

Stella for Kentucky's Senate District 20

Building a Better Kentucky: Stella's Plan

Kentucky deserves a government that works for the people, not the other way around. This booklet lays out my plan to make that happen. It includes policies that expand healthcare, support working Kentuckians, strengthen schools, keep communities safe, and make government transparent and accountable.

Every policy here is guided by one simple principle: put Kentuckians first, always. When citizens have the information they need, leaders are held accountable, and communities can thrive. This is our roadmap for a stronger, fairer Kentucky, one that works for everyone and upholds our shared values.

These ideas come directly from the conversations I've had with neighbors across the 20th Senate District. These are the issues that impact **us**. I hear you loud and clear, and we have plenty of work to do. If you have questions, feedback, or want to discuss policy further, please email me at stella@stellarpollard.com. I cannot wait to represent you as your next state senator in Boone, Carroll, Franklin, Gallatin, Kenton, and Owen counties.

Investing in Kentucky's Future: Strong Schools, Strong Communities

Stella's Vision:

Every child in Kentucky deserves access to high-quality education, regardless of their zip code. I envision a state where schools are fully funded, teachers are empowered, and students are prepared for college, career, and life. Education is the cornerstone of our communities, and by investing in our children today, we build a stronger Kentucky tomorrow.

What We Can Accomplish Together:

- Ensure equitable funding for all public schools, so rural and urban students alike have the resources they need.
- Support teachers with professional development, competitive pay, and classroom resources.
- Expand access to career and technical education (CTE) programs that prepare students for in-demand jobs in our local economy.
- Promote literacy, STEM, and arts education from early childhood through high school.
- Encourage family and community engagement to strengthen schools as community hubs.

Implementation Strategies:

- Conduct a statewide review of school funding to ensure equitable allocation of resources.
- Partner with educators, local governments, and community organizations to identify gaps in educational services.
- Increase funding for teacher training, mentorship programs, and retention incentives, especially in rural areas.
- Support the expansion of broadband and digital learning tools to bridge the technology gap in underserved communities.
- Integrate work-based learning and CTE programs with local industry partnerships.
- Encourage strong Citizenship to be taught from K-12
- Teach democratic values in K-12 and 4-year colleges.

Expected Outcomes:

- Higher student achievement and graduation rates across Kentucky.
- Improved teacher retention and satisfaction.
- More students are prepared for both college and workforce opportunities.
- Eliminate achievement gaps between urban, suburban, and rural schools.
- Stronger community engagement in local schools.

Ensuring Accountability:

- Continues annual review by the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Committees on funding equity and student outcomes.
- Maintaining funding for the Kentucky Department of Education's School Report Card is essential to ensure public reporting of student achievement metrics, graduation rates, and teacher retention by district. Rising costs and inflation have forced some funding requirements to be shifted back to local districts, often requiring small, rural communities to raise taxes to cover the shortfall. By funding KDE directly from the state's general funds, we preserve transparency and support informed decision-making. KDE will manage the system and collect validated data from districts, producing annual reports for public access. Legislative oversight will include annual reviews by the Education and Workforce Development Committees, hearings with educators, parents, and community stakeholders, and periodic audits to ensure funds are allocated effectively and used solely to maintain the School Report Card.
- Periodic audits to ensure funding is allocated effectively to meet student needs. This can be done by working through the State Auditor's office.
- Oversight hearings with educators, parents, and students to assess program effectiveness and identify improvements.

Rural Health, Real Solutions

Stella's Vision:

Every Kentuckian deserves access to quality healthcare, no matter where they live. Rural families should not have to travel hours for primary care, mental health support, or specialized treatment. Since 2020, individuals on Medicare have been able to participate in telehealth services.

Unfortunately, unless something changes in Washington, D.C., that option is going away for medicare recipients. 35 Kentucky hospitals are at risk of closure due to proposed Medicaid cuts¹, this is the highest number in the nation and we should be concerned. Our state legislature must speak up for our needs. Rural Kentuckians deserve someone who will advocate for the basic human rights that we deserve.

A thriving Kentucky cannot exist if we do not take care of the needs of our people first.

What We Can Accomplish Together:

¹ Pugel, D., & Jones, E. (2025, June 17). *Kentucky faces the nation's highest number of rural hospitals at risk of closure if Congress cuts Medicaid*. Kentucky Center for Economic Policy.

