

**KENTUCKY COUNCIL ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
AERO ACT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**



August 26, 2026, 10:00 AM ET (9:00 a.m. ET)

Virtual meeting via ZOOM, livestreamed at: <https://bit.ly/4x1sfBK>

- I. Call to Order & Roll Call**
- II. Approval of the Minutes**
- III. Introduction of Senior Associate, Workforce and Economic Development**
- IV. Updates and Feedback on AERO Dashboard**
- V. AERO Legislative Talking Points Document**
- VI. Legislative Updates**
- VII. Upcoming meetings and Next Steps**
- VIII. Other Business**
- IX. Adjournment**

MEETING MINUTES

Draft for approval on August 26, 2026

Who: Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
Meeting Type: AERO Act Advisory Committee
Date: May 20, 2026
Time: 10:00 a.m. ET
Location: ZOOM Teleconference

WELCOME REMARKS

The AERO Act Advisory Committee held a meeting on Wednesday, May 20, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. ET. The meeting occurred via Zoom and was livestreamed via ZOOM webinar. Committee vice chair Lindsey Case presided.

ATTENDANCE

There was a quorum of 7 voting committee members in attendance.

- Lindsey Case – attended
- Tristan Durbin – attended
- Marty Fryer – attended
- Laura Jones – did not attend
- Luke McCowan – attended
- Brad Schwandt – did not attend
- Brad Simms – did not attend
- Jim Smith – attended
- Todd Smith – attended
- David Springer – did not attend
- Dr. Aaron Thompson – did not attend
- Curt Wilson - attended

Mr. Miles Feroli, Executive Director, served as recorder of the meeting minutes.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from March 18, 2026, meeting were approved as presented.

AERO LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Ms. Case led a discussion on the 2026 Legislative Sessions appropriation as they pertain to Aviation and Aerospace. Madisonville Community and Technical College received a \$6 million dollar agency bond for equipment and Eastern Kentucky University received \$8 million dollar appropriation to establish and operate an Air Traffic Control Training program. The AERO Act itself did not receive an appropriation.

Dr. Leslie Sizemore, Vice President of Workforce and Economic Development, provided additional context on the session, stating that budget decisions were competitive and that the Council is going to continue to advocate for aviation and aerospace funding. The statute for the AERO Act does not sunset until 2030, and she recommended that Committee members speak with leaders and legislators in this field to keep up momentum.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Ms. Case led a discussion centered on next steps for the AERO Act business and next steps for the Committee. Dr. Sizemore noted the importance of continuing to raise awareness about AERO Act funding. Mr. Durbin suggested developing a “1-pager” informational flyer for Committee members to bring to meetings with key stakeholders. Ms. Case suggested that the Council engage with the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce as a partner to help legislators understand the need for investing in the aviation and aerospace talent pipeline. Mr. Smith offered implementing a ‘proof of concept’ pilot so that it will demonstrate how the AERO Act will support the workforce need.

Ms. Case then requested meeting cadence feedback from the Committee. Mr. Jim Smith and Mr. Curt Wilson suggested meeting on a quarterly basis. Mr. Jim Smith also suggested developing subcommittees to focus on various goals the Committee would like to achieve.

AERO DASHBOARD UPDATE

Ms. Madalyn White, Senior Associate for Data and Advanced Analytics, updated the Committee on the development of the AERO data dashboard. Items requested to be added to the dashboard include employment retention as well as a map that identifies companies that are in Kentucky because of the aviation industry.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m. ET.

Fund the AERO Act in 2028

Kentucky's aerospace and aviation sector is one of the Commonwealth's most important economic assets, and its continued growth depends on a steady supply of trained workers. The General Assembly created a framework to address that need through Senate Bill 127 during the 2024 Regular Session. The Aerospace Education Reinvestment Opportunity (AERO) Act, codified at KRS 164.7011–164.7021, established the Kentucky Aerospace, Aviation, and Defense Investment Fund to support partnerships between Kentucky's public aviation programs and the aerospace, aviation, and defense industries. **The fund has never received a state appropriation.** CPE and its partners have laid the groundwork for implementation. A state appropriation is now needed to activate the fund before the AERO Act expires on June 30, 2030.



