



# HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS



*2023 Legislature Week 5*

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**An Integra Technologies Spokesperson**, along with Governor Kelly, announced last week that Kansas has reached an agreement for a 10-year, \$304 million package of tax breaks and reimbursements in return for their building a new semiconductor plant in Wichita that will cover 1 million square feet and employ 2,000 people. The \$1.8 billion endeavor will also be dependent on receiving essential federal grants and incentives that have become available specifically for companies rebuilding the nation's microchip production after they became scarce during the pandemic. In the unlikely case that Integra fails to secure any of those federal funds, the project will be a no-go.

**Notable Retirements** Herman Jones will retire on July 1st after a 45-year career in law enforcement. He was the long-standing Shawnee County Sheriff until assuming the KHP position in 2019. The Governor has not yet named a replacement. On April 1st the Kansas National Guard Adjutant General David Weishaar, who is also Kansas' Emergency Management Director, will also be retiring with Brigadier General Michael Venerdi stepping into those roles.

**Agriculture News** Governor Kelly announced to attendees of a Statehouse event that bills have been introduced to improve the agricultural industry in both House and Senate committees. The list of measures in the bills include crop insurance, volunteer conservation programs, and technological innovations vital to maintaining a robust agricultural economy for Kansas. The Governor, along with Agricultural Secretary Mike Beam, shared their commitment to monitoring the progress of these bills and to advocating for their approval.

**Senate Concurrent Resolution 1602** was adopted this week, formally disapproving the Federal government's listing of the lesser prairie chicken as a threatened species in Kansas and announcing support for efforts to remove the designation. The action is purely symbolic in nature without any weight to actually resolve the issue. State officials acknowledge they will have to work with the federal agencies in charge of the issue to find a solution that would protect both farmers and the bird.

**State Deputy Attorney General For Consumer Affairs**, Fran Oleen, spoke to the Senate Utilities Committee about the many challenges investigators face when it comes to deterring consumer fraud via phone calls and text messaging. She noted that robocall technology is evolving more rapidly than state and federal regulations can be established to govern it. Lawmakers were encouraged to consider incentivizing telecommunications companies to engage more aggressively in the fight against illegal robocall practices. The Federal Trade Commission received 29,000 reports of deceptive robocalls from Kansans in 2022, while the Kansas AG's office received only 231 robocall complaints during the same time period, which resulted in 68 open investigations, but no lawsuits filed.

**SNAP Work Training Requirements** may soon be expanded to include employed able-bodied people ages 50-59 without dependents if they work fewer than 30 hours a week. Supporters of this bill claim this would lift the older Kansans out of poverty by helping them acquire new job skills for full-time employment. Opponents say their concern is simple: people cannot work if they cannot eat so they should not be forced to choose between food and other living expenses.

**The Department for Aging & Disability Services** has awarded a \$231,616 grant to the Kansas Suicide Prevention Headquarters. The funds will be used in part to organize an in-person meeting of the Kansas Suicide Prevention Coalition that includes suicide prevention/intervention training. The money will also help advocates review and update a statewide suicide prevention plan.

**The House Committee on Taxation** is discussing a bill that would eliminate the state grocery sales tax on April first of this year. The planned exemption would also include diapers and feminine hygiene products to the tax exemption. Currently, the state sales tax on groceries is set to phase out over the next 3 years.

**The House K-12 Education Budget Committee** heard more than two hours of testimony before giving its approval for a bill that would afford parents the opportunity to sign up for tax-funded education savings accounts for each of their children that they wish to remove from the Kansas public school system. The program, which would be phased in over 4 years and monitored by an appointed board, would offer up to \$5K annually per student to fund homeschooling or pay tuition at any private school willing and able to admit them. The measure now moves to the full House for consideration.

**The House Local Government Committee** held a hearing about cities planning and zoning authority in unincorporated regions within a 3-mile radius of their borders. HB 2150 would repeal that law and give sole authority for those 3-mile regions to county commissioners. A spokesperson for the League of Kansas Municipalities said such a change would be an unmitigated disaster, undermining municipal utility agreements, projects financed through bonding, state or federal regulatory practices, metropolitan or regional planning commissions, and joint city and county infrastructure collaboration. Supporters of the proposed legislation say the current law makes county governments subservient to city governments while encouraging urban sprawl which is detrimental to people who purposefully choose to live outside city limits.

**The House Water Committee** is considering a bill that would require groundwater management districts to come up with viable solutions to save the Ogallala Aquifer, and submit them along with annual reports on their spending to the state legislature. Kansans began pumping water from the aquifer, the country's largest underground water source after World War II, transforming western part of the state into an agricultural powerhouse. Less than 100 years later, the water is running out with parts of the aquifer having just a 10 to 20 year supply left. A vote on the legislation is expected next week.

**The Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee**, as well as the **House Committee on Taxation**, have been working on bills to reduce Kansas income taxes on Social Security income as an incentive to keep retirees from leaving the state. Kansas is one of only 13 states that still impose any taxes whatsoever on Social Security benefits. The proposals would eliminate the tax for individuals who earn under \$100K annually and lower the tax for those earning between \$100-120K. The bills have bipartisan support even with early estimates suggesting the change could cost the state between \$58-99 million in revenue a year.

**The R.G. Bethell Joint Committee on Home & Community-Based Services** held a lengthy hearing

regarding financial ways Kansas can improve long-term care options for the mentally disabled, the mentally ill, and the elderly. The lawmakers were given an urgent call to action when confronted with the following grim details:

- The inadequate number of psychiatric facilities and personnel has forced the Kansas AG's office to deal with the mentally ill who became a danger to themselves and/or others by dropping them into community hospitals and jails for unreimbursed shelter while they wait months for appropriate care.
- There are currently 4,813 children and adults on Kansas' Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Waiver Program's decade-long waitlist.
- 19 long-term elder care facilities have closed and 28 more have had to reduce services due to a drop in their workforce by more than 10% over the past 2 years. This has resulted in a loss of 1000 openings while the state is facing an increase of 208,000 senior citizens in need over the next 10 years.

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