

# 2018: Our Year In Investigations

By [Kate Howard](#) December 28, 2018

## 2018



Our investigations this year took us across the state. We brought you groundbreaking stories about everything from conditions in public housing to workplace deaths and widespread sexual harassment complaints in state government.

Take a look back at some of our biggest investigations, and see what's happened since they published.

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## [Fatal Flaws: How Kentucky Is Failing Its Workers](#)



Michelle Hanks

Lisa Hobbs holds a photo of her and her late husband, Gene Hobbs, dancing together. Hobbs died in Meade County in 2016 when he was run over by a dump truck driven by a coworker.

[Our investigation into Kentucky's worker safety program](#) found it failed to properly investigate nearly every workplace fatality for a two-year period.

That failure has left Kentucky's workers at risk, and the state's worker safety agency in peril.

[Fatal Flaws](#) was reported in collaboration with the [Ohio Valley ReSource](#) and the [Center for Public Integrity](#).

## What's happened since?

Democrats and Republicans alike saw [cause for concern in our investigation](#), which published in November.

When asked about the investigation after a press conference, Gov. Matt Bevin [ignored the questions](#).

–*Eleanor Klibanoff*

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## [Racial Disparities In Kentucky's Juvenile Justice System](#)



Though black youth are less than 27 percent of Louisville's population, they represented more than 75 percent of the youth bookings in the city's secure facility last year. The proportion of black youth in lockup has bounced between 75 and 80 percent since 2015.

The problem extends beyond Louisville. Records, research and interviews with stakeholders in the juvenile justice system showed that [this disparity occurs at nearly every decision point in Kentucky's juvenile justice system](#). As juvenile detention center populations dwindle and fewer minor offenders are locked up, whites feel the

benefit most. Youth lockups are becoming more black and brown.

### **What's happened since?**

One solution proposed by advocates and the Louisville Metro Police Department was a juvenile civil citation program that could keep more youth out of court altogether. Instead of a criminal citation or arrest, some youth accused of minor crimes would go through a civil process instead.

A pilot was targeted for last fall, and then the spring. Grant funding was available through Restorative Justice in Louisville at the time our investigation published. But the funding was reallocated after the state rejected the plan due to legal barriers, Libby Mills, executive director of Restorative Justice.

Maj. Jamey Schwab of the LMPD said that while the idea is tied up in legal limbo, there's no new target date to launch a pilot. State Sen. Whitney Westerfield, who is chair of the judiciary committee and has sponsored numerous juvenile justice-related bills, said he has no plan to file any legislative remedies in the upcoming session.

*–Kate Howard*

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[\*\*A Louisville Family Reported Sexual Abuse By A Coach. He Worked With Kids For 15 More Years\*\*](#)



J. Tyler Franklin

(L-R) Father Bob Flynn, Eric Flynn, his brother Kyle Flynn, mother Kathy Flynn and sister Jessica Crawley.

In August 2003, when he was 17 years old, Eric Flynn confided to his parents that Conliffe had sexually abused him dozens of times over a period of at least two years.

But Conliffe apparently escaped serious consequences, [an investigation by the Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting showed](#). He continued to work with children, leading a tour for youth golfers until this year even though dozens of people, several Louisville institutions and the Louisville Metro Police knew about the allegation.

The Flynn family's attempt to get the LMPD to reopen the case floundered when a prosecutor declined to take the case, police records show. The initial case file from the 2003 investigation was lost, an LMPD spokesperson said.

### **What's happened since?**

Two additional men [told KyCIR](#) in the weeks that followed the investigation that [Conliffe abused them as children, while he coached](#)

[basketball at Louisville parish schools.](#) One was a student at Lourdes School, and a second attended Holy Spirit School.

The LMPD has not reopened Flynn's case or launched any new investigations into Conliffe, a spokesperson said.

—R.G. Dunlop

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## [Despite Calls For Help, Bedbugs Infest Louisville Public Housing Complex](#)



Michelle Hanks/KyCIR

Kenneth Williams holds a jar that contains a bedbug he found on his couch the night before in Dosker Manor.

