

THE ADVOCATE

A WEEKLY UPDATE
FROM THE KANSAS
LEGISLATURE

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Intro

Legislators returned to the capitol last Tuesday after the Turn Around break and are now entering the final full two weeks of committee hearings before the March 18 deadline, which marks the last day for nonexempt committees to meet and consider bills. The Senate Ways and Means Committee has begun reviewing the budget, with their process seeming to be to strike funding before being briefed about the use, meaning those items will need to be added back in later if deemed fit. The budget is also expected to be passed by March 18. It's important to remember that the governor has line-item veto power in the budget and is expected to veto a significant number of items as well as bills this session. However, most of these vetoes are likely to be overridden with the increased Republican supermajority. As the session nears its end, there is a notable sense of frustration and fatigue among members due to the constraints of the shortened calendar. Despite these concerns, the 2026 legislative calendar has already been published, maintaining the same 90 calendar-day schedule.

Senate Budget Process Kicks Off

The Senate Ways and Means Committee began its budget hearings on Wednesday by cutting roughly \$132 million from the 2026 budget passed by the House. These cuts targeted projects funded through a mix of state general funds, COVID relief interest, and lottery proceeds, sparking objections from Democrats who argued it was too soon to make such decisions. The committee eliminated \$48 million in lottery-funded projects, including \$27.6 million for the Commerce Department, containing funding for public broadcasting, the Rural Opportunity Zone program, the Main Street Program, the Sunflower Summer Program, and the Kansas Arts Commission. It also removed \$47.9 million from projects funded by COVID relief interest, such as a child care facility in Dodge City, a Kansas Highway Patrol hangar in Wichita, and the Blueprint for Literacy program.

Additionally, the committee cut \$39.7 million in higher education projects added by the House but not requested by the Kansas Board of Regents, including funding for two-year college apprenticeships, student success initiatives, and technical college operating grants. While Vice Chair J.R. Claeys (R-Salina), who proposed the cuts, stated that funding could be reconsidered, Democratic lawmakers, including Rep. Pat Pettey (Kansas City), criticized the rapid pace of budget cuts before the Senate had fully reviewed the House's spending plan.

Newest Tax Proposal

A new proposal aims to curb local government spending as an alternative approach to reducing state property taxes. House Tax Committee Chair Adam Smith (R-Weskan) introduced [HB2396](#), which would establish a \$60 million fund known as ASTRA (Acknowledging Stewardship of Tax Revenue and Appropriations) to assist cities and counties in keeping property taxes in check. However, only cities and counties that limit spending increases to the rate of inflation would be eligible for the funds. The bill also includes a protest petition process, allowing residents to challenge excessive local spending. If a city or county raises spending beyond the rate of inflation, voters could trigger a public vote by gathering signatures from 10% of qualified voters. The petition would be available at the county treasurer's office, with public notice required.

This plan serves as an alternative to previous proposals that aimed to cut property taxes, including a 1.5 mill state property tax cut for schools, which stalled due to concerns over school funding. The bill mirrors the past local ad valorem tax reduction fund and is designed to provide direct property tax relief while maintaining financial stability for local governments.

Meanwhile, the House is still pursuing a constitutional amendment in [HCR5011](#) to limit residential property appraisal increases, setting a cap based on a rolling six-year average or the current fair market value, whichever is lower. This approach differs from the Senate plan [SCR1603](#), which caps property tax appraisals at 3% annually based on 2022 values. The debate continues over the best strategy to balance tax relief with local and state financial needs.

Regulatory Sandbox Program Passes House

[HB2291](#) passed the House last Thursday with a 90-28 vote. The legislation establishes the Regulatory Relief Division within the Attorney General's office and creates the Regulatory Sandbox Program, designed to encourage innovation by temporarily easing regulatory restrictions for businesses. Regulatory sandboxes are a new concept, but states that have implemented them are seeing positive outcomes. A regulatory sandbox provides a controlled space where businesses can operate with reduced regulatory barriers for a time, allowing them to test new products and services without being immediately subject to full compliance requirements. The goal is to foster innovation and help businesses gain success while allowing regulators to evaluate industries more effectively and trim burdensome regulations.

Several states have adopted industry-specific sandbox programs, while Utah became the first state to implement a universal sandbox policy covering all industries. HB2291 follows Utah's model, aiming to create a similar framework in Kansas. The bill now moves to the Senate Commerce Committee, where a hearing is expected within the next two weeks ahead of the 18th deadline.