\$15 Million Requested

CPE is requesting \$15 million be appropriated to the Kentucky Aerospace, Aviation, and Defense Investment Fund in the 2028–2030 biennial budget.

Leveraging private investment

The fund created by the AERO Act is designed to leverage state dollars. Funding would flow through partnerships between eligible aviation programs and industry partners, with qualifying employer and education contributions matched dollar-for-dollar by the state.

This structure would allow state appropriations to attract additional private investment while strengthening the programs that prepare Kentuckians for aviation, aerospace and defense careers. The AERO Act's public-private investment model closely mirrors Kentucky's successful Healthcare Workforce Investment Fund, which uses a similar public-private matching structure to address critical workforce needs. That experience provides a strong model for how AERO could bring employers and education providers together around shared workforce priorities.

65%

At least 65% of net fund moneys for aviation training scholarships (KRS 164.7015)

35%

Up to 35% of net fund moneys for aviation equipment grants (KRS 164.7017)

1:1

State match for qualifying industry-partner contributions

Addressing workforce shortages

Under KRS 164.7013, at least 65% of net fund moneys would support aviation training scholarships for Kentucky residents. These scholarships would help reduce financial barriers to completing credentials needed for high-demand aviation careers. Up to 35% of net fund moneys could support aviation equipment grants under KRS 164.7017. These grants would help public aviation programs obtain aircraft, engines, simulators and other equipment needed to provide hands-on training aligned with industry needs. Scholarship recipients would also be subject to Kentucky employment commitments, helping ensure that the state's investment supports the Commonwealth's workforce.

State data show sustained demand for trained workers

Statewide occupational projections for 2023–2033 show sustained demand across aviation-related occupations the AERO Act is designed to support. Many of these careers can be entered with a postsecondary credential rather than a four-year degree.

Occupation	Current Employment	2033 Jobs Est.	% Change	Projected Openings	Median Wage	Typical Entry Education
Aerospace Engineers	201	224	+11.4%	137	\$117,660	Bachelor's degree
Aircraft Mechanics & Service Technicians	3,431	3,741	+9.0%	2,971	\$72,320	Postsecondary award
Avionics Technicians	84	90	+7.1%	72	\$46,490	Postsecondary award
Commercial Pilots	601	632	+5.2%	729	\$101,290	Postsecondary award
Air Traffic Controllers	183	180	-1.6%	157	\$126,550	Associate degree

Source: KYSTATS Kentucky statewide occupational employment projections, 2023–2033 (Occupational Projections and Analysis Files). Projected openings reflect growth, exits, and transfers combined.

Over the projection period, aircraft mechanics alone are projected to account for nearly 3,000 openings statewide, more than any other aviation occupation shown above. AERO scholarships and equipment grants are designed to help public aviation programs prepare Kentuckians for these and other high-demand careers.

Kentucky is also competing nationally for aerospace, aviation and defense investment. Activating an employer-matched training fund would give the Commonwealth another tool to build the skilled workforce employers need and position us to compete for future economic development opportunities.

2028 is the critical window to activate the fund

The AERO Act's authorizing statute sunsets June 30, 2030, and unspent appropriated dollars lapse at the end of fiscal year 2029–2030. Because the fund has never received an appropriation, the 2028–2030 biennial budget is effectively the final practical opportunity to put the program to work under its current authorization. A 12-member advisory committee representing industry, education and the defense sector has already begun meeting to identify workforce needs and prepare for implementation.

The General Assembly created a strong workforce investment framework in 2024. CPE and its partners have prepared it for implementation. Funding the AERO Act in 2028 would activate that framework while there is still time to deliver results for Kentucky students, employers and communities.