

CHFS Community  
Aubrey L. Mason,  
Associate and Fiscal Grants Officer, Serve Kentucky  
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Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Our governor talks about Team Kentucky, but this is something that's been going on a while that really exemplifies that. It's how people reach out in their communities and help, and it gives us an opportunity to recognize them.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Julianne Hatton:

Welcome to CHFS Community, a place where ordinary people do extraordinary work, helping Kentuckians reach their full human potential. Hosted by Eric Friedlander, Secretary of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Hello, CHFS. This is Eric Friedlander, your Secretary of the Health and Family Services Cabinet. And today I have with me Aubrey Mason. Aubrey is an associate and fiscal grants officer for Serve Kentucky. Hi, Aubrey.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Hi. Good morning. How are you?

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

I'm doing all right. Doing all right. Nice day today. So I always like to ask a little about where we come from and things like that. So where'd you come from?

Aubrey L. Mason:

Well, I am from Frankfort. This is my hometown here, and I have lived here the majority of my life. I had just a couple of years when I was in Louisville attending the University of Louisville. But yeah, Frankfort's my home.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Where'd you go to high school?

Aubrey L. Mason:

I actually went to Western Hills High School my first two years, and then I went to Frankfort High School my second two years. So I graduated in '98 from Frankfort High, and I ended up attending Kentucky State University right out of school, then went to U of L and then came back and ultimately graduated from Kentucky State.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Okay. Yeah, that's nice. But then you were kind of a rival with yourself when you went from Western Hills into Frankfort Independent, right? Is that-

Aubrey L. Mason:

Right. Yeah, so that was kind of interesting to go from both schools, but it was a lot of fun. A lot of the Western Hills and Frankfort High students, we spent time together. And so now as I'm older, I'll run into people and I kind of have to think sometimes. Did we go to school at Western Hills or Frankfort High?

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

That's good.

Aubrey L. Mason:

But it was fun. I got to know a lot of people that way.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah, I'll bet. I'll bet. And over this time, Frankfort has grown so much. It's amazing.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Oh my gosh, it is. I just think back to when I was younger and just seeing where we are today is just remarkable. And I love being a part of this community and seeing the growth and what's happening here and some of the revitalization and yeah, it's fantastic.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

So you grew up here. You graduated from Kentucky State, and you found your way to state government too. How did you find your way to serve Kentucky?

Aubrey L. Mason:

Well, so it's been an interesting path. So after I graduated, I decided that I wanted to start working for the commonwealth, and this was back in the time when the personnel cabinet was actually in the old, the Buffalo Trace barrel warehouses back at that time.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

I remember that.

Aubrey L. Mason:

If you remember that.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah. Behavioral Health. DBHDID was there as well. I was briefly their commissioner. I always thought it was ironic that they were located in the old distillery, in the old rickhouse.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Right. And back then you had to test for positions as well. And so I remember going to libraries and archives and checking out those study guides and the books and just testing. And then once you pass, then you got to see what you could interview for. And it was quite a process for you to have an interview an in-person interview there as well. So it took me about a year and a half, but I got my first position in March of 2006, and that was with the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet. And I was in the Office of Legal Services, which was part of the Office of the Secretary. So I really enjoyed that position. And when I first got hired, I was kind of just doing a little bit of everything and then ended up promoting into a position where I started working more with in the financial branch there.

This was right at the very early year one of eMARS. So the way they had transferred from MARS to eMARS, and I didn't have the experience with MARS, but I got right in on the beginning of eMARS, which has been great and really helped me in my career. So I stayed there for a little over five years, and then actually took a brief break from state government for about three years.

I was working as a makeup artist part-time, just on the weekends. So I ended up working as a cosmetics department manager for a couple of years. This was in 2011. And then ended up working as a makeup artist again and traveled all over Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, Kentucky, and just ultimately realized at that time it was fun, but the travel was a lot, and I just wanted to be closer to home. So I thought, well, I think I want to go back into state government service. So I ended up in 2014, I was hired on with the Department for Aging and Independent Living here in the cabinet. I worked in their financial branch, and gosh, did a little bit of everything there as well, but primarily worked with the area development districts and working with their invoices, budgets, all of those things.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Always a little challenge when everybody wants to do their own thing, yeah.

Aubrey L. Mason:

I was there, gosh, I think a little over five years as well. And then I moved to the Division of Procurement and Grant Oversight with the cabinet and worked as a contract specialist there, which was really, it was neat to kind of be on the cabinet level side of things, working with multiple departments. I got to meet a lot of people in the cabinet that way. And then ultimately found my way to serve Kentucky in 2021. So I'll be coming up on my three-year anniversary

here. And my primary role now with Serve Kentucky is the working with contracts and procurement. So yeah, it's been an interesting path.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Well, I always think those central office functions; the finance piece, the contracts piece, the regulatory piece, that's how I came up. They translate across programs, and I think it's really helpful. Like you said, you learned eMARS right when it was starting, and when you have that kind of experience and some of that basic process stuff, it sounds really boring, but then everybody wants you to come work for them.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Having that piece is great. And also being on both the department side of things, and then also at the cabinet level, it's just given me a very kind of global look at things, because I see where it starts on one side and then goes here for approvals and then comes back. And so I hope also that's been helpful for the other staff that I work with that I can see the whole picture and put all that together. So it's been a great opportunity for sure.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah, I just think it's important to have all those kind of different perspectives. And you said you had your three-year anniversary, but you also had your 15-year too, right?