<https://kypolicy.org/35-kentucky-hospitals-at-risk-of-closure-due-to-medicaid-cuts/>

- **Expand Telehealth Access:** Advocate for the continuation and expansion of telehealth services for Medicare recipients, ensuring that rural communities can maintain access to healthcare without the need for extensive travel.
- **Support Rural Healthcare Facilities:** Strengthen and support Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to provide comprehensive primary care services in underserved areas.
- **Enhance Mental Health Services:** Increase funding and support for mental health services in rural areas, addressing the growing need for accessible mental health care.

Implementation Strategies:

- **Advocacy at the Federal Level:** Work with federal lawmakers to ensure the continuation of telehealth services for Medicare recipients, emphasizing the unique challenges faced by rural communities.
- **Incentivize Healthcare Providers:** Offer incentives for healthcare professionals to practice in rural areas, such as loan forgiveness programs and competitive salaries.
 - Many states already have healthcare or workforce development budgets. Funds can be shifted from less urgent programs to rural healthcare incentives.
 - Hospitals benefit from having providers in rural areas, so they could contribute to loan repayment programs or relocation bonuses.
 - Encourage foundations, non-profits, and community organizations to invest in rural healthcare recruitment through partnerships.
- **Community-Based Initiatives:** Collaborate with local organizations to develop and implement community-based health programs that address the specific needs of rural populations.

Expected Outcomes:

- Reduced travel time and costs for rural families seeking care.
- Improved health outcomes and earlier interventions for chronic and mental health conditions.
- Strengthened rural economies as healthcare becomes a reliable local service.

Ensuring Accountability:

- We will make sure every dollar invested in rural healthcare goes directly to improving access and quality. This includes:
- **Transparent Reporting:** Annual public reports on how funds are used to recruit healthcare providers, expand clinics, and support telehealth services.
- **Performance Metrics:** Track provider retention, patient access, and health outcomes to measure program success.
- **Committees:** State lawmakers will regularly review program results to ensure goals are met and adjust funding strategies as needed. This information will be provided by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS).

- **Community Feedback:** Rural families and local healthcare leaders will have a voice in shaping programs to ensure they meet real community needs. The information would be publicly displayed on the CHFS website.

Expanding Cooperative Models for Electricity and Internet

Stella's Vision:

Many communities in Kentucky, particularly rural areas, face higher costs and limited access to reliable electricity and high-speed internet. Investor-owned utilities often overlook these areas because they are less profitable. Cooperative (co-op) models- already a proven solution in Kentucky for electricity- offer a member-owned, locally governed way to deliver essential services. We know this model works. It's the same approach that brought electricity to rural communities in the 1930s. For those co-ops that already exist, this will strengthen them; for those that do not have co-ops, this will empower the community. If cooperatives could power the hills and hollers, then imagine the opportunities they can unlock for us today. What follows are the goals, strategies for implementation, and recommendations for how we can monitor this initiative to ensure its success.

What we can accomplish together:

- **Promote Equity:** Cooperatives can complement our existing utilities by expanding broadband, supporting renewable energy, and reaching communities where resources are limited. By closing service gaps where private companies will not invest, we can ensure all Kentuckians have access to modern infrastructure and equal opportunity. Reliable internet keeps our communities connected, which is especially important as Plain Old Telephone Service (POTS) is phased out.
- **Empower Local Communities:** Support the establishment and expansion of electric and broadband cooperatives that give residents direct ownership and governance over their utilities. Build partnerships with our existing co-ops and local governments.
- **Increase Access & Affordability:** Ensure that every household has access to reliable, affordable electricity and high-speed internet, regardless of zip code.
- **Strengthen Economic Growth:** Use co-op infrastructure to attract small businesses, improve farm productivity, enhance healthcare access, and support digital learning for students. This will open the door to new economic opportunities for rural Kentuckians.

Implementation Strategies

- **Funding Support:** Advocate for state and federal grant and loan programs to help co-ops build new broadband networks and upgrade electric infrastructure.
- **Partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between existing rural electric cooperatives and local governments to expand fiber internet service.
- **Rate Stability:** Ensure co-ops are regulated in a way that prioritizes affordability and member benefits, and prohibits profits for non-members.
- **Member Credits:** Maintain the cooperative principle of returning surplus revenues (capital credits) to members, keeping money in local communities.

