and CEO for Operation UNITE, manages all substance use prevention, education, treatment, recovery, and law enforcement initiatives

for the Kentucky-based anti-drug non-profit. He previously served as Deputy Director/ Human Resources Manager for eight years and as a Coalition Coordinator for 17 years. Prior to UNITE, he served as mayor for 13 years, City Councilman for 12 years, and worked in various coal mining industry capacities for 25 years. With a passion for youth, Tom has been a volunteer baseball coach for 46 years and was recipient of the Commissioner's Play Healthy "National Coach of the Year" award by Partnership to End Addiction and Major League Baseball Charities.

### ***Ashli Watts***

Ashli Watts was named President and CEO of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce in 2019. She joined the Chamber in 2012 as Vice President of Public Affairs. In this role, she helped pass

felony expungement, right to work, and workers' compensation legislation. Prior to joining the Chamber, she worked at the Kentucky Bar Association and the Legislative Research Commission.

### **John J. Wernert**

Dr. John J. Wernert has 38 years of experience as a psychiatrist, geriatrician and healthcare policy leader in Kentucky and Indiana. He has served as Secretary of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) and held leadership positions in the AMA and the American Psychiatric Association. Dr. Wernert joined Norton Healthcare as Executive Medical Director for behavioral medicine, working with Norton to build access to medical, psychiatric and addictions services in underserved areas of Louisville and southern Indiana.

### **Whitney Westerfield**

Former Senator Whitney Westerfield, first elected in 2013, served as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee for all three terms in office, and also served as a member of the Veterans, Military Affairs and Public Protection Committee; Natural Resources and Energy Committee, the Child Welfare Oversight and Advisory Committee; the Commission on Race and Access to Opportunity; and as Co-Chair of the Juvenile Justice Oversight Council. In January of 2021, Senator Westerfield was appointed a national Co-Chair of the Law, Criminal Justice, and Public Safety Standing Committee with the National Conference of State Legislatures and served on the NCSL Executive Committee. Following his public service, Westerfield joined LifeSkills, Inc., one of Kentucky's leading



behavioral health providers, as Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs.

### **Randy White**

White began his career in corrections in 1996 and held various leadership roles before becoming Warden of the Kentucky State Penitentiary in 2012, where he implemented a behavioral program and expanded evidence-based programming by 60%. Appointed Deputy Commissioner of Adult Institutions in 2018, White oversaw Kentucky's 13 state prisons, introducing Narcan training, inmate tablets, and expanded prison programming. He played a key role in prison expansions and new facility designs. After 28 years of service, White retired in 2023 and was appointed Commissioner of Juvenile Justice in 2024. A Purple Heart recipient, he is also a veteran of the Kentucky Army National Guard. He holds two bachelor's degrees from Eastern Kentucky University.

### **Carrie Ovey Wiggins**

Carrie Ovey-Wiggins is the Commonwealth's Attorney for the 56th Judicial Circuit. She has held this position since January 2015, following eight years of service as an Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney. She is a member of

the Commonwealth Attorney's Association Executive Committee and the Prosecutors Advisory Council.

### **Marc Woods**

Dr. Marc Woods is a nurse executive with over 30 years of experience in behavioral health, specializing in suicide prevention, safe workplace practices, and reducing the use of seclusion and restraint. He has held various roles in education, clinical management, and administrative leadership. Currently serving as the Chief Nursing Officer at University of Kentucky HealthCare and Eastern State Hospital, Dr. Woods has implemented numerous patient and nurse safety initiatives alike.

### **Brian Wright**

Brian Wright is the Commonwealth's Attorney for the 29th Judicial Circuit, which consists of Adair and Casey County. He began prosecuting in 1998 and has spent approximately 22 years as a felony prosecutor. Wright earned his bachelor's degree in government and economics at Centre College before obtaining his juris doctorate from the University of Kentucky Rosenberg College of Law.

## Closing Reflections



The 2024 year marked significant progress for the Commission. System reforms were advanced, statewide training initiatives were launched, and collaborative partnerships continued to strengthen the impact of this work. These accomplishments demonstrate what is possible when courts, agencies, and communities come together with a shared commitment to meaningful change.

The work, however, is not complete. Continued collaboration is essential, and all professionals and individuals with lived experience are encouraged to take part in this effort. There is room for every voice in this mission, and participation is welcomed at all levels. To learn more or to connect with the Commission, please contact [JCMH@kycourts.net](mailto:JCMH@kycourts.net).

The coming year will bring a transition in leadership. In January 2025, Justice Robert B. Conley will assume the role of Commission Chair as he begins his tenure as Deputy Chief Justice. Deep

appreciation is extended to Deputy Chief Justice Debra Hembree Lambert for her exceptional service as Chair during this formative period, and her continued leadership as she assumes the role of Chief Justice of Kentucky will further strengthen the Commission's vision.

Gratitude is also extended to the Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts for providing Commission staff and to the Office of Statewide Programs for embedding the Commission's mission into their ongoing work. Their support and commitment have been vital to advancing these efforts across the Commonwealth.

With a strong foundation established, 2025 offers an opportunity to build upon the progress achieved, expand engagement, and continue shaping a judicial system that responds with compassion, collaboration, and innovation.





Kentucky Judicial Commission on  
**MENTAL HEALTH**