



Auditor of Public Accounts
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Auditor Harmon: Greater Transparency Needed Regarding Use of State Aircraft by Elected Officials

Auditor Harmon's office releases review of use of state aircraft by former Governor, Lt. Governor

FRANKFORT, Ky. (March 12, 2020) – Today, Auditor Mike Harmon called on the Kentucky General Assembly to pass legislation that will create greater transparency when it comes to the use of state aircraft by elected officials. Auditor Harmon's call comes as his office releases a review of the use by state aircraft by former Governor Bevin and former Lt. Governor Hampton between January 2016 and September 2019.

"Originally, we intended to review the use of state aircraft by both former Governor Bevin, and former Governor Steve Beshear. But the documentation available for former Governor Beshear was not sufficient enough to allow for a comparison between his administration and that of former Governor Bevin," Auditor Harmon said. "Of the documentation we were able to review, my office has concluded that increased transparency is needed when officials like the Governor or Lt. Governor are using a taxpayer-funded aircraft."

Auditor Harmon's letter details the use of aircraft operated by the Kentucky State Police (KSP) Aircraft Branch, and the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet's (KYTC) Capital City Aircraft Division (CCAD):

**Table 1: Passenger Details Related to Flights Billed to the Governor's Office
January 1, 2016 through September 30, 2019**

	KSP Aircraft	CCAD Aircraft	Totals
Total Number of Flights	289	20	309
Flights with Governor	246	7	253
Flights with Both the Governor and Lt. Governor	8	0	8

Flights with Lt. Governor without the Governor	32	13	45
Flights without the Governor or Lt. Governor	11	0	11

Source: Auditor of Public Accounts based on documents provided by the former Governor Bevin's administration, Kentucky State Police Aircraft Branch, and the Capital City Airport Division.

**Table 2: Cost and Reimbursement of Flights Billed to the Governor's Office
January 1, 2016 through September 30, 2019**

	KSP Aircraft	CCAD Aircraft	Totals
Charge for Flights	\$803,790	\$24,556	\$828,346
Total Number of Flights	289	20	309
Number of Flights With Reimbursement	126	2	128
Amount Reimbursed by a Non-State Entity	\$341,245	\$842	\$342,807
Percent of Flight Costs Reimbursed	42.5%	3.4%	41.3%

Source: Auditor of Public Accounts based on documents provided by the former Governor Bevin's administration, Kentucky State Police Aircraft Branch, and the Capital City Airport Division.

**Table 3: Documentation Available for Flights Billed to the Governor's Office
January 1, 2016 through September 30, 2019**

	KSP Aircraft	CCAD Aircraft	Totals	Percent of Total
Total Number of Flights	289	20	309	N/A
Number of Flights with a Documented Flight Request	0	16	16	5.2%
Number of Flight Requests with a Documented Purpose	0	16	16	5.2%
Number of Flight Requests with a Documented Personal Business Allocation	0	5	5	1.6%
Allocation Form from Governor's Office Documents Personal Business Percentage	250	16	266	86.1%

Source: Auditor of Public Accounts based on documents provided by the former Governor Bevin's administration, Kentucky State Police Aircraft Branch, and the Capital City Airport Division.

According to the tables in Auditor Harmon's report letter, aircraft operated by KSP were used on 289 of 309 flights taken. Because KRS 174.500 excludes KSP aircraft from the definition of state aircraft, these flights are not required to document a purpose.

"Law enforcement flight activities need to remain confidential and undisclosed, but flights transporting government officials do not require the same level of privacy. Though these flights are not law enforcement missions, KSP flights transporting officials, including the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, are not explicitly required to comply with statutory flight information requirements," Auditor Harmon wrote in the report letter.

While not required by statute, former Governor Bevin's staff created and used an Allocation Form during his administration to document the percentage of official and non-official flight time and calculate reimbursement amounts for non-officials flights. These forms were used internally and not provided to KSP or CCAD, which would offer an added layer of transparency in the process.

“Unlike flights for law enforcement purposes, protection from disclosure requirements shouldn’t extend to the use of taxpayer owned and funded aircraft by their elected leaders for both official and non-official business. That is why I’m advocating for changes in law by the General Assembly that will create a consistent way to disclose the purpose of flights by the Governor and Lt. Governor,” said Auditor Harmon.

Overall, Auditor Harmon’s report details four findings and recommendations regarding the use of state aircraft. Among the findings are:

- **Only 16 of 309 flights between January 2016 and September 2019 had their purpose documented:** The 16 trips with documentation were among the 20 flights taken using CCAD aircraft. None of the 289 flights on KSP aircraft, costing more than \$800,000, had a documented purpose.
- **Reimbursements for personal flights on state aircraft didn’t include KSP overnight crew fees:** Since 2017, KSP has billed overnight crew fees as executive security costs instead of reporting them to the Governor’s Office. Prior to 2017, KSP flight information submitted to the Governor’s Office showed more than \$8,300 in flight crew fees. Of that, \$5,200 was for flights reimbursed by a non-state entity, but these crew fees were not included in the reimbursement. If a non-state entity reimbursed 100% of the flight costs, the \$5,200 billed to taxpayers should likely have been included.

“This report should serve as a basis for improving transparency and accountability when it comes to our state airplanes and how elected leaders use them. It is my hope the General Assembly, along with current and future Governors, carry out our recommendations as a commitment to taxpayers for open and good government,” said Auditor Harmon.

The complete letter is available for review on our [website](#).

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