Expected Outcomes

- Expanded broadband and reliable electricity for underserved areas.
- More stable rates and reinvestment of utility margins into communities.
- Economic development is driven by access to modern infrastructure.
- Greater local control and accountability in how essential services are delivered.

Legislative Oversight Options

- Annual Reports
 - Require electric and broadband cooperatives to submit annual reports to the Natural Resources and Energy relevant Executive Branch agency.
 - Reports should include:
 - Service coverage and expansion updates
 - Membership growth and engagement
 - Rate structures and changes
 - Infrastructure investments and upgrades
 - Financial statements, including surplus revenue or capital credits
- Performance Metrics
 - Track reliability, speed, and affordability for both electricity and broadband services.
 - Measure progress toward rural coverage and underserved areas.
- Public Accountability
 - Reports should be published online for transparency, so constituents can see progress and ask questions.
 - Include opportunities for public testimony during committee hearings.

Building Stronger Communities Through Housing

Stella's Vision:

Every Kentuckian deserves a safe, affordable, and accessible place to call home. Housing is not just a roof over our heads- it's the foundation for strong families, thriving communities, and economic opportunity. Yet nearly **one in three renter households in Kentucky spends more than 30% of their income on housing²**, putting families at risk of instability and forcing them to leave the communities where they work and raise their children. I envision a Commonwealth where families can stay in their communities, children have stable environments to grow, and local economies flourish because people can afford to live where they work.

What We Can Accomplish Together:

- Reduce homelessness and housing instability across the state. For many, this will be the first time they've had somewhere to call their own.
- Increase access to affordable housing in both rural and urban areas.
- Strengthen local economies by keeping families in their communities.
- Improve quality of life through safe and well-maintained housing.

Implementation Strategies:

- Expand state and local programs that support affordable housing construction and renovation.
- Offer incentives for developers to build mixed-income and workforce housing.
 - **Property Tax Abatements:** Reduce or defer property taxes for a set number of years for projects that include a significant portion of affordable units.
 - **Tax Credits:** Similar to the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), Kentucky could offer state-level credits for developers who build or rehabilitate mixed-income housing.
 - **Low-Interest or Forgivable Loans:** Offer financing to developers to reduce upfront costs and make mixed-income projects more financially viable.
- Partner with nonprofit organizations and housing co-ops to provide long-term rental assistance.
- Provide grants and low-interest loans for home repairs, energy efficiency upgrades, and accessibility improvements.
- Coordinate with local governments to streamline permitting and zoning for affordable housing projects.
- Ways this could be funded:
 - Pass a law requiring homes to be listed for at least 30 days before businesses can purchase them.
 - State Housing Trust Funds
 - Federal Grants and Matching Funds

² United States Census Bureau & USAFacts. (2023). *How many households in Kentucky spend too much on housing?* USAFacts.

<https://usafacts.org/answers/how-many-households-in-the-united-states-spend-too-much-on-housing/state/kentucky>

- Public-Private Partnerships
- Cannabis Revenue or Other New State Revenue Streams
- Energy Savings and Renovation Revolving Funds
 - **Commonwealth Energy Fund / Green Energy Programs:** Allocate a portion of state energy or environmental budgets to seed revolving funds.
 - **USDA Rural Development Grants & Loans:** Target rural homeowners for energy-efficient renovations.
 - **Loan Repayments:** As homeowners repay low-interest loans for renovations or energy efficiency upgrades, the money cycles back into the fund to support future projects.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased homeownership opportunities for families and local residents.
- Reduced displacement and gentrification pressure in small towns and rural communities.
- Stronger, more stable neighborhoods where residents can build long-term roots.
- Balanced housing market that serves families first while still allowing responsible development.

Ensuring Accountability:

- Annual Reporting to the Housing, Urban Development, and Local Government Committee:
 - The Housing Policy Advisory Committee (HPAC), established under the Commonwealth of Kentucky Housing Policy Act, submits an annual report detailing its activities and recommendations to the Governor. This practice could be extended to include reporting on the implementation and impact of the 30-day listing requirement, ensuring legislative oversight and accountability.
- Periodic Audits to Ensure Compliance and Prevent Loopholes:
 - The Legislative Research Commission (LRC) conducts research and analysis on various legislative matters, which may include auditing the effectiveness of housing policies.
- Public Tracking of the Number of Homes Purchased by Businesses Versus Residents:
 - Enhancing data collection and transparency in this area could facilitate public tracking and inform future policy decisions.
 - Allocate a small recurring budget to the Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC) or the Department of Housing, Buildings, and Construction for data collection and management.
 - Require the annual report to be shared to the appropriate Executive Branch agency.

