

# Safeguarding the Mission: How Human Rights Commissions Navigate Legislative Challenges



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# Presentation Disclaimer

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# Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission

The Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission works to prevent and address discrimination in **Lexington** and **Fayette County** by investigating complaints, enforcing civil-rights protections, and promoting equal opportunity.





# Kentucky House Bill 468

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- \* Introduced in House on January 22, 2026.
- \* Sent to Judiciary Committee on January 30, 2026.
- \* Title of the bill was simply “an act relating to civil rights.”
- \* Bill was twenty-six pages long.
- \* Sponsor of the bill was Representative Daniel Elliott out of Boyle County, Kentucky.
- \* Bill was being packaged and publicized as simply modernizing the Kentucky Civil Rights Act.
- \* Bill to bring KCRA in line with the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008.

## Positive Outcomes of House Bill 468

**Disability protections:** The bill would incorporate standards from the **Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA)** into Kentucky's civil-rights law.

**Definitions:** It would establish or clarify terms such as “**major life activities**,” “**transitory impairment**,” and “**regarded as having such an impairment**.”

**Qualified individuals:** Kentucky's definition of a “**qualified individual with a disability**” would be interpreted consistently with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

# Major Issue with House Bill

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The narrative going around Frankfort at this time was only the positive aspects of the bill. However, hidden within the pages of the bill were many radical changes to the way that Human Rights Commissions could operate. There were also recommended changes to Human Rights Commission's jurisdiction and fundamental changes to the way HRC's could adjudicate employment and public accommodation cases.

House Bill 468 proposed major changes to Kentucky civil rights law by expanding alignment with federal disability protections and shifting discrimination cases away from administrative adjudication by Human Rights Commissions toward civil court proceedings.

# Controversial Side of House Bill 468

- \* Removes the Human Rights Commission's adjudicative powers over employment and public accommodation cases.
- \* Individuals alleging discrimination could file a civil lawsuit without first filing a complaint with the HRC.
- \* A probable cause determination would have to be made within 30 days after receiving the Respondent's response.
- \* Questions of fact in civil actions could be tried before a jury.
- \* Local HRC's could investigate, but **could not** compel witnesses, issue subpoenas, issue remedial orders



## Lexington HRC's First Impression of Bill

- \* While bill had some good intentions, the remainder of the bill was too radical.
- \* Over the years, bills that have been filed that recommended sweeping changes to local commissions have stalled or been defeated.
- \* Bill was not considered a serious threat by Executive Director and Commission Attorney.
- \* With all the issues going on contractually with the US Department of Housing and Development, we decided to keep our focus on this issue.
- \* At the monthly Commission meeting on February 23, 2026, Executive Director briefed board about the proposed bill. Shared thoughts that bill was not a serious threat. Board agreed to keep monitoring the situation but keep the focus on HUD contract dispute. **[local commission, not much leverage on state issues anyway].**

- \* Keep in mind, we are not getting any information from anyone regarding the House Bill previously or at this point in time.

- \* Found out later that the Kentucky Commission did get the feeling something was coming down the pipeline due to several requests for information from the House of Representatives.

- \* Nobody had contacted the local commissions regarding numbers, statistics or any other similar information.

- \* All information we have received / been receiving were through updates on the Kentucky Legislature website.

## Lexington HRC and House Bill 468

# House Standing Committee on Judiciary

- \* On February 24, 2026, the Lexington HRC found out that a hearing on House Bill 468 would take place on February 25, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.
- \* Lexington HRC was notified of the hearing by Cynthia Fox, Executive Director of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights.
- \* The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights found out about the hearing accidentally and wasn't directly notified by the House of Representatives or Judiciary Committee.
- \* Colt Sells, KCHR Attorney would be testifying "against" the bill. Other people could sign up to speak, given five-minute time limit.

# Judiciary Committee Hearing: 2/25/26

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- \* Representative Daniel Elliott (right).
- \* Joe Bilby (left), Attorney for the Kentucky House of Representatives co-presented the bill.
- \* Their summary only mentioned the bringing language of KCRA in line with ADAAA, nothing about changes to state or local commissions.
- \* Representatives for KCHR, Lexington and Franklin-Simpson HRC's spoke out against potential changes to state and local commissions.
- \* Vote was 16-0 with three Democratic members passing on the vote. Reported favorably, sent to House calendar.



