



# HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS



2023 Legislature Week 11

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**Governor Kelly Along With The Kansas Military Council** planned and hosted a ceremony to proclaim March 22nd as Armed Forces Appreciation and Vietnam War Veterans Day in Kansas. Nobel Lathromof Perry, and Philip Preston of Olathe, were honored with the Kansas Vietnam Veteran Medallion at the event. The annual observance will celebrate the impact of military activity, service member sacrifices, and veteran quality of life in Kansas along with acknowledgment of how much Kansas military units and installations contributed to the state economy - last year it was \$9 billion.

**A House Committee Is Considering A Bill** that would expand an economic incentive program for the development of housing to include cities with at least 60K residents. The current incentives are only for rural communities to issue bonds to developers for the construction of up to 100 small, affordable residential homes. The Senate approved this legislation in February with a bipartisan vote of 30-6. Supporters believe broadening this program is necessary because investment in constructing homes of 1,650 square feet or less anywhere in Kansas has come to a standstill because doing so is simply no longer a profitable venture.

**A Senate Committee Is Considering Expanding An Economic Incentive Program** for building affordable housing to include cities with at least 60K residents. The current incentives are only for rural communities to issue bonds to developers for the construction of up to 100 small, affordable residential homes. The House approved this legislation in February with a bipartisan vote of 30-6. Supporters believe broadening this program is necessary because investment in constructing affordable homes of 16K square feet or less anywhere in Kansas has come to a standstill because doing so is simply no longer a profitable venture.

**Kansas Court Of Appeals Ruled Against Law Restricting Voting Access** handing down a decision that all laws must pass the strictest legal standards to be enforceable. This decision comes after several voting rights groups challenged a law that limited the number of ballots individuals may deliver and required election officials to verify signatures on all mailed ballots. That law can now be overturned if it does not meet that standard which it apparently does not in light of the Kansas AG's swift announcement of plans to appeal the ruling.

**Kansas Liquor Laws Might Get Another Update**, following in the footsteps of to-go drinks and expanded Sunday sales. Kansas is looking to join the over 26 other states that already allow stores, restaurants, and third-party delivery services to offer home delivery of liquor. The bill currently in committee is backed by national brands, arguing that this is meeting consumer need. Opponents fear both the public health consequences and the negative impact on small businesses.

**Bi-partisanship In The House Elections Committee** resulted in a unanimous vote to modify the Kansas Governmental Ethics Commission's administrative procedures for subpoenas, funding, and protection for testimonials. The compromise bill has been sent to the full house for discussion.

**The Attracting Powerful Economic Expansion Program** (APEX) has helped Kansas attract mega businesses resulting in tremendous economic success and development which is why Governor Kelly and the Kansas Department of Commerce want to extend the program. However the legislation has had no hearings or votes on the issue this session nor are any planned. Purportedly lawmakers are more interested in saving state funds than in broadening business growth this year.

**The Kansas House Could Soon Vote On A Bill** that would prevent cities and counties from prohibiting the sale of any consumer products that are not illegal under state or federal law. Supporters state that restrictions on authorized products impact economic growth and business expansion. Opponents claim local officials should be allowed to manage their own communities.

**The University of Kansas Institute for Policy & Social Research** has released a report on their 2-year Study of Broadband Access across the state that shows a continuing significant divide between urban and rural areas in digital access, speed, and literacy. Officials recently distributed nearly \$50 million in federal funds to improve broadband access in Kansas, but researchers say the state still is not getting its share of federal money because federal maps undercount the number of people without access. One million Kansans live in places that lack access to high-speed broadband because the private sector often does not want to build into unprofitable sparsely populated areas which is why Kansas is falling behind. The report concludes that these gaps are limiting the economic growth of the state. Researchers proposed that the solution to this broadband problem lies in adequately funding the recently established Office of Broadband Development so it can quickly develop and implement strategic changes for improvement.

**The Kansas Court of Appeals has ruled that a state law restricting voting** access must pass the strictest legal standards to be enforceable. This decision comes after several voting rights groups challenged a law that limits the number of ballots any individual may deliver and requires election officials to verify signatures on all mailed ballots. That law can now be overturned if it does not meet that standard which it apparently does not in light of the Kansas' AG almost immediate statement about his plans to appeal.

**The Kansas Senate Approved A \$9.3 Billion Budget Plan** that includes a clause prohibiting state colleges and universities from requiring diversity, equity, and inclusion standards in hiring decisions. The Senate will likely need to negotiate with the House on its budget proposals. The House is crafting its own spending bill.

**The Needs of K-12 School Budgets** were piecemealed into nine separate bills that were bundled together in a legislative swarm. Overall, the package increases spending by roughly \$600 million over two years and includes a voucher-like program of a \$5,000 annual stipend for students enrolled in private or home-based education. Also, in an amendment opposed by the KSHSAA, the Kansas State Board of Education, and the Kansas State Parent Teacher Association, private school or homeschool students would be allowed to participate in team activities offered at public schools for a price. The bundle eliminates \$580 million in special education programs, revokes the authority of districts to buy Narcan, and would phase out aid to districts with high percentages of at-risk students by 2024. All this was approved by the House 75-48.

**Engaged Kansas is a Coalition of Kansas Organizations** seeking to specifically encourage and prepare citizens to run for, and enter, local public service. There are 6,000 local election positions in Kansas, and the group is trying to demystify the process. The coalition is nonpartisan and will not advocate for specific policies. Programming is based on focus group research that reluctance to seek office comes from lack of clarity around job duties, financial obligations of running, and general anxiety, all of which offer opportunity for community education.

**The House Judiciary Committee** heard testimony about giving the Kansas Attorney General's office jurisdiction to prosecute multi-county crimes simultaneously or collectively. The drive for this bill was spurred by a National Retail Federation report that disclosed that organized retail crime has increased by 26.5% since 2021. This bill has already passed the senate.

**The Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee** voted against broadening religious or moral objections to vaccination exemptions, including coronavirus, measles and mumps. Testimony in support of the bill claimed a fundamental right to bodily autonomy. Opponents implored lawmakers to put their trust in medical experts, especially when it comes to protecting the lives of Kansas' youth.

**The Kansas Senate will soon Debate the "ESG" bill.** HB 2436 was passed in the House, forcing state investment authorities to focus solely on rate of return and to give no preference or thought to factors that may fall under the heading of "ESG". The bill, which also applies to cities, counties, and school boards, seeks to protect businesses like nuclear and ammunition manufacturing, from being discriminated against, and blocks any investing tied to "ESG" goals like diversity or environmental protections.

**The Center for Healthcare Quality & Payment Reform** released a report that claims 53 rural hospitals in Kansas are in danger of closing with half of those being in imminent risk of closure. The state has seen nine rural hospitals close since 2005. Researchers found the prevailing reasons are their failures are financial woes, including insurance plans not fully covering the cost of providing essential services. This was found to be true in all 11 states that have not expanded Medicaid for the poor, elderly, and disabled. Taking care of the uninsured is becoming an insurmountable financial burden for these facilities.

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