



# HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS



*2025 Legislature Week One*

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**The American Heart Association is asking for a new law in Kansas that would require specialized training for 911 operators** to teach them how to guide individuals through CPR over the phone. This training is essential so that bystanders can assist until the ambulance arrives, as the AHA states that every second matters in cardiac events. It is called TCPR, and currently, only half of Kansas counties have 911 operators trained in it. The AHA emphasizes that receiving CPR as soon as possible can double or even triple the chances of surviving a cardiac event. Supporters argue that learning to guide someone else through the process over the phone is an entirely different skill set from knowing CPR personally. The only opposition to this idea came from the Kansas Sheriffs' and Police Chiefs' Associations, who primarily objected to having the state's 911 Board take charge of the training. Another main objection was that this would be an unfunded mandate. Supporters contend that there are inexpensive, possibly even free, ways to complete the training, such as having local EMS set it up. To date, the AHA reports that 20 states have enacted such requirements into law.

**A coalition of broadband providers has raised concerns about the Kansas Department of Commerce's transparency** in distributing state and federal funding for internet service improvements in underserved areas. During a Senate budget committee meeting, issues were highlighted regarding the perceived inequity in grant awards and the potential for favoritism in the selection process. Approximately \$660 million has been allocated for high-speed internet enhancements, but challenges remain, particularly with grant proposals. The Department of Commerce emphasized its commitment to transparency while protecting confidential business information. Recent leadership changes within the Kansas Office of Broadband Development have also drawn attention, with allegations of unprofessional conduct leading to the dismissal of the previous director. The ongoing dialogue between the department and broadband providers aims to address these concerns and improve the funding process. KOBD, established in 2020 by Governor Kelly, aims to enhance coordination of state and federal broadband investments. Operating under the Department of Commerce, KOBD collaborates with nine broadband access programs. Concerns have been raised specifically in relation to grant application scoring criteria and results. Stakeholders, including Cox and the Communications Coalition of Kansas, have expressed frustration over limited feedback and a perceived decrease in transparency regarding grant awards. Senator Michael Fagg criticized the Department of Commerce for withholding scoring information, advocating for greater transparency post-award. Rachel Willis from the commerce department emphasized the ongoing need for broadband investment to meet technological demands and ensure community connectivity and competitiveness.

**Kansans for Conservation announced the introduction of House Bill 2063, aimed at the establishment of a state conservation fund**, a working lands conservation fund, a wildlife conservation fund, and a Kansas outdoors fund. These accounts will be mandated to provide financial reports to the governor and legislature. The organization emphasizes the importance of conservation as a priority for Kansans and highlights the

urgency for meaningful action. With Kansas being one of only fifteen states lacking a dedicated conservation fund, there is a risk of falling behind in addressing the critical needs of natural resources. HB 2063 presents an opportunity to invest in the landscapes and resources that support communities, the economy, and the overall quality of life in the state. In collaboration with researchers at Kansas State University, Kansans for Conservation has published a report titled "The Future of Conservation in Kansas," which identifies budgetary constraints, limited staffing, and restricted funding streams as significant barriers to conservation efforts. Despite these challenges, agencies and organizations in Kansas have shown resilience and adaptability, employing innovative strategies to maximize their impact. However, the capacity to expand these efforts is dependent on increased financial and human resources. HB 2063 is anticipated to be referred to the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Budget Committee, with a potential hearing scheduled for early February.

**Avian influenza outbreak has resulted in the loss of approximately 12.97 million chickens** across the United States within just 30 days. This situation has significantly contributed to the rising egg prices consumers are facing at grocery stores, with the Federal Reserve Bank reporting an average cost of \$4.15 per dozen eggs as of December. The Kansas Department of Agriculture has classified this outbreak as a critical threat to the livelihoods of chicken and dairy producers in the state. When a flock is infected with bird flu, the consequences are dire; producers are compelled to cull the entire flock to prevent further spread, which temporarily halts egg production as they work to rebuild their stocks. During a recent House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee hearing, Dr. Justin Smith, an animal health commissioner with the Department of Agriculture, highlighted the role of wild birds, particularly geese, in the transmission of the virus. He explained that as these birds migrate, they interact with both large-scale and backyard chicken farms, facilitating the spread of the disease.