# HB 468 Amendments

March 11, 2026

- \* Kept the bill's original disability-related provisions.

- \* Respondents would get at least 20 days to submit a written response to a complaint.

- \* If HRC found probable cause, it could file a civil action in Circuit Court within 180-days of receiving the complaint.

- \* If the HRC did not file an action or found No Probable Cause, it would issue a dismissal without prejudice.

- \* Case must be investigated within 180-days or dismissed as a No Probable Cause.

- \* The HRC could recover litigation costs and attorney's fees.

- \* Local HRC's would retain investigative powers.

# House Bill 468

- \* Passed on March 11, 2026, with floor amendment.
- \* House passed the bill 72 – 22.
- \* Sent to the Senate on March 12, 2026.
- \* Sent to Committee on Committees.



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House Bill 468 moved  
forward. So did we.



# First, We Took Care of Our Own

- \* Our first responsibility wasn't to the legislature; it was people doing the work.
- \* Before responding publicly to HB 468, we had a responsibility to our staff.
- \* News of the bill began to hit print and other media; staff was finding out about the negative impact of the bill before I could speak with them.

**Inform**: Make sure staff understood what the bill proposed and how it could affect our work.

**Listen**: Give staff space to ask questions, voice concerns, and process what was happening.

**Support**: Make sure employees had information, resources and leadership support they needed.

**Prepare**: Equip our team on how to communicate with the community, what media policy entailed and how they could crowd source / coalition building.

\*\* I gave my staff my word that I wouldn't sugar coat anything and if I believed things were so bad where funding may be lost and jobs in jeopardy, I would honestly tell them when they could bail.