Residents at Dosker Manor, a public housing complex on the eastern edge of downtown Louisville, have said for years that the whole place is infested.

Our investigation found that residents in nearly half of all Dosker Manor apartments — more than 340 units — had complained about bedbugs in the last two and a half years. LMHA officials said they were confident maintenance was being handled properly, even though

residents from 150 units asked at least three times for the housing authority for help with bedbugs.

## **What's happened since?**

At first, the Louisville Metro Housing Authority seemed to double down. Officials initially sidestepped the idea that there was a problem, and then in June, [blamed it on residents](#). But by August, city officials were [instituting an array of changes](#) in an attempt to improve living conditions.

An inspection required by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development found the complex improved, but [still failing to meet health and safety standards in September](#).

In an interview this week, the housing authority's executive director, Lisa Osanka, said the bedbugs have not been eliminated at Dosker. But the agency remains focused on improving conditions at Dosker Manor and is making "tremendous strides."

Osanka was appointed as executive director of the Louisville Metro Housing Authority in November after serving as interim leader for seven months.

She expects the Dosker Manor maintenance crew to be fully staffed by year's end. And workers are continuing to "get caught up on work orders" and conduct quarterly inspections for bedbugs.

If residents complain of bedbugs prior to inspections, crews are dispatched within 48 hours, Osanka said. And follow up treatments are conducted as needed.

But some bugs remain, she said.

Making a promise to eliminate the bugs would be irresponsible, Osanka said, because it's difficult to predict a bedbug infestation.

Still, she expects the complex will pass its next federal inspection, which is set for Fall 2019.

"We should see significant improvement," Osanka said.

-Jacob Ryan

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## ['Lack Of Good Behavior'? Kentucky Government's Inconsistent Response To Sexual Harassment](#)



Thinkstock

Generic sexual harassment form

KyCIR conducted the most comprehensive look so far at sexual harassment allegations filed by state employees since 2012.

The records show that when a state employee alleges sexual harassment, the depth of investigations, the severity of punishment,



and even what agencies call the behavior depends on where the employee works.

Of the claims that were substantiated as sexual harassment, 88 percent resulted in punishment, but it ranges from counseling or a written reprimand to termination. Nearly 20 percent of all alleged perpetrators left their job as a result of the claim, either because they were fired, resigned or retired. Eighty percent of the alleged offenders were men.

In 20 percent of the state cases, investigators found no sexual harassment, but deemed the behavior to be some other kind of misconduct.

### **What's happened since?**

When we published that investigation, we had yet to receive records from the Kentucky Department of Corrections and Department of Juvenile Justice. It turned out that, though corrections and juvenile justice employees make up less than 15 percent of state employees, [they accounted for nearly half of all sexual harassment complaints filed over six years.](#)

In October, Kentucky [settled a lawsuit related to one of those claims.](#) The state will pay four women a total of \$1.5 million to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit stemming from their time working as prison guards at Little Sandy Correctional Complex in northeastern Kentucky.

We were also forced to go to court in our quest to uncover these stories of sexual harassment. [KyCIR was sued twice by state agencies](#) who didn't believe they should have to turn over names of employees

accused, but cleared, of sexual harassment.

[We won both those lawsuits.](#)

When the Labor Cabinet turned over the name it had been protecting, we learned that the employee was under a court order to stay away from a woman who accused him of domestic violence while the investigation into his alleged harassment was ongoing. [In the two years since, he has been charged with domestic violence, driving under the influence and felony child abuse](#) — and [kept his job.](#)

The Finance and Administration Cabinet is still appealing the judge's ruling.

*–Kate Howard and Eleanor Klibanoff*

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## [International Talent, Questions Follow Louisville's New Basketball Academy](#)



Eleanor Klibanoff

Hennssy Auriantal, second from right, looks on while Charles Bassey plays in the Grind Session World Championship in Owensboro, Kentucky on March 10, 2018.

We looked into a new prep basketball academy in Louisville this year and found a team playing by its own rules. Aspire Academy boasted one of the country's top recruits, brought to Louisville by a controversial international recruiter.

