

# THE ADVOCATE

A WEEKLY UPDATE  
FROM THE KANSAS  
LEGISLATURE

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## Intro

Monday marks Day 71 of the session, and we will see first adjournment later this week. Legislative leaders have said they believe they can adjourn before Friday, and based on last week's performance, they may be correct. The House and Senate combined to pass around 150 bills when they took to the floor of their respective chambers on Wednesday and Thursday. Although there was some evening work, both chambers avoided working late into the night. Surprisingly, there was often less debate than expected on bills that have historically had drawn-out floor appearances.

While it's known the Republican strategy for the session has been to largely remain silent and let their super majority of votes do the talking, it appears Democrats have either adopted a similar policy or have opted to refrain from prolonging sessions. The same expected opposition remarks are made, but the long and spirited debates have been noticeably abbreviated. It's also likely this is a side effect of the Legislature's overall fatigue due to the shortened calendar. Conference committees will meet throughout the week in between floor sessions. The first adjournment is scheduled for Friday but will likely be Thursday, after which the Legislature will be out of town until Thursday, April 10th, the start of the veto session.



## Budget Heads to Conference

On Tuesday, the Senate approved a \$10.58 billion state general fund (SGF) budget for fiscal year 2026, which includes a 3% across-the-board cut in state spending. This cut, which excludes capital improvements, debt service, and aid programs, is expected to save around \$70 million. The total state budget stands at \$25.6 billion in FY26, down 2.4% from 2025.

A major provision in the budget mandates that all executive branch employees return to in-office work, ending remote and hybrid setups for about 5,500 state employees. This comes despite a 2023 audit stating that remote work hadn't significantly impacted productivity while acknowledging it was a difficult issue to measure.

The Senate budget includes \$36.7 million for state employee raises and authorizes the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to issue up to \$100 million in bonds for a new headquarters. Other investments include \$15.5 million for aircraft maintenance at Topeka Regional Airport, \$4 million to attract unmanned aircraft systems industries, and \$2 million for the Sunflower Summer tourism program. An additional \$9 million is earmarked for disability and brain injury services.

The Senate declined to fund special education, rejecting a \$21 million floor amendment. In contrast, the House included \$10 million, while Governor Laura Kelly proposed adding \$72.6 million annually over four years. The budget also withholds \$4 million from the governor's and

Department of Administration budgets until diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs are removed. This includes eliminating DEI-related positions, training, and policies, as well as removing gender pronouns from state communications.

Several programs saw cuts, including the Kansas Arts Commission, Main Street program, Junior Achievement, and public broadcasting. The Senate also rejected the House's proposal to fund AI-based gun detection systems in schools, instead redirecting funds toward CPR and AED training and equipment for schools.

The Senate budget projects an \$842 million ending balance in fiscal year 2027, though a \$656.3 million deficit is expected by 2029. However, the rainy-day fund would still hold \$1.8 billion by then. Although the Senate and House positions on the budget have been divided, the conference committee process shuts down outside noise and essentially becomes negotiations between Senate and House leaders, leading many to think the differences will be resolved in a short time. On Thursday, the budget conference committee inserted the HB2007 budget into [SB125](#), which will serve as the basis for House and Senate conference positions going forward. You will find the conference comparison sheet [here](#).

## Regulatory Sandbox to Governor

Both chambers have now passed a bill to establish regulatory "sandbox" programs that allow entrepreneurs to test innovative business ideas under relaxed or suspended regulations. The goal of the program is to accelerate new products and services to market while maintaining consumer protections. [HB2291](#) passed 31-9 in the Senate and 90-28 in the House and now heads to the Governor. The sandbox program would be housed in the Attorney General's office, with a small team overseeing applications and reviewing outdated or burdensome regulations. Approved businesses would operate under an agreement detailing which rules are waived. Applications can be denied if they pose significant risks to consumers.

Supporters, including the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and Americans for Prosperity, say the measure promotes entrepreneurship, especially for small innovators. Critics, mainly Democrats, raised concerns about public safety, lack of expertise in the AG's office, and favoritism toward certain businesses. The bill had been kicked around in previous sessions but never made it to the finish line. Kansas joins a growing number of states, such as Utah, West Virginia, and Missouri, that have implemented similar sandbox programs to encourage business innovation.

## Single Income Tax Rate Gains Support

The Kansas House and Senate have passed bills that move the state toward a single-income tax rate, triggered only when state revenues exceed inflation. The Senate bill ([SB259](#)) would lower the current rates to 4.5% once general fund revenues surpass a \$10 billion baseline. In comparison, the House version ([HB2318](#)) sets a lower revenue threshold of \$5.96 billion that comes from income taxes plus inflation and eventually drops the rate to 4%. Both versions also include plans to reduce corporate and bank tax rates afterward. The House added a safeguard preventing tax cuts if the state's \$1.7 billion rainy-day fund dips below 20% of revenues, aiming to protect fiscal stability.