# The Counteroffensive

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**1. Community Education**



**2. Media Blitz**



**3. Coalition Building**

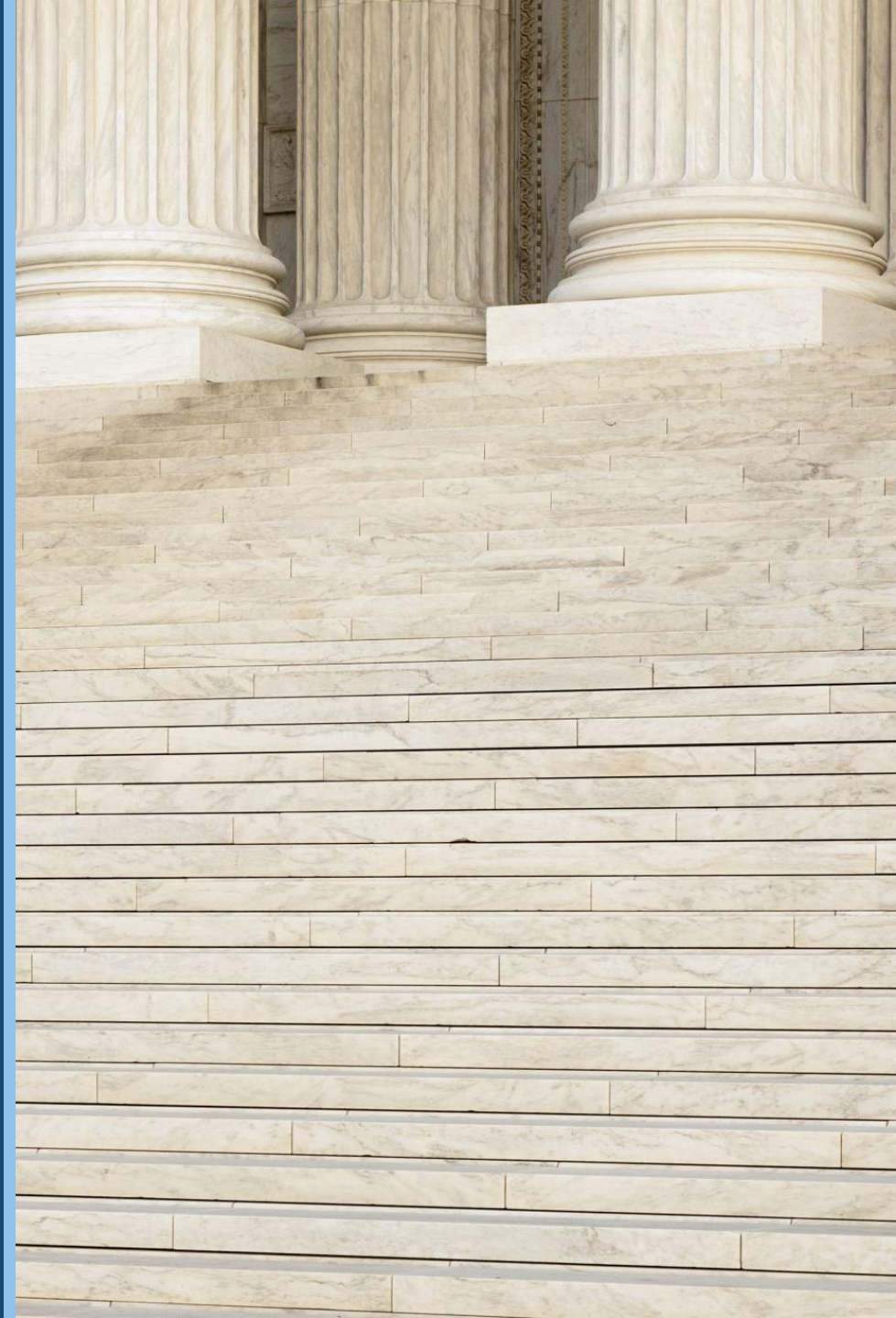


**4. Mobilizing HRC Leaders**



**5. Direct Engagement with Lawmakers**

At the beginning, we were moving quickly and were increasingly confident that we had already lost the House. By the time our efforts reached full momentum, we had shifted our strategy: rather than continuing to fight for a chamber we believed was already out of reach, we focused our resources and energy on the Senate.



# Community Education

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- \* Engaged in community conversations.
- \* Answered questions and addressed concerns.
- \* Connected with people affected by the bill (current Charging Parties).
- \* Gave community members tools to advocate for themselves.
- \* Provided resources for contacting legislators.



# From Frankfort to the Headlines

- \* We used media to our advantage...no such thing as bad press.
- \* We spoke to anyone / everyone who would listen.
- \* We used media for three (3) main reasons:
  1. Amplify the message.
  2. Reach the right audience.
  3. Create momentum.



## Amplify the Message

\* Used interviews, press releases, op-eds and social media to explain HB 468.

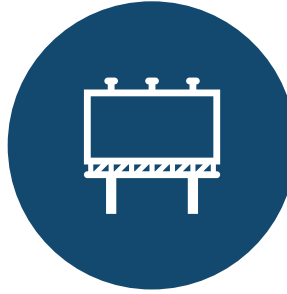
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\* Translated complicated legislation into clear, public-facing messages.

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\* Repeated key facts and concerns across multiple platforms.

# Reaching the Right Audience



\* TARGETED MEDIA  
OUTLETS WITH AUDIENCES  
ACROSS KENTUCKY.



\* USED EARNED MEDIA TO  
REACH LEGISLATORS AND  
THEIR CONSTITUENTS.



\* ELEVATED VOICES  
DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THE  
PROPOSED CHANGES.

## Creating Momentum

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- \* Generated public awareness and conversation.

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- \* Kept HB 468 in the news as it moved through the legislature.

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- \* Used media attention to support broader advocacy and community engagement.

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- \* Media assisted a smaller local HRC to reach a broader audience that extended beyond Lexington-Fayette County.



PHOTOGRAPH

## House bill could alter discrimination complaint resolution in Kentucky

- A Kentucky bill may change how discrimination complaints are resolved.
- Supporters say the bill strengthens legal protections against discrimination.