After our investigation published, [Aspire and its partner school, DeSales High School, parted ways.](#)

That top player, Charles Bassegy, reclassified this summer and enrolled early at Western Kentucky University. The president of Aspire [cast doubts on whether Bassegy had actually graduated](#), which would imperil his NCAA eligibility. Hennssy Auriantal, Bassegy's recruiter turned guardian, was [hired by WKU as an assistant coach](#).

### **What's happened since?**

Ultimately, the NCAA said [Bassegy was clear to play](#). WKU never elaborated on how or where Bassegy earned a degree.

A lot has changed for Aspire Academy, Auriantal and Bassegy in the last few months.

Aspire players now attend Holy Cross High School and live in dorms owned by the Archdiocese on campus.

The Archdiocese directed all questions to Holy Cross. Holy Cross President Danielle Weigandt said the partnership is a "work in progress," but ultimately, it has been a positive for the school.

"Many of these students, English is not their first language, but they were able to jump right in," she said. "Obviously, they've had to get

comfortable with the way we do things and our academic standards, but we've been pleased with their academic journey so far."

Aspire has expanded to add a post-graduate team, where players take an extra year to improve their grades, test scores or basketball abilities to get a second chance at college recruitment. Those players do not attend Holy Cross, but do live in the on-campus dorms.

The program faced a setback in October, when the Kentucky High School Athletic Association ruled that Aspire cannot play other Kentucky high schools. Aspire had applied for associate membership, according to the Courier-Journal, but the KHSAA denied the request.

Head coach Jeremy Kipness did not respond to a phone call, and his voicemail box was full. Aspire President Roger McClendon did not respond to a voicemail.

In Bowling Green, Auriantal's annual coaching salary is \$200,004, paid partly from men's basketball donor funds. He earns as much as men's assistant basketball coach Marc Hsu, who has been coaching college basketball since 2008, according to his bio on the WKU website.

WKU did not return a request for comment.

Bassey has been earning accolades on the court. He has played an average of 30 minutes a game and has been named the Conference USA freshman of the week three times.

The Hilltoppers are 5-5 so far in the season amid a host of off-court issues. Players have been benched due to academic eligibility issues, suspended for marijuana possession and disorderly conduct and left

mid-season to pursue professional play.

Even before he arrived on campus, Bassey's departure for the NBA was already being predicted by websites like Bleacher Report and The Athletic. Many speculate that Bassey will be a "one and done," leaving WKU after the one year he must spend in between high school and the NBA.

By the time the 2019 NBA draft rolls around, Bassey will still be only 18 years old.

*–Eleanor Klibanoff*

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## [After Animal Cruelty Charges, Why Does Trixie Foundation Still Have Hundreds of Animals?](#)



WAVE 3 News

Dozens of dogs are loose and housed together in an outdoor pen at the Trixie Foundation in Webbsville, Kentucky in April 2018.

An investigation by the Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting and WAVE3 News found that Trixie Foundation owner Randy Skaggs has been enabled by Kentucky's woefully weak animal protection laws,

by lax worker-safety enforcement and by the unwillingness of public officials to demand that he provide better care for his dogs and cats.

On March 7, following a sustained barrage of complaints from Skaggs' detractors and a state Department of Agriculture investigation, he was charged with 179 criminal counts of animal cruelty and 179 additional counts of failing to provide rabies vaccine for his dogs. But the vast majority of the animals remained at his property.

### **What's happened since?**

Little of substance has happened in Skaggs' case since he entered a not guilty plea more than nine months ago.

In May, 14 of the oldest, sickest dogs, plus four cats, were removed and taken to an animal-rescue facility in Ohio. But with winter approaching, virtually all of the dogs – plus about 45 cats, some chickens and two horses – that Skaggs was housing at the time are still there, confined to an area not much larger than a football field.

The case initially was set for trial in October, then continued to February 22.

Elliott County Attorney Patrick Trent, who is about to leave office, and his successor, John D. Lewis, Jr., did not respond to requests for comment about the case.

Skaggs' attorney, Dan Carman, declined to comment. Skaggs recently told KyCIR that all of the dogs have been vaccinated.

Conditions at Trixie are "somewhat" the same as in March, Skaggs

acknowledged, but he said he is in the process of making major renovations.