While Republicans argue the bills promote competitiveness and responsible budgeting, Democrats are concerned they could tie the hands of future legislatures and a return to financial instability. Negotiations between the chambers are expected, with lawmakers emphasizing that any income tax plan must be paired with property tax relief to move forward, although given how far apart the chambers are on property taxes, a compromise on income taxes may be enough to hang their hats on until next year.

## Childcare Reform Passes House

The House overwhelmingly passed [HB2294](#) on Thursday, a bipartisan bill to create an Office of Early Childhood. The bill was crafted by Governor Kelly and is a key initiative aimed at streamlining childcare and education services. The bill, which passed 103-15, follows a renewed round of negotiations between Kelly's team and the House Commerce Committee after a similar effort failed last year. This year's bill was negotiated to simplify licensing requirements and establish oversight without expanding state government. The new office would centralize the administration of childcare programs and mandate annual reporting to the Legislature on spending, regulations, and areas for improvement.

However, Kansas Action for Children has raised concern over two amendments, a revised licensing rule that loosens oversight for small-scale care providers and an updated definition of "religious beliefs" for vaccine exemptions. Advocates worry these changes could erode safety standards and increase health risks for children. While supporters say the bill is more efficient and refined after feedback, critics argue that the exemptions and deregulation could have unintended consequences for child welfare. Increasing access to childcare has been one of the most frequent issues brought to legislators since the Covid-19 pandemic. It remains unclear if the bill has a path forward in the Senate this year.

# Voters to Decide on Election of Supreme Court Justices

The Legislature has approved a constitutional amendment to change how state Supreme Court justices are selected, shifting from the current nominating commission to popular elections. [SCR1611](#) narrowly received a 2/3 majority in both chambers. The measure will now go before voters in August 2026. Supporters, mostly Republicans, argue the change restores voter control and transparency, replacing what they see as a secretive process dominated by lawyers who have a 5-4 advantage on the nominating commission. GOP leaders say it reflects a return to how justices were chosen prior to 1958 when the current system was adopted after the “Triple Play” political scandal.

Opponents, including Democrats, Planned Parenthood, and the Kansas Trial Lawyers Association, warn the change would politicize the judiciary and flood races with outside money, undermining judicial independence. They fear justices would be forced to campaign, potentially hearing cases involving donors. Critics also raise concern that the move is politically motivated, particularly in light of past court rulings on abortion, school funding, and the death penalty, while proponents highlight that the Kansas Supreme Court has been overturned 87% of the time by the U.S. Supreme Court since 2007. If approved by voters, judicial elections would begin in 2028, with justices serving six-year terms.

## Last Week’s Highlighted Bills

### Taxation

[HB2336](#): Providing for the apportionment of business income by the single sales factor and the apportionment of financial institution income by the receipts factor, deductions from income when using the single sales factor and receipts factor, the decrease in corporate income tax rates determining when sales other than tangible personal property are made in the state and excluding sales of a unitary business group of electric and natural gas public utilities. Passed 109-9, proceeds to the Senate.

[HB2377](#): Providing that countywide retailers' sales tax is apportioned based on total assessed valuations of property taxes rather than property taxes levied. Passed 118-0, proceeds to the Senate.

### Local Government, Housing & Infrastructure

[HB2149](#): Substitute for HB 2149 by Committee on Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications “ Requiring distributed energy retailers to disclose certain information to residential customers who are offered or seeking to install a distributed energy system, requiring the attorney general to convene an advisory group to develop, approve and periodically revise a standard form for such disclosures and requiring publication thereof, establishing requirements for interconnection and operation of distributed energy systems, increasing the total capacity limitation for an electric public utility's provision of parallel generation service and a formula to determine appropriate system size. Passed 40-0, proceeds to conference.

[HB2088](#): Enacting the fast-track permits act to require local governments to meet specified deadlines for issuing building permits and other required approvals for real estate development. Passed 30-10, proceeds to conference.

HB2152: Substitute for HB 2152 by Committee on Financial Institutions and Pensions- Mandating financial institutions to secure governmental unit deposits in excess of the amount insured or guaranteed by the FDIC by utilizing a public moneys pooled method of securities, prohibiting investment advisers that execute bids for the investment of public moneys from managing moneys directly from such bid, allowing governmental unit deposits to be invested at a rate agreed upon by the governmental unit and the financial institution, requiring certification from a governmental unit that deposits in the municipal investment pool fund were first offered to a financial institution in the preceding year and allowing financial institutions to file complaints upon the failure to comply. Passed 40-0, proceeds to conference.\

## **Public Health, Health Care & Safety**

HB2365: Establishing the south central regional mental health hospital. Passed 40-0, proceeds to conference.

