

KEEC COMMENT ON HOUSE BILL 200

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HB200 should be revised to restore funding to the Kentucky Environmental Education Council (KEEC).

According to a 2014 survey, 96 percent of Kentuckians believe environmental education should be taught in schools. KEEC promotes learning and skills for a sustainable and economically healthy environment. KEEC brings order and consistency to environmental education by promoting environmental literacy pursuant to KRS 157.905 instead of environmental advocacy. We are an honest broker in a world of competing environmental interests.

Specifically, with baseline funding of \$150,000 from environmental fines and penalties, KEEC provides:

- Support for the nearly 300 public and private K-12 schools in the [Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools Program](#). This program uses schools' buildings and grounds as a learning laboratory for student improvement projects, such as gardens, energy-saving initiatives, and recycling. The Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools initiative is a partnership with business and industry.
- One of only three nationally accredited [certification programs](#) for environmental educators. Including educators from businesses and industries, schools, universities, parks, extension offices, non-profit groups, the community at large, and federal, state, and local government agencies.
  - Since 2004, KEEC has certified more than 200 environmental educators via the Professional Environmental Educator Certification program. In 2017, 100 of those educators reached approximately 200,000 Kentuckians.
  - One of the principal tenants of becoming a certified a principal is that of being an educator rather than an advocate for any environmental stance. All educators are required to sign a [code of ethics pledge](#) to receive their certification through KEEC. This is also required when they apply for their annual recertification.
- Support for any Kentucky teacher to implement environmental education using resources that teach students how to think, not what to think, about environmental issues.
- Coordination for the commonwealth's environmental education initiatives via the Interagency Subcommittee on Environmental Education,
- A comprehensive approach to environmental education via the Environmental Education Master Plan — in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including business and industry, government agencies and education entities.
- Matching funds to secure federal and corporate grants, \$125,000 of which are ongoing and would mostly need to be returned if KEEC were eliminated.
- Workforce development skills—such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and communication skills—through the Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools program and the Professional Environmental Educator Certification course. The hands-on, experiential nature of environmental education is shown to improve students' test scores in all subject areas and improve behavior in school.

- Coordination of regional environmental-education centers at Kentucky's state universities and the central office of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. This results in the dissemination of environmental-education programs, materials, and information across the state.
- Support for legislation related to Kentucky Proud, high-performance school buildings, energy efficiency, recycling, waste-management, and pollution prevention.

## AN ELABORATION

KEEC brings order to chaos, promoting environmental literacy over environmentalism. Environmentally literate citizens approach the environment with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions. In the long run, healthy economy and a healthy environment are inseparable.

KEEC helps businesses meet expectations of environmental responsibility, providing nationally accredited training. East Kentucky Power and Toyota Motor Manufacturing of Kentucky, among other businesses, have enrolled participants in the Professional Environmental Educator Certification course. Toyota has supported the program since 2014, including \$9,500 for the 2018-19 course.

In addition, business and industry helped create the Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools program to promote healthy learning environments, reduced operating costs for schools and environmentally literate children.

KEEC serves federal, state, and local government agencies, teaching environmental literacy to government workers in various agencies, such as parks, nature preserves, and agency staff tasked with interacting with the public on environmental issues.

KEEC leverages a small amount of non-general fund money to reach hundreds of thousands of citizens each year. Since 1994, KEEC funding originates from the first \$150,000 collected from environmental fines and penalties. The remaining fines and penalties go to the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund to purchase and protect Kentucky's land. Using the money collected from environmental fines and penalties to advance environmental literacy has a lasting impact on the commonwealth's resources – fiscal, natural, and human.

Another way KEEC uses the fines and penalties allotment is as matching funds for grants. Two of the most recent grants are a \$91,000 federal water quality grant and a \$61,000 federal AmeriCorps grant. The water quality grant provided professional development to 60 preK-12 teachers and \$22,500 funding to schools for improvement projects. The AmeriCorps grant aims to place 20 AmeriCorps workers across Kentucky, trained by the Professional Environmental Educator Certification course, to assist local agencies and non-profits in promoting environmental literacy as defined in KRS 157.905.

KEEC has faithfully and creatively carried out its statutory responsibilities found in KRS 157.915. KEEC has leveraged the \$150,000 annual fine and penalty allotment to teach millions of Kentuckians how to make factual, informed decisions about the environment. In developing initiatives based on sound pedagogical and scientific principles that embrace environmental literacy, KEEC has ensured that the use of environmental education by environmentalists as an advocacy tool has been diminished.