"This will be one of the very best facilities in the state," he asserted.

*-R.G. Dunlop*

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## **[What Trash Cans Tell Us About Poverty](#)**

A review of city trash bin locations showed us that, in 91 percent of the 340 complaints in Taylor Berry, there's no public trash can on the block. And the problem wasn't unique to Taylor Berry.

Across the city, data showed trash piling up in parts of town with the fewest public trash cans. In fact, 73 percent of all trash complaints reported to the city's MetroCall 311 service were not within one block of a trash can, the data show. And 41 percent of those locations had no trash bin within two blocks.

**(Read "[Behind The Data: How We Analyzed Trash Complaints](#)")**

Mayor Greg Fischer said after the story published in January that an assessment was already underway using city data, social media and community input to determine areas that need "concentrated help" to be more "clean and green." He said a citywide initiative would be unveiled in the spring.

### **What's happened since?**

Since that report, city crews have installed 55 trash bins across the city. And the installation of 15 more is underway, according to Harold

Adams, a spokesman for the city's Public Works department.

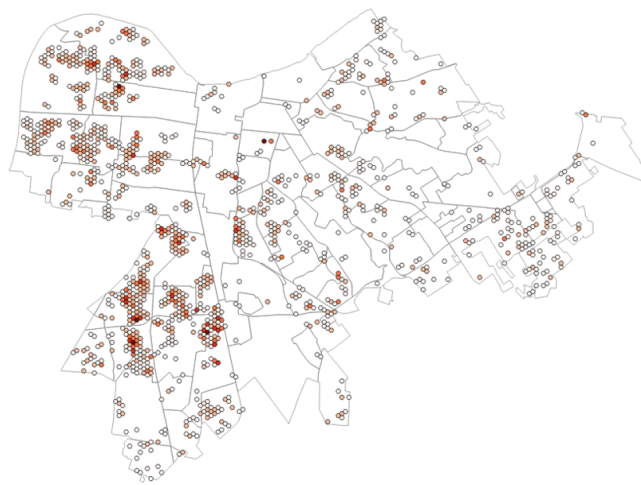
The total cost for all the cans is \$42,940. Many of the trash bins — all but 16 — were requested by Metro Council members and paid for with council funds, Adams said.

The others are part of a pilot program focused on improving neighborhood cleanliness in the Shelby Park and Smoketown neighborhoods, Adams said. Those sixteen trash cans were paid for by the city's Waste Management District and cost nearly \$9,250, Adams said.

City officials working on the pilot program have assessed street and alleyway cleanliness, examined the source of litter and what people are doing when they litter, and locating areas in need of more garbage bins.

"The results of the pilot will be evaluated for potential citywide implementation," Adams said.

### **Where new bins were installed**



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Alexandra Kanik



The colored hexes show areas that reported a high volume of trash issues in 2017, but had no bin in a one-block radius. The yellow circles show where new bins were installed in 2018.

Fischer's planned city-wide cleanliness initiative didn't launch in the spring and has yet to be unveiled.

"We are working every day, as a matter of business, to keep our streets clean and our neighborhoods green. We're still discussing a more specific initiative, but not planning to roll out anything in 2018," said Jean Porter, a spokesperson for Fischer.

City crews have also provided additional garbage carts and recycling carts to some residents, and conducted an outreach campaign through printed mailers and social media, according to documents provided by the city's Public Works department.

Metro Councilwoman Cheri Bryant Hamilton, a Democrat from District 5, said the presence of trash in a neighborhood is "demoralizing" to the people that live there. She's represented the neighborhoods in the northwest corner of Jefferson County – some of the city's poorest — since 2000.

Hamilton will leave the Metro Council at the beginning of the new year. She was defeated by Democrat Charles Booker in the May 2018 primary election. She said she's heard from her constituents about the ills of litter in the neighborhoods. This year, she dedicated nearly \$19,000 of her council funds to 24 permanent trash cans.

"It's taken a while, but there's a lot of work going on," she said. "But I think people see progress and they see things happening now and they don't feel as neglected."

*-Jacob Ryan and Alexandra Kanik*