Fixing Our Roads, Connecting Our Communities

Stella's Vision:

I believe every Kentuckian deserves to drive on roads that are safe, reliable, and well-maintained, no matter where you live. Our rural communities keep our farms thriving, our small towns alive, and our families connected. Too many of our roads and too many bridges are so old, they're dangerous. This is costing people time, money, and peace of mind. These issues have led to local businesses shutting their doors, and we know how hard that hits small towns. South Frankfort has definitely felt this impact due to the sudden long-term closure of the Singing Bridge. Our neighbors pour their hearts and their life savings into their dreams, and it's heartbreaking to watch them struggle.

We can't keep putting band-aids on problems we've known about for years and hope they hold up forever. We must fund our Kentucky Transportation Cabinet properly because keeping our people safe is a promise that our legislators must deliver.

My vision is simple. A Kentucky where every mile of road brings opportunity, safety, and growth. That means investing in critically needed repairs, partnering with local leaders to prioritize needs, and creating a transparent system so communities can track progress. When our roads are strong, our towns are stronger, our businesses can grow, and our families can thrive.

What We Can Accomplish Together

- Fix critical roads and bridges – Focus on the routes that impact families, commerce, and safety the most.
- Fund KYTC appropriately – Ensure the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet has the resources it needs to plan, track, and maintain projects that last. Stop assigning new duties without the money to pay for carrying them out.
- Partner with local communities – Work with county leaders, residents, and businesses to identify priorities and track progress.
- Spend wisely without raising taxes – Use existing funds more efficiently, tap federal grants, and explore responsible bonds.
- Improve daily life for Kentuckians– Safer roads mean kids get to school safely, farmers move goods efficiently, businesses thrive, and emergency services respond quickly.
- Track progress transparently – Report miles repaired, bridge improvements, and community satisfaction annually to ensure accountability.

Implementation Strategies:

Our state's Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) does a great job with collecting data- as your next state senator, I'll advocate for us by ensuring our needs are heard. I will also share those annual reports for our towns in our town-hall meetings, which will be held often.

- **Prioritize critical projects:** Identify the roads and bridges that most affect safety, commerce, and daily life, and focus resources there first. The General Assembly should review the Strategic Highway Investment Formula for Tomorrow (SHIFT) results and the scoring

methodology regularly through the Transportation subcommittees to ensure priorities reflect safety, commerce, and community needs.

- **Increase KYTC efficiency:** Use modern planning tools, better maintenance scheduling, and performance tracking to stretch every dollar further.
- **Leverage federal and state funds:** Tap existing federal infrastructure grants and responsibly use state resources without raising taxes.
- **Encourage local input:** Regularly update the Public Involvement Plans so KYTC listens to our communities and makes sure all feedback and data are easy to find and use.
- **Track and report progress:** Publicly publish annual updates on miles repaired, bridges improved, and community satisfaction to maintain transparency and accountability.

Expected Outcomes:

- Safer roads and bridges for families, farmers, and local businesses. Improve use of general resources without raising taxes.
- Reduced vehicle repair costs and travel delays. Stronger local economies through reliable transportation infrastructure.
- Improve transparency in project planning and spending. Include clear ways for the community to provide input in transportation decisions.
- Improve long-term maintenance plans that prevent roads from falling back into disrepair.

Ensuring Accountability:

Kentucky's Transportation Cabinet already does a great job managing road and bridge projects and engaging communities through Public Involvement Plans. To build on that success, annual reports to the Natural Resources & Energy Committee can continue to:

- Highlight miles of roads repaired, bridges improved, and major maintenance projects completed
- Require the KYTC to publicly share an annual report detailing the number of bridges in poor or dangerous condition. The report should list the year each bridge was built and include the strategic plan for repair or replacement.
- Show budget allocation, spending efficiency, and use of federal or state grants
- Summarize community feedback collected through PIPs and how it influenced project priorities
- Keep the public informed by making reports easily accessible, so Kentuckians can see the progress being made
- This approach continues to ensure transparency, accountability, and continued trust and celebrates the strong work KYTC does.