## Lexington Human Rights Commission speaks out against House Bill 468

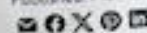
Commission says bill would strip enforcement powers



Lexington Human Rights Commission speaks out against House Bill 468

By Jackson Plank

Published: Mar 2, 2026 at 10:43 PM EST | Updated: 10 hours ago





Other Examples

# My Favorite



# In the News

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<https://spectrumnews1.com/ky/louisville/news/2026/03/05/human-rights-commission-s-face-changes>

# Coalition Building

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- \* Contacted friends and family about the bill, urged everyone to contact their legislator to oppose the bill as written.
- \* Met with Senator Amanda Mays Bledsoe (former Lexington Councilmember about the bill and its impact).
- \* Any community relations event we attended, we discussed the bill and its impact.
- \* Kept open line of communication through the various HRC's in Kentucky.
- \* Connected local advocates with statewide partners.
- \* Current and former commissioners reached out regarding their role and how they can best serve the organization during this time.
- \* Met with Administrative Office of the Courts – asked them to weigh in on the matter.
- \* Utilized IAOHRA and our partner members (e-mails, press releases, checking-in).

# Legislative Advocacy

- \* Identified key legislators and legislative staff.
- \* Reached across party lines, Republican Commissioner gave us access to a lobbyist who provided us strategic guidance.
- \* Created and distributed a fact sheet with talking points on why they should vote “no” on the bill and hand delivered a copy to each and every senator.
- \* Responded quickly to amendments, votes and changes to the bill.
- \* Shared facts, concerns and real-world implications on the bill.

**We simply stopped asking, “How do we stop the bill?” and started asking, “where and how can we still change the outcome?”**

# Direct Engagement with Lawmakers

- \* Sent e-mail to Daniel Elliott, asked for meeting to discuss bill and educate him on HRC process (invitation was not answered).
- \* Had regular contact with Senator Amanda Mays Bledsoe regarding the bill and its progress through legislative process.
- \* Contacted legislators both personally and professionally (e-mails sent as constituent and as ED).
- \* Followed up after meetings and conversations.
- \* Made availability known to answer questions and requests for information.
- \* Continued engagement as the bill changed and moved through the process.

# What Happened With the Bill?

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- \* As mentioned, bill passed House 72-22 and was sent to Senate on March 12, 2026.
- \* In the Senate, bill was sent to the general committee, Committee on Committees.
- \* The legislative session was scheduled to end on April 15, 2026.
- \* Daily checks on the status of the bill showed no movement...the bill was not even being sent to a specialized committee for further action.
- \* We (I) believed that the bill had possibly stalled and I was cautiously optimistic that the bill was dead for this session.
- \* We understood that there was still a possibility HB 468 could become a rider and become attached to another bill.
- \* There was no intel on this bill at all, leading me to believe it had run its course for this session.



April 1, 2026

- \* Received telephone call from Cynthia Fox, KCHR Executive Director stating that HB 468 has been attached to Senate Bill 214 and was scheduled for passage.
- \* When I found out, bill had already received two readings and was scheduled for passage in the orders of the day.
- \* Senate Bill 214 was an agricultural bill allowing the Kentucky Department of Agriculture to accept funds and grants from public or private sources.
- \* At that point, I had pretty much accepted defeat. Not only was this bill going to pass, but this was also an emergency bill that would take effect immediately.
- \* I had meeting with my investigator to begin developing a plan to tighten up / streamline the investigative process to make sure our investigations meet the new investigatory timelines.