Hearing on the Impacts of 2016 SB367 in Child Welfare

Senate Bill 367, passed in 2016, was designed to reduce the number of Kansas youth in detention and divert savings into evidence-based community programs aimed at treating juveniles. The goal was to provide alternatives to incarceration while addressing the underlying causes of juvenile delinquency. During testimony heard Wednesday, conferees reported that SB 367 has been successful for 95% of youth involved in the system. However, concerns were raised about the remaining 5%, who appear to be slipping through the cracks. These youth are committing multiple offenses, without facing meaningful consequences until they commit a serious crime that results in them being tried as adults.

Mental health providers, judges, law enforcement officials, case managers, and care providers testified that while treatment and intervention remain essential, there must also be clear repercussions for repeated offenses. Conferees emphasized the need for more treatment options and structured consequences to prevent high-risk youth from continuing down a path of escalating criminal behavior. The discussion around SB 367 has been ongoing for the past few years, with calls for a balanced approach that maintains the bill's intent while addressing gaps in accountability and rehabilitation. At the close of the meeting, Chairwoman Howerton (R- Wichita) brought attention to two bills in the House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee, which seek to expand detention time for youth with firearms as well as provide increased placement of juvenile offenders in non-foster home beds. Those bills are [HB2325](#) and [HB2329](#), respectively, and are likely to be worked today in the Corrections Committee.

Single Factor Apportionment Heard

[HB2336](#) was heard Wednesday before the House Tax Committee, with testimony in support of shifting corporate tax apportionment from the three-factor formula, which considers property, payroll, and sales, to a single sales factor approach. Shortly before the hearing, the Department of Revenue released its fiscal note, estimating that the proposed three-year election period would cost the state \$278.7 million over three years. Given the tight budget situation, this projection significantly diminishes the bill's chances of moving forward in its current form.

To address concerns about the fiscal impact, an alternative approach is being considered. Instead of allowing corporations to choose the single sales factor immediately, a phase-in plan would be proposed maintaining the three-factor formula for the first two years, followed by a mandatory transition to the single sales factor in year three. This compromise would establish a clear path toward adopting single-factor apportionment while giving businesses time to adjust and mitigate negative impacts on companies that the change may disadvantage.

Commerce Looks to Address Childcare

The House Commerce Committee heard [HB2294](#), a bipartisan proposal driven by Governor Kelly aimed at streamlining early childhood governance and reducing regulatory barriers for child care providers. The bill establishes the Kansas Office of Early Childhood, consolidating oversight for greater efficiency and accountability. It also lowers licensing fees and training requirements for child care staff and allows temporary waivers for certain regulations, giving providers more flexibility. Additionally, a pilot program is included to help expand the availability and capacity of child care facilities across the state.

A key provision in the bill exempts individuals who provide care for four or fewer children under 35 hours per week from licensing requirements, making it easier for family members and neighbors to offer informal child care. The bill has a healthy amount of support from stakeholders and legislators alike, reflecting the past years' conversations expressing legislators' desire for reduced regulations and the Governor's wish to create the Office of Early Childhood.

Utility Wildfire Liability Passes

The House passed [HB2107](#) on a 99-19 vote on Thursday. The bill addresses liability for wildfire damage caused by utilities, with proponents generally stating the bill would codify existing negligence standards and contribute to a more predictable legal climate. The bill sets a two-year statute of limitations for property owners to file claims for economic losses resulting from a wildfire. Additionally, it directs the Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) to develop training programs and assess risk and mitigation strategies for utilities. The KCC may also establish protocols utilities must follow during a fire to help prevent and minimize damage. The Utilities Committee amended the bill to change the statute of limitations to begin on the date of the damage from the fire event, removed a formula for calculating awards for damages, and changed required KCC trainings to a workshop.

Elimination of Three-Day Grace Period for Ballots Clears Both Chambers

SB4 would change the deadline for the receipt of all mailed advance voting ballots from the third day following the date of the election to 7:00 p.m. on the date of the election. The bill was passed by the House on Thursday on a vote of 80-39, having previously passed the Senate 29-10. Democrats offered several amendments on the floor, including the creation of an Election Day holiday, but all were either voted down or ruled non-germane. 80 votes are not enough to overturn the Governor's inevitable veto. However, four Republicans were absent during the vote, which means the 84 required votes could be seen in the future. The House Elections Committee amended the bill to go into effect on and after January 1, 2026, to which the Senate did not concur, and a conference committee is to be appointed. It is likely the decision to non-concur and go to conference is to create a shell bill for other election matters.

Important Dates

March 18 – Last day for non-exempt committees to meet and consider bills

March 21 – Last day for non-exempt bills in either House

March 24 – Conference Committees begin to meet

March 28 – First Adjournment

April 10 – Start of Veto Session

The Week Ahead

The following bills are scheduled to receive hearings this week.

Monday, March 3

9:00 AM House Local Government

Hearing on SB 104: Granting the Shawnee County Board of County Commissioners the discretion to create a Citizens Commission on local government.