Aubrey L. Mason:

Right. That's coming up in June. So time flies. It's been, thank you so much. It's just, yeah, it's hard to believe, but it's pretty exciting. I feel like that's another landmark with my career.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

It is. I remember when I got to 10 and I'm like, oh, wait a minute. This is a career.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Yes, yes. I know. I actually have the ten-year framed, and I was like, okay, I'm doing this. This is what we're doing.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Exactly.

Aubrey L. Mason:

I love it.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Wait a minute. I didn't expect this. So talk to me a little about Serve Kentucky. It's a pretty cool organization.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Yeah, definitely. And for those that may not be as familiar with Serve Kentucky that are listening, our primary role really is we receive federal grant funding, and we provide the oversight and administration for AmeriCorps programs throughout the commonwealth. And as far as AmeriCorps, just to give folks a little idea of that, because to be honest, I wasn't that familiar with what AmeriCorps was when I came. So it's been an amazing opportunity to learn as well.

But AmeriCorps is the Federal Agency for National Service and Volunteerism. So we have currently 22 programs throughout the state. And those programs all have members that are out there providing service and things for their communities. And those programs really span so many different areas. It could be disaster relief or tutoring or college prep or senior service. There's a little bit of everything that we're really touching on throughout the whole commonwealth.

But yeah, we've been staying really busy. We have an event coming up, the Governor's Service Awards, which will be on April 16th, and I know you were at the one last year, which was just phenomenal. And so we're really excited about that. And so those awards are, that was a program started by the Office of the Governor, but it started Kentucky administers it. So it recognizes it's an event that recognizes groups, individuals that are just out there providing that exemplary service and volunteerism out in their communities as well. So we're really excited about that.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

I've gone to those programs for years, and what's neat is it's people from all over the state, from firefighters to bikers. It's a really interesting collection of folks, and it always is.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Yeah, it's fantastic.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Our governor talks about Team Kentucky, but this is something that's been going on a while that really exemplifies that. It's how people reach out in their communities and help, and it gives us an opportunity to recognize them.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Absolutely. Absolutely. But yeah, so we always have a lot going on with Serve Kentucky and our AmeriCorps. We've grown so much. It'll be, like I said, three years I've been with this team this year, and we've really just had so much growth in the past three years. Our funding has grown by leaps and bounds, and we've increased members out there in our programs, and we feel like we're adding more programs. If you look at some of the charts and some of the graphics we have going back to 2013-14, and see where we are today, it's just a huge amount of growth. So I'm excited to be a part of that growth and what we're doing.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Oh, yeah, absolutely. Oh, I said we didn't quite honor a dog last time, but we sort of did. We had Ethan Almighty, so that was really neat.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Yes, that was, I loved that.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Had my picture taken with them. I think that might've been the most exciting picture I've had.

Aubrey L. Mason:

It was really great. I loved that as well. It was awesome.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

And now Ethan lobbied for an animal cruelty bill. So it's good stuff.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Yes.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

So you've got a studio art degree.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Yes.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

What kind of other art do you do?

Aubrey L. Mason:

Well, so I enjoy painting, drawing. I also like doing kind of crafty things too, but probably painting and drawing are my two favorite types of art, or doing mixed media is fun as well.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

My wife's an artist as well. She's primarily a potter, but she also does a little painting. I've got one in my office that's hers.

Aubrey L. Mason:

That's awesome.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Are you more abstract or figurative or?

Aubrey L. Mason:

Well, when I draw, I do like to draw. I really was into portraits for a while, so I was doing a lot of portraits of self-portraits or friends or family. But I feel like when I paint, I'm definitely more abstract with painting.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Do you do larger canvas, smaller canvas?

Aubrey L. Mason:

It kind of depends. When I was in school, I did some really quite large pieces. I think one was about six feet by six or seven feet. So back then I was building my own canvases and frames and stretching everything and doing all that. But now it's much more just a kind of casual hobby for me. So I'll buy the pre-stretched and just kind of paint smaller for fun.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Is that what you do to relax?