**The attorneys general from Kansas, West Virginia, Ohio, and Louisiana have filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Census Bureau**, asserting their method of counting the population unfairly benefits states with higher numbers of undocumented individuals. They argue that including people without legal status in the population count violates the 14th Amendment and could lead to a loss of congressional representation for their states in the upcoming 2030 Census. The lawsuit seeks to halt the Census Bureau's current policy, asserting that it undermines the original intent of the Constitution regarding equal representation. The legal action echoes former President Trump's 2020 efforts to exclude undocumented individuals from the population count, which faced opposition from various civil rights organizations.

**Acting child advocate for Kansas has recommended that lawmakers implement annual unannounced inspections** of residential facilities serving children in the welfare system. This proposal, part of a series of recommendations for the 2025 legislative session, aims to enhance oversight and ensure the safety of children. Key suggestions include redefining "neglect" to prevent poverty from being a factor in assessments, reducing the frequency of court hearings on child permanency from 12 to 9 months, and creating a best-practices handbook for attorneys. Additionally, Kerri Lonard proposed a certification program for child welfare employees and emphasized the need for better collaboration between the Department for Children and Families and law enforcement. Recent reforms, including the establishment of an independent child advocate office, have shown positive outcomes, with 235 formal complaints filed in 2024. The advocate highlighted the importance of access to court records for foster care cases to improve understanding and oversight.

**House Bill 2020 mandates the Division of Vehicles provide monthly reports** to the Kansas Secretary of State regarding personal information of non-citizens obtaining state IDs. The Secretary of State will compare these reports with voter registration rolls, removing any non-citizen names. Affected individuals will be notified and can be reinstated on the voter rolls upon proving citizenship. A hearing on the bill was held by the Committee on Elections, with Clay Barker, general counsel for the Secretary of State's office, explaining that the bill formalizes a process in place for 15 years. Additionally, non-citizen information collected by the Kansas Department of Revenue will remain confidential and not released publicly without significant redaction.

**In the past two years, Kansas communities have requested over \$600 million for water-related projects,** highlighting a significant funding gap as state officials work to allocate limited resources. Dawn Buehler, chair of the Kansas Water Authority, reported to a House committee that the state's new water grant programs, initiated in 2023, received nearly 600 applications. In the last fiscal year, requests exceeded \$380 million, while only \$18 million was available. This year, requests reached \$227 million against a budget of \$27 million. The state faces critical water challenges, including the depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer and sedimentation in eastern reservoirs. Parts of western Kansas may have less than 25 years of water supply remaining. Governor Kelly has emphasized that addressing water issues will be a priority during her remaining time in office.

**Saline County Appraiser Sean Robertson advocated for a bill in Kansas that would exempt off-road vehicles, boats, and trailers from personal-property tax.** He highlighted the inconsistency in tax application, using the example of three individuals with the same trailer, where only those using it for specific purposes were exempt from taxes. The Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee is reviewing Senate Bill 10, which proposes significant tax exemptions, potentially reducing state property tax revenue by \$190,000 and K-12 public school funding by \$2.5 million annually. While some lawmakers support the bill, others, like Senator Mary Ware, emphasize the need to focus on reducing the tax burden for lower-income residents rather than benefiting those who can afford recreational vehicles. Additionally, there are calls to consider exemptions for personal-use aircraft and mobility devices for veterans. The committee is expected to discuss amendments to the bill soon.

**Kansas' Derek Schmidt along with five other Congressman have introduced the bipartisan Pet Food Uniform Regulatory Reform Act of 2025,** aimed at establishing uniform standards for pet food and labels. This legislation seeks to alleviate the burdens of inconsistent regulations that hinder innovation in the pet food industry, which significantly contributes to the economy of eastern Kansas. Congressman Schmidt emphasized the need for streamlined regulations to empower businesses and ensure pet owners have access to high-quality, nutritious food. The PURR Act proposes centralized oversight by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and aims to eliminate conflicting state interpretations affecting ingredient approvals.

## KANSAS HOUSING ASSOCIATION, INC.

513 SW VAN BUREN STREET, TOPEKA, KANSAS 66603

PHONE: 785-235-6283 FAX: 785-235-8676

KHA@KANSASHOUSINGASSOCIATION.COM

WWW.KANSASHOUSINGASSOCIATION.COM

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