

**A visit with Senator Givens**



Photo submitted

Greensburg City Councilman Mark Judd, left, met with Senator David Givens of Greensburg on Wednesday, February 25, 2026 in Senator Givens' office in Frankfort to discuss citizens' concerns.

*Representative Bivens' Update:*

**House approves \$31 billion budget prioritizing education, healthcare, public safety, and community stability**

State Representative Ryan Bivens

The Kentucky House of Representatives took a major step with the passage of the House version of the state's two-year spending plan, House Bill 500 HCS, on Thursday, February 26. The bill reflects a focus on making state government more efficient in order to focus on priority areas like education, healthcare, public safety, and community stability.

As its sponsor advised all along, the budget that passed was substantially different from the version filed in late January. In the weeks since it was filed, budget review subcommittees and staff gathered input from stakeholders and crafted a version that intentionally allocates taxpayer resources in ways that preserve and strengthen essential public services without overextending government. While the budget process is far from finished, this committee substitute represents a strong next step.

The two-year, \$31.56 billion plan protects the state's core priorities. It provides an increase for per-pupil SEEK funding, and holds funding Family Resource and Youth Service Centers, Medicaid, juvenile justice, corrections, and programs serving veterans at current rates. Educational programs with measurable results, such as Read to Achieve, extended school programs, and Jobs for America's Graduates, also remain protected.

It sets the stage to trim outdated programs, eliminate duplicate

grants and incentives, reduce unnecessary administrative costs and consulting contracts, and end programs that lack measurable results. At the same time, it recognizes opportunities for services to be delivered more effectively by families, businesses, and community organizations. The measure calls for budget reductions across several cabinets and programs, including a 3% reduction in executive branch spending each year. Agencies are given flexibility to identify where reductions can be made. By streamlining government operations and right-sizing expenditures, the state can free up funding to benefit Kentucky families and communities.

The plan also addresses employee benefits by funding the Kentucky Employees Health Plan (KEHP) at actuarially determined levels, with a 14% increase in cost in the first year and an additional 10% in the second year. Lawmakers continue to request the data behind the KEHP estimates, as well as other executive branch's budget proposals, and issued subpoenas for details on the rising costs of the health plan.

In addition, HB 500 HCS underscores some of the Commonwealth's most pressing challenges. Medicaid alone will require \$6 billion over the next two years, second only to K-12 public education, highlighting the need to balance essential services with responsible fiscal management.

Could we have spent more? Of course. And, the proposal passed by the House reflects an almost 2% increase in overall state spending and leaves a surplus in both years,

just in case we need to allocate more for an unexpected expense.

Is this shift to focus on spending because we need more revenue? No. Kentucky has a spending problem, not a revenue problem – as illustrated by a recent auditor's report that exposed more than \$800 million in Medicaid spending made in error, or another that detailed \$39 million in questionable advertising and luxury travel expenses across the executive branch.

HB 500 HCS now goes to the Senate for consideration. In the meantime, if you are a "by the numbers" reader, here are a few details about HB 500 HCS that might interest you:

**Overall:**  
 \$31.56 Billion Two-Year Budget  
 \$369 Million Increase for K-12 Public Education  
 \$5.99 Billion for Medicaid  
 Public Safety Fully Protected  
 3% Executive Branch Reduction Each Year, Except:  
 Per-Pupil/SEEK Medicaid Benefits  
 Juvenile Justice & Corrections  
 Veterans Programs

**K-12 Public Education:**  
 \$7.1 Billion Two-Year Allocation  
 \$369 Million Increase in Each Year  
 2% SEEK Increase in Each Year  
 \$398 Million in Transportation Funding\*  
 \$134.87 Million Increase Over Two Years for Teacher's Retirement  
 Fully Funds Kentucky Employee Health Plan at Actuarially Recommended Amount  
 \*Based on estimates from KDE