Legalizing and Regulating Cannabis Use in Kentucky

Stella's Vision:

Kentucky's rural communities have long been the backbone of our agricultural heritage. However, the decline of tobacco farming has left many farmers seeking new, viable crops. Legalizing cannabis presents a unique opportunity for our farmers, new economic opportunities, and generates substantial tax revenue for public services. Legalization would also relieve pressure on our law enforcement and reduce overcrowding in jails by eliminating criminal penalties for adult cannabis possession, allowing officers and courts to focus on serious crimes instead of low-level drug offenses. Typically involving nothing more than personal use or small-scale sales.

Growing and selling cannabis can give our farmers a new, profitable crop, bring more money into our schools and roads, and even welcome visitors to our communities—all while keeping our families safe and healthy.

What We Can Accomplish Together:

- **Empower Rural Farmers:** Transition tobacco farmers into cannabis producers, providing them with a profitable and sustainable crop alternative.
- **Boost Agricultural Economy:** Establish Kentucky as a leader in cannabis production, creating jobs and stimulating local economies.
- **Generate Tax Revenue:** Implement a regulated cannabis market that generates significant tax revenue for things like education, transportation, and more.
- **Attract Tourism:** Develop cannabis-related tourism, drawing visitors to Kentucky and boosting the hospitality industry.

Implementation Strategies:

- **Agricultural Support:** Provide training and resources to farmers transitioning to cannabis production, ensuring they have the knowledge and tools needed for success.
- **Regulatory Framework:** Establish a state-run cannabis board to monitor cultivation, processing, and sales, ensuring compliance with safety and quality standards.
- **Tax Allocation:** Allocate cannabis tax revenue to education and infrastructure projects, prioritizing rural areas to address disparities.
- **Tourism Development:** Promote cannabis-related tourism through events, farm tours, and partnerships with local businesses.

Expected Outcomes:

- **Economic Growth:** Creation of new jobs in agriculture, processing, retail, and tourism sectors. Cook (2025) reports that the legal marijuana industry has surpassed 440,000 full-time jobs.

- **Increased Tax Revenue:** Projected annual cannabis tax revenue of over \$83 million, with potential to reach \$200 million with full legalization. 1(Cook, 2025)
- **Improved Public Services:** Enhanced funding for education and infrastructure projects, particularly in underserved rural communities.
- **Tourism Boost:** Attraction of cannabis tourists, contributing to local economies and promoting Kentucky as a progressive state.

Ensuring Accountability:

- **Annual Reports:**
 - Require cannabis cooperative leaders and licensed operators to submit annual reports to an appropriate Executive agency, a copy to the Health and Family Services Committee (or a similarly relevant committee). Reports could include:
 - Licensing and operational updates
 - Employment numbers and local ownership data
 - Tax revenue collected and reinvestment projects
 - Compliance and safety metrics
 - Community engagement initiatives
- **Performance Metrics:**
 - Track safety, accessibility, and pricing of cannabis products.
 - Measure equity in business ownership and job creation.
 - Track cannabis sales revenue locally in each town, as well as revenue from products sold to other states, to ensure transparency and show how legalization benefits communities across Kentucky.
 - Monitor reductions in cannabis-related criminal charges, which could be included in the Kentucky State Police report to the Governor each year.
- **Public Accountability:**
 - Publish reports online for transparency.
 - Hold public hearings to allow constituents to provide input and feedback.
- **Follow-Up Mechanisms:**
 - Require corrective action plans if benchmarks aren't met.
 - Adjust funding or licenses to incentivize compliance and community impact.
 - Offer technical support for new community-based cannabis enterprises.

Women's Health in Kentucky

Stella's Vision

Whether she lives in Louisville or Carrollton, every woman in Kentucky deserves access to quality healthcare. This includes maternal care, preventive services, and education on healthy living. Too many women in Kentucky have to travel far from home just to get prenatal care. Nearly one-third of

women in the state live more than 30 minutes from a hospital where they can give birth. In our rural counties, that number jumps to nearly 60%³. And almost half of Kentucky's counties don't have any hospital or provider offering obstetric care at all.