Aubrey L. Mason:

Gosh, I feel like I have so many different hobbies and things I like to do in my downtime. We bought a camper a couple years ago, and so we had started out as tent campers. Well, my husband did, and I didn't think I wanted to be a camper. I just didn't think that was going to be for me at all. But he was having so much fun with it, and I was like, okay, come on. Just give it a try. And so we did. We went one year, and I just fell in love with it. We tent camped for many years all over the state, and then we decided we wanted to upgrade and do the camper. We camp, we kayak. We usually, when we go to a park, we'll bring our bikes and kayaks and do that. In fact, we're going to go this weekend. My birthday's tomorrow, so we're going to go from our birthday this weekend.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Happy birthday. My birthday was just two days ago.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Oh my gosh. Well, happy birthday to you as well. That's great. Yeah, so we love to do that. I'm a big foodie. My husband, he actually graduated from culinary art school, so he worked as a chef off and on for many years. One of his most recent was as a chef at the Governor's Mansion. Oh, yeah. And so now he's hung up the chef's clothes, and he's the assistant director there now. So now he's traded that for a shirt and tie. But we love to explore different restaurants, and I love to cook. I think I do probably more cooking now than he does. But yeah, we love food. And gosh, probably, well in my biggest kind of relaxed downtime, I'm also a certified yoga instructor, so I got my yoga teaching certification a couple of years ago. I actually went to Spain and did my training there. Yeah, so long story short, my dad was in the military, and so he was stationed there for a long time and ended up retiring back there in Spain, and his wife is from there.

So when I went, I got to visit with them and spend a little over a week with them. But I spent three weeks on site at the yoga training facility, lived there the whole time. It was an intensive training, but it was great. It was a great experience. And I started teaching when I got home. So actually I teach, there's a yoga studio here in Frankfort called My Old Kentucky OM. It's down on Second Street.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Oh, so you're downtown.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Yes. Yes. So we're downtown. We're a very active studio. I teach every Monday night, and then I also teach workshops. So if I'm not doing those other things, I'm definitely doing something with yoga. And that's been a part of my life, gosh, for almost 10 years now. So I'm very passionate about that. And yeah, we just love to travel. We love music, live music. We love to go to concerts. We live in a very old home, which we've been remodeling and restoring for the past couple, four years now, I guess. And we have a music room here because we have a lot of bedrooms, and so we've turned some of them into, it's just my husband and I.

So we've got, I think, gosh, a couple of drum kits in there, maybe six or seven guitars. So we have a lot of friends that are musicians and they like to come over and play. And so yeah, it's usually never a dull moment in our lives. I feel like we're always doing something. And we love the art. I mean, really anything with the arts. We love the theater. We went to a ballet last year. We love to go to museums. Yeah, we're just kind all over.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

That's good. I actually think your husband gave me some advice about my beard grooming, so I appreciate that.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Oh, yeah. That's great.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

It was good. I needed it. It was good. He was like, it's good because he can't keep it this length anymore. So I think he was admonished about it, but it was helpful advice. It was good.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Yeah. Well, he's had all levels of very long to very short and everything in between with his beard over the years.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

It was very solid advice. Please thank him for me.

Aubrey L. Mason:

I will.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

So I also see, if it's okay, that you've got a tattoo that's a pretty significant sleeve.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Yes. I do have a sleeve, and I don't really have a full theme for it necessarily, but I do have a bee, I have some different kinds of nature. There's a moth, there's some other designs. There's a mandala design to it, so it's all in black and gray. So it all kind of works together with those different pieces. I have a lot of flowers that are a part of the piece that kind of go up and down the arm.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

It looks lovely.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Thank you.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Sometimes there's stories behind tattoos, so I always like to ask, and if there is, people love to tell you about it.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Oh, yeah. For me, it's interesting because I don't have really a lot. I love having tattoos, but all of mine are either birds or flowers, and I don't know how that happened, but I'm a really avid bird watcher. That's kind something else I like to do in my time. So I actually have little bird watching scopes and books, and we do all kinds of bird feeders in our backyard.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

We have the same thing. Have you ever, what's that called, Bird Buddy, where you've got the camera that's in the bird feeder? Have you seen that?

Aubrey L. Mason:

I have seen those. I have not done that, but I have definitely seen those, and they're very fascinating.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

They are. We have one. It's addictive. Be careful.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Oh my gosh. Thanks for the warning. I've always been a little bit curious.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

They're really neat, by the way. Well, that's really cool. So I want to say thank you for your service, right? And working for Serve Kentucky, I think in the cabinet is one of the really cool organizations.

Aubrey L. Mason:

It is.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

And folks, keep your eye out for the Serve Kentucky piece. Also, not this one, but the next one, there are always ways to nominate folks for awards, so keep your eyes open for that, because oftentimes we meet people in community and we're like, they need to be recognized, right?

Aubrey L. Mason:

Absolutely. Yep. For sure.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

So keep your eyes peeled for that, and lovely conversation. Thank you so much for talking with me today, and I hope the folks who listen to this enjoy it.

Aubrey L. Mason:

Thank you so much for having me. It was a pleasure.

Julianne Hatton:

Thanks for joining us on CHFS Community, hosted by Secretary Eric Friedlander, produced by Julianne Hatton. Our assistant producer is Brice Mitchell, with help from Jennifer Hubbard. Find us at [chfs.ky.gov](http://chfs.ky.gov) and tell all your friends about the show. Until next time, stay healthy, Kentucky.