**Human Services:**  
 \$5.99 Billion – Medicaid Funding  
 125 New Michelle P. Waiver Slots  
 150 New Community Living Waiver Slots  
 175 New Home Community Based Services Waiver Slots  
 \$101.5 Million To Cover Additional SNAP Costs  
 \$40 Million Increase to State-Run Psychiatric & ICF/ID Facilities  
 Specifically Identifies Funding for Children's Advocacy, Rape Crisis, Domestic Violence Shelters  
 Identifies Funding for Child Care Benefits and Relative/Fictive Kin Caregivers

**Veterans Services:**  
 \$10.6 Million for Staffing Support at the Thomson-Hood Veterans Center  
 \$13.2 Million for Staffing Support at the Western Kentucky Veterans Center  
 \$100,000 General Fund in Each Year for the Homeless Veterans Program

**Public Safety:**  
 \$16.7 Million for Kentucky State Police Salary Adjustments  
 \$10 Million Body Armor Grant Program  
 \$6.5 Million for Jefferson County Juvenile Justice Center Support  
 \$13 Million Increase for Corrections Medical Funding  
 Increased Funding for Crime Lab Upgrades

As always, I can be reached anytime through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via email at Ryan.Bivens@kylegislature.gov and keep track through the Kentucky legislature's website at legislature.ky.gov.

**Senate passes bill on federal education tax credit program**

Legislation implementing a new federal tax-credit scholarship program in Kentucky received final passage in the Senate on Friday and now heads to the governor's desk.

HB 1 is sponsored Rep. Kimberly Poore Moser, R-Taylor Mill, and was carried in the Senate by President Pro Tempore David P. Givens, R-Greensburg.

It would make Kentucky eligible to participate in the qualified elementary and secondary education scholarship federal tax credit program established in House Resolution 1, which passed the U.S. Congress last year.

The legislation grants Kentucky's Secretary of State the authority to opt into the program on behalf of the state. Participants would receive a federal tax credit of up to \$1,700 for donations made to Kentucky scholarship granting organizations (SGOs).

"I want to stress the word tax credit, Mr. President, because that is a significantly different phrase than tax deduction. This is a dollar-for-dollar credit. In essence, if you have a dollar that you owe to D.C., you have the choice of sending that dollar to D.C. or one of these Kentucky SGO's," Givens said.

Givens also said that potential donations from the bill would not affect state resources in any negative fashion.

"Your donations do not impact state receipts in any fashion other than potentially having a positive ripple multiplier effect of that money being invested back in Kentucky. There are no state tax dollars being used in this program," Givens said.

Senate Minority Caucus Chair Reginald L. Thomas, D-Lexington, spoke against the bill, arguing that as a tax credit,

it, it would divert important government money that could otherwise fund other programs.

"As explained, this bill is a tax credit that takes out money that could otherwise go to Medicaid benefits, Medicare benefits, SNAP, defense, housing, transportation, you name it," Thomas said.

Thomas further argued that the bill might create a two-tiered public school system.

"This bill will create a have and have not system among our public schools. Certainly those schools that are in urban areas, that have private schools, this will be a real boon for them," Thomas said. "But if you live in one of those counties where your primary workforce depends on the school system, you will be harmed and disadvantaged by this bill."

Speaking in favor, Senate Majority Floor Leader Max Wise, R-Campbellsville, said the bill would help provide the best outcomes for Kentucky students.

"This is truly a benefit that would help kids. The creativity and opportunity this could provide for summer programs, for the purchase of technology. This is another tool and another option for superintendents to work with," Wise said.

Sen. Robin L. Webb, R-Grayson, explained her yes vote by saying she would monitor how any increased funding is used in the state to ensure the bill achieves its intended effect.

"This is an opt-in program. I assume we could also opt-out if it does not give us the results that we think it will or that other states are experiencing. I'm a rural legislator, we are going to be monitoring that. I think this bill has a lot of potential across the board."

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Ange Olt, DVM