HB2249: Requiring the secretary for aging and disability services to grant physical environment waivers for certain rural emergency hospitals to provide skilled nursing facility care. Passed 40-0, proceeds to conference.

HB2172: Senate Substitute for HB 2172 by Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources - Establishing the water program task force to evaluate the state's water program and funding for such program and requiring the task force to establish a water planning work group and submit a report the legislature and the governor. Passed 40-0, proceeds to conference.

SB284: Enacting the defense of drug delivery act to prohibit manufacturer interference relating to 340B drug distribution. Passed 34-6, proceeds to House.

## **Elections & Rules and Regs**

HB2240: Senate Substitute for HB 2240 by Committee on Government Efficiency - Requiring legislative approval prior to any state agency seeking or implementing a public assistance program waiver or other authorization from the federal government that expands eligibility for any public assistance program, increases cost to the state or makes certain changes in services for persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Passed 29-11, proceeds to conference.

HB2022: Clarifying that a special election shall not be held within 45 days before or after a general or primary election. Passed 24-16, proceeds to conference.

SB231: Modifying the requirements for soliciting registered voters to submit an application for an advance voting ballot. Passed 40-0, proceeds to the House.

SCR1611: Proposing a constitutional amendment to provide for direct election of supreme court justices and abolish the supreme court nominating commission. Passed 84- 40, proceeds to ballot box.

SB1: Exempting the state of Kansas from daylight saving time but providing for moving to permanent daylight saving time upon an act of Congress requiring such move. Passed 33-7, proceeds to the House.

## Education & Workforce Development

HB2294: Reducing certain license fees and training requirements for child care staff, creating a process for day care facility licensees to apply for temporary waiver of certain statutory requirements, authorizing the secretary of health and environment to develop and operate pilot programs to increase child care availability or capacity, transferring certain child care programs to the Kansas office of early childhood and creating day care licensing duties of the director of early childhood. Passed the House 103-15, proceeds to the Senate.

SB44: Expanding the postsecondary educational institutions eligible to participate in the Kansas promise scholarship program. Passed 77-41, proceeds to conference.

HB2195: Establishing the Kansas technical college operating grant fund administered by the state board of regents. Passed 40-0, proceeds to conference.

## Legal & Criminal Justice

HB2192: Limiting or prohibiting work release for people convicted of a second or third offense of domestic battery. Passed 39-1, proceeds to conference.

HB2164: Senate Substitute for HB 2164 by Committee on Judiciary - Prohibiting certain sex offenders from entering onto school property or attending school activities and creating criminal penalties for violation thereof. Passed 37-3, proceeds to conference.

## Important Dates

March 28 – First Adjournment

April 10 – Start of Veto Session

April 12 – 90th day of Session | Sine Die

## The Week Ahead

The following bills are scheduled to receive hearings this week.

### Monday, March 24

9:00 AM Senate: Financial Institutions and Insurance/ House: Financial Institutions and Pensions

Conference on SB139: 582-N

9:30 AM Senate: Judiciary / House: Judiciary Conference on All bills in conference: 281-N

9:30 AM Senate: Financial Institutions and Insurance / House: Insurance Conference on All bills in conference: 582-N

9:30 AM Senate: Public Health and Welfare/ House: Health and Human Services Conference on All bills in conference: 142-S

10:00 AM Senate: Transportation / House: Transportation Conference on HB2029 and all other bills in conference: 582-N

11:00 AM Senate: Federal and State Affairs/ House: Elections Conference on All bills in conference: 144-S

1:00 PM Senate: Financial Institutions and Insurance / House: Insurance Conference on All bills in conference: 582-N

1:30 PM Senate: Public Health and Welfare/ House: Child Welfare and Foster Care Conference on HB2075: 142-S.

## **Tuesday, March 25**

2:00 PM Senate: Utilities/ House: Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications Conference on All bills in conference: 159-S.

## **Wednesday, March 26**

Floor Work

## **Thursday, March 27**

Floor Work

## **Friday, March 28**

Floor Work

## **Helpful Links to Monitor the Action**

[Listen](#) live to committee hearings or playback past hearings.

[Watch](#) the House and Senate floor debates via YouTube.

[Find](#) the daily calendars.

[Search](#) for a bill.

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