

# Commissioner James Rodney Ballard (1955-2025)

Rodney was born on February 11, 1955 in Covington, Kentucky, the oldest of three children born to James and Patricia (Latimer) Ballard. He attended Simon Kenton High School in Independence where he participated in many extracurricular activities. He was a star basketball player taking the “most rebounds” award at both the Junior Varsity and Varsity levels and Most Valuable Player as a senior. He was voted “Mr. Hustle” in his sophomore year of football as a center and after switching to fullback, best offensive back as a Junior and Senior. He was also their starting defensive end. He also had the best field goal percentage as a kicker. He was a four-sport athlete participating also in swimming and track. Furthermore, he was in the Pep Club, on the Annual staff, on the Prom Court, and on the Graduation Committee. He capped these off in his Senior year being voted as the schools “Most Popular” of the 279 seniors. He graduated in 1973. He later earned a degree in Criminal Justice.

His first foray into law enforcement was as a Police Officer with the Taylor Mill Police Department. He transferred to the Kenton County Police Department and, on October 26, 1979 graduated from the 102<sup>nd</sup> Class of the Bureau of Training Basic Training Academy. He resigned in 1982.



After another 18-week Kentucky State Police Academy in Frankfort, he was assigned as a Trooper at the Dry Ridge Post on March 25, 1983. He was immediately investigating traffic, criminal, and drug offenses and appeared in newspaper articles dozens of times within the next year. On August 20, 1985, Trooper Ballard was dispatched to a report of a shooting. Upon arrival, he found the victim in a vehicle outside the trailer containing the armed shooter. Trooper Ballard entered the ‘kill zone’ treated the wounded woman and dragged her to safety. He and another trooper then negotiated a peaceful surrender of the barricaded man. By August 1986, Trooper Ballard was assigned to a five-man Special Response Team.

He was promoted to Detective. In December 1988, Detective Ballard investigated and testified against a Fayette County Sheriff for misappropriation of funds. A month later, he testified against a Fayette County Deputy Sheriff for planting Cocaine evidence to discredit another witness in the same case. In May 1990, his undercover investigation culminated a federal indictment of two men for possession and distribution of a “measurable amount” of cocaine. Another investigation in 1992 resulted in 13 arrests in a cocaine distribution ring in Covington. By 1993, he was a member of a Drug Enforcement Administration Task Force in northern Kentucky. At the end of 1993, he was assigned to general investigations, including sex crime, burglary, embezzlement, drug conversion, kidnapping, and homicide. In June 1994, he was one of three detectives appointed statewide to investigate allegation of a United States Representative from Lexington. In 1997 he was chosen to investigate allegations of misappropriation by a Williamstown mayor. The representative was found to have committed a minor administrative violation and was not charged. He charged and convicted the mayor and by 1998 the former mayor was robbing banks. On January 15, 1998, two women were taken hostage just south of Crittenden by their husband and brother, respectively. Detective Ballard and a deputy sheriff negotiated for hours with the man who eventually surrendered without harm to anyone. Detective Ballard retired at the end of 1998 after 20 years as a law enforcement officer.

In January 1999, he was appointed Major and Chief Deputy of the Kenton County Detention Center. Before 2007, he was promoted to Colonel.

After nine years, on February 6, 2008, Governor Steve Beshear appointed Chief Ballard as Deputy Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Corrections’ Community Services Division, which also included the Division of Probation and Parole, a division which employed 636 officers, supervisors, and support staff, and the Division of Local Facilities.



Four years later, on March 10, 2012, Deputy Commissioner Ballard was hired as the Fayette County Division of Corrections Director.

Almost four years after that on February 20, 2016, Governor Matt Bevin appointed him as the Kentucky Department of Corrections Commissioner. In March 2017, Commissioner Ballard resigned after four decades of service to his community, county, and state.

In October 2022, he was drawn again out of retirement when hired as the interim Fayette County Division of Corrections Director until a new director could be found.

Commissioner Ballard died in Edgewood on July 25, 2025 at the age of 70.

He was predeceased by his brother, Phillip Ballard. Commissioner Ballard is survived by his wife of 49 years, Beverly (Napier) Ballard; children, Britni Megan (Fort Wright Police Chief Jonathan) Colwell, Zachary (Kati Elliott) Ballard, and Wesley (Tara) Ballard; grandchildren, Aiden Colwell, Olivia Colwell, Maddox Colwell, Channing Elliott, Charlie Elliott, Chesney Elliott, Aubriana Ballard, and Luca Ballard; and sister, Susan (Don) Stewart.

A celebration of his life will be held on Sunday, August 3, 2025 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Chambers and Grubbs Funeral Home at 11382 Madison Pike in Independence. A funeral service will be held at 2 p.m.

Memorials may be made to In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the [Kentucky State Police Foundation](#) or [Trooper Island](#).