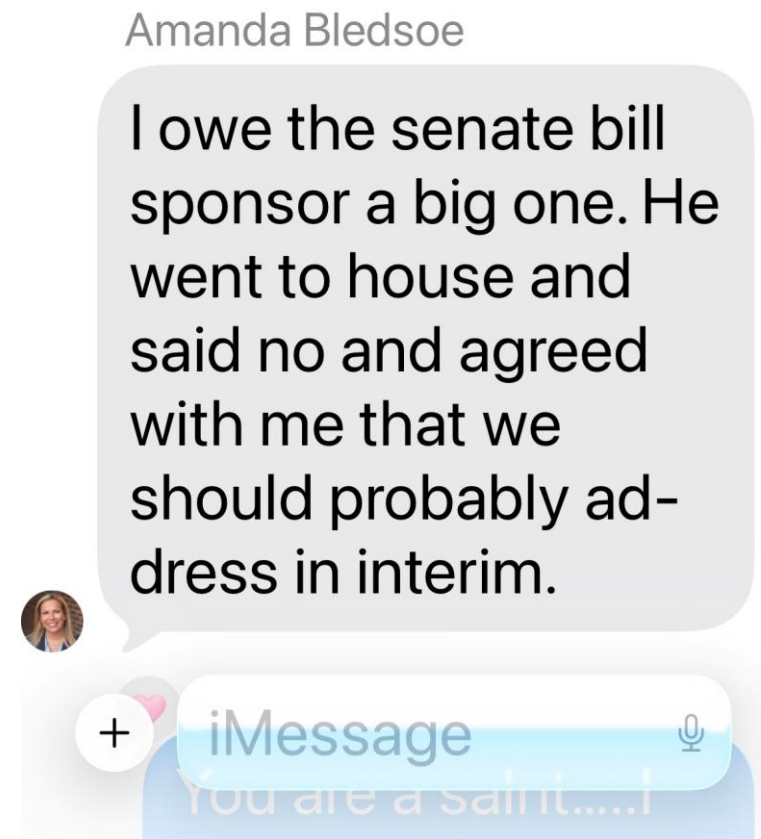
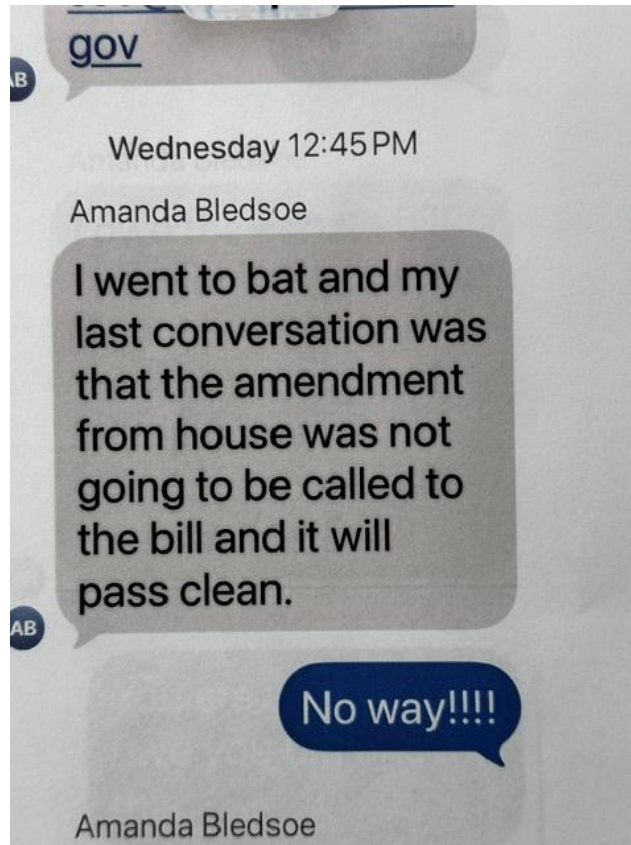
# Nothing to Lose: The Hail Mary

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- \* Even though the passage of the bill was imminent, something was telling me to make one last attempt...what do I have to lose?
- \* I made one last plea to Senator Amanda Bledsoe and informed her that bill had been attached to an SB 214, an agricultural bill and it was set to pass that day.
- \* She emailed back, “well it’s over in house. I can’t do anything about it. That’s infuriating.”
- \* Okay...now it’s over. This is our new normal, let’s figure out how to navigate the changes.

# Not so fast!



With the Senate Bill 214 passing clean (without the civil rights amendments), House Bill 468 was essentially dead for this legislative session.

The Kentucky legislature interim session began on June 1, 2026. So far, we have not received any word that this issue has been brought up (as of yet) to be discussed during the next legislative session.

We fully anticipate this issue to be revisited during the next session and are developing our next steps.



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