This isn't just inconvenient; it's a real barrier to healthy pregnancies and safe deliveries. It puts Kentucky women at risk for complications. Every mother and baby deserves care close to home, and we must ensure no one has to drive hours to get the services they need.

I am committed to expanding programs that strengthen community-based prenatal programs. These improve perinatal outcomes and set up rural families for success. I will also work to ensure access to preventive screenings, reproductive health services, and health education for all women, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

What We Can Accomplish Together

- Strengthen rural and underserved communities' access to care.
- Reduce maternal and infant mortality rates in Kentucky.
- Ensure all women have access to preventive screenings and reproductive health services.
- Educate communities on healthy lifestyles to prevent chronic diseases.

Implementation Strategies

- Provide statewide access to birth control and prenatal services through community clinics and telehealth. Kentucky administers the Title X program, which offers comprehensive family planning services, including contraception, pregnancy testing, and screenings for sexually transmitted infections, at public and nonprofit health centers.
 - Partner with rural healthcare providers to ensure essential services reach underserved communities.
 - Advocate for expanded rural telehealth to connect patients with specialists and reduce travel barriers.
 - Partner with local health departments to ensure that our communities are aware of these services.
- Increase funding for community health programs focused on women's health.
 - Introduce or support legislation that explicitly earmarks existing funds for women's health services or expands coverage of preventive and reproductive care programs.
 - Work within the state budget process to propose allocating more resources to women's health programs. This could involve presenting data on outcomes, cost savings, and community benefits.
- Support rural health clinics to ensure services reach underserved areas.

³ March of Dimes. (2023). *Where you live matters: Maternity care in Kentucky*.

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/assets/s3/reports/mcd/Maternity-Care-Report-Kentucky.pdf>

- Promote state-level grants or matching funds to support local women's health initiatives, including prenatal care, reproductive health, and preventive services. Some rural communities are already seeing success with these efforts. The Appalachian Regional Hospital Carevan in Eastern Kentucky is an example of this.
- Launch statewide education campaigns on preventive care, reproductive health, and wellness.
 - Build mechanisms for tracking how funds are used and what outcomes are achieved, which can justify future funding increases.
- Partner with nonprofit organizations, hospitals, and local health departments to coordinate services.

Expected Outcomes

- More women receive timely prenatal care and have access to birth control services.
- Maternal and infant mortality rates decrease.
- Health disparities between urban and rural women are reduced.
- Increased awareness and utilization of preventive care and reproductive health services.

Ensuring Accountability:

- Require annual reporting to the Kentucky Department for Public Health on access to birth control, prenatal care, and women's health program outcomes.
 - Expanding on the Maternal Mortality Review reports
- Monitor Medicaid enrollment, coverage gaps, and service availability.
 - Break the Comprehensive Evaluation Report down by geographic area and publicly share that.
 - Clearly show the coverage gaps.
- Conduct audits of rural health clinics to ensure equitable access.
- Host public hearings to review progress, gather community feedback, and adjust policies as needed.

Transparent Government Records

Stella's Vision:

Every Kentuckian deserves to know how their government is working for them. By keeping accurate, up-to-date records online, we can ensure transparency and accountability at every level.

What We Can Accomplish Together:

Every citizen should be able to see exactly how their government is spending their money, making laws, and running public projects. When people have this information at their fingertips,

communities are stronger, more informed, and ready to hold leaders accountable. Right now, that's not always the case.

Implementation Strategies:

- Every state and local agency should post key records- budgets, RFPs, project updates, and more- online, where everyone can easily access them. Each year, every office should report to the Secretary of State, showing how they are keeping their information current and accessible. Government works for the people, and the people deserve to know what's happening.
- Standardize formats for public records to make them easy to read and download.
- Establish periodic audits to ensure compliance and accuracy.
 - This will be funded through the State Auditor's office.

Expected Outcomes:

- Greater public trust in government operations.
- Reduced barriers to information for journalists, researchers, and citizens.
- A more accountable and responsive government that serves Kentuckians first.