1:30 PM House Corrections and Juvenile Justice

Hearing on HB 2329: Providing for increased placement of juvenile offenders in non-foster home beds in youth residential facilities, requiring the secretary of corrections to pay for the costs.

3:30 PM House Taxation

Hearing on HB 2318: Providing that future personal and corporate income tax rate decreases be contingent on exceeding tax receipt revenues.

9:30 AM Senate Assessment and Taxation

Hearing on SB 277: Exempting certain qualified tips from state income tax.

10:30 AM Senate Federal and State Affairs

Hearing on HB 2022: Clarifying that a special election shall not be held within 45 days before or after a general or primary election.

Hearing on SB 231: Modifying the requirements for soliciting registered voters to submit an application for an advance voting ballot.

10:30 AM Senate Judiciary

Hearing on HB 2134: Amending the Kansas Open Records Act regarding charges for records and limiting fees for electronic copies and employee time spent retrieving records.

Hearing on SB 242: Requiring that a political subdivision hold an open meeting to discuss a contingency fee contract for legal services before approval.

Tuesday, March 4

9:30 AM Senate Assessment and Taxation

Hearing on SB 226: Allowing an itemized deduction for certain losses from wagering transactions for individuals for income tax purposes.

9:30 AM Senate Local Government, Transparency and Ethics

Hearing on HB 2099: Permitting periodic inspections by a city or county for code violations of private residential rental housing where the property owner is receiving governmental rental subsidies.

Hearing on HB 2116: Requiring certain contractual provisions be incorporated in all contracts for certain cities and counties, including the provisions of Form DA-146a.

1:30 PM House Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development

Hearing on HB 2308: Enacting the Aviation and Innovative Manufacturing in Kansas Act to attract businesses engaged in aircraft assembly, electric or hydrogen-powered vehicle production, and other specified industries.

1:30 PM House Education

Hearing on SB 76: Requiring employees of school districts and postsecondary educational institutions to use names and pronouns consistent with a student's biological sex and birth certificate.

1:30 PM House Health and Human Services

Hearing on HB 2236: Establishing the mental health intervention team program in the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services.

3:30 PM House Agriculture and Natural Resources

Hearing on SB 36: Increasing the cap on money disbursed by the division of conservation to conservation districts.

Wednesday, March 5

8:30 AM Senate Public Health and Welfare

Hearing on HB 2075: Requiring that a permanency hearing for a child in custody of the secretary be held within nine months from the child's removal from home.

9:30 AM Senate Local Government, Transparency and Ethics

Hearing on HB 2160: Enacting the Municipal Employee Whistleblower Act to provide statutory protections for municipal employees who report or disclose unlawful or dangerous conduct.

1:30 PM House Health and Human Services

Hearing on HB 2250: Increasing the annual assessment rate on hospital providers.

1:30 PM Senate Utilities

Hearing on HB 2109: Authorizing public utilities and law enforcement agencies to enter into utility pole attachment agreements for the installation of law enforcement equipment on structures located in the public right-of-way.

Thursday, March 6**9:00 AM House Water**

Hearing on SB 58: Modifying the requirements and allocations for multi-year flex accounts.

9:30 AM Senate Assessment and Taxation

Hearing on SB 280: Requiring the approval by a majority of electors voting at an election for any taxing entity to increase property taxes beyond the annual rate of inflation.

10:30 AM Senate Federal and State Affairs

Hearing on SB 178: Requiring certain law enforcement agencies to apply for and enter into agreements with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for the enforcement of federal immigration laws.

Hearing on SB 196: Requiring business entities and public employers to register and use the E-Verify program for employment purposes and prohibiting income tax deductions for wages paid to unauthorized aliens.

10:30 AM Senate Judiciary

Hearing on HCR 5008: Proposing a constitutional amendment to provide for legislative oversight of rules and regulations adopted by executive branch agencies and officials.

1:30 PM House Education

Hearing on SB 78: Requiring postsecondary educational institutions to review and update accreditation policies, prohibiting accrediting agencies from compelling institutions to violate state law.

3:30 PM House Elections

Hearing on SB 105: Requiring the governor to appoint a person to fill vacancies in the offices of U.S. senator, state treasurer, and commissioner of insurance from a list approved by the legislature.

1:30 PM Senate Utilities

Hearing on HB 2107: Providing for claims to recover damages from fire events caused by electric public utilities, specifying recovery for damages, and requiring the State Corporation Commission to provide wildfire risk and mitigation training.

Friday, March 7**1:30 PM House Health and Human Services**

Hearing on SB 29: Removing the authority of local health officers to prohibit public gatherings when necessary for controlling infectious diseases.

Hearing on SB 67: Authorizing registered nurse anesthetists to prescribe, procure, and administer drugs consistent with their education and qualifications.

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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