Ensuring Accountability:

- Review audits from the State Auditors' office

Investing in Technology for Every Kentucky Student

Stella's Vision:

Every student in Kentucky deserves access to modern technology and digital learning tools. By maintaining and expanding funding for the Kentucky Education Technology System (KETS) through the Kentucky Department of Education, we can ensure that every classroom is equipped to prepare students for college, careers, and a rapidly changing world. Technology should empower all students, not divide them based on zip code. Without adequate funding, local school districts (especially those in rural areas) bear the burden, impacting taxpayers. By allocating a portion of tax revenue from new business industries, we can fully support KETS and provide equitable access for every student.

Implementation Strategies:

- Prioritize full funding for KETS in the state budget.
- Continue to review the statewide technology plan that our KDE complies with each year. This will allow us to review accounts for infrastructure, maintenance, and professional development.

- Partner with local districts to identify gaps in technology access and create targeted solutions. Look for formal grants that will assist with the co-op broadband initiative mentioned earlier.
- Establish a technology refresh cycle to keep devices and software up to date.

Expected Outcomes:

- All students will have reliable access to modern learning tools regardless of their zip code.
- Teachers will have the tools and training to effectively use technology in their classrooms, and school districts won't have to cut funding from other programs to make it happen.
- Schools will be prepared to adopt emerging technologies and digital learning innovations.
- Students will graduate ready to succeed in college, the workforce, and a technology-driven society.
- Schools will be able to afford the cybersecurity resources absolutely necessary to keep our students and staff safe.
- The workforce will see a ripple effect when our students enter the workforce.
- To ensure Kentucky students have access to up-to-date technology and equitable digital learning opportunities, we recommend doubling the current KETS budget to \$30.8 million per year. This increase could be sustainably funded through revenue from the state's cannabis initiative, addressing both the technology shortfall and future-proofing our schools against inflation and aging infrastructure.

Ensuring Accountability:

- Annual reporting by the Kentucky Department of Education on KETS funding usage and technology access. KDE turns in the annual Technology Activity Report (TAR) each year.
- KDE conducts regular audits, which are reflected in the Digital Readiness Report Card. Many devices purchased through COVID Relief Funds (ESSER) and the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC/eRate) are now becoming obsolete and will require replacement. It is essential to continue documenting needs and asking questions about funding opportunities, including revenue from the cannabis industry, to ensure every student has access to up-to-date technology.
- Legislative committees review technology infrastructure progress and student outcomes to guide future investments, with support from the Kentucky Broadband Co-op Initiative described earlier. Annual reports will be provided by KDE to the appropriate Executive Branch committees.

Strengthening Local Journalism for a Stronger Kentucky

Stella's Vision:

Local newspapers are the heartbeat of our communities, keeping families informed about schools, local government, and community events. Kentucky's 20th District is home to a rich tradition of historic publications, from Frankfort's *State Journal* to Carroll County's *News Democrat*. These independent news sources promote transparency, civic engagement, and accountability. Strong local journalism empowers citizens to make informed decisions, ensures our democracy works for everyone, and provides a safe platform for the public to share their voices. Newspapers are essential to our communities and deserve continued legislative support.

What We Can Accomplish Together:

By supporting local newspapers, we can:

- Keeping families informed about schools, local government, and budgets.
- Sharing community achievements and boosting local pride.
- Helping small businesses grow through advertising incentives.
- Investigating issues that affect everyday Kentuckians, from roads to healthcare.
- Connecting citizens with their representatives through regular legislative updates.

Expected Outcomes:

- Local newspapers will continue driving community engagement in elections and civic initiatives, with tax incentives helping them stay in business.
 - Create a state-funded grant program administered through the newspaper for small businesses to subsidize ad costs.
 - Tax breaks for newspapers that expand digital platforms to include small business ads or directories.
- Ongoing reporting will maintain greater transparency in government actions at the city, county, and state levels.
- Our papers will keep preserving local culture, history, and stories that matter to Kentuckians.
- Communities will remain strong and informed, capable of advocating for themselves, supported by sustainable local journalism.

Ensuring Accountability:

- Legislative committees can periodically consult with KPA and local editors to track how state support strengthens local journalism and promotes transparency.
- Legislative committee review of grant allocation effectiveness to ensure funds support community journalism.

- Periodic audits to assess digital access initiatives and their impact on underserved rural communities.
- Ongoing dialogue with community leaders will help refine policies that sustain independent newspapers and ensure they continue connecting citizens with their local government.

Connect with Stella

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