

# THE ADVOCATE

A WEEKLY UPDATE  
FROM THE KANSAS  
LEGISLATURE

ADVOCACY THAT WORKS



## In This Week's Advocate:

- Intro
- Convention of States Passes
- Tax Exemptions Costing Counties
- School Cell Phone Ban Woes
- Budget
- Tax
- Health
- Economic Development
- Local Government
- Utilities
- Important Dates
- The Week Ahead

WICHITA REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

## 2026 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



## Intro

Today marks day 15 of the legislative session and is the last day for individuals to request member-sponsored bill drafts. We are full steam ahead, and last week saw bill hearings and bills passed out of committee. The 90-day calendar schedule means some work is being done at a faster rate, but there has been a noticeable lull in one area, newly introduced bills. The Office of Revisor of Statutes is remarkably behind in producing bill drafts, partially due to the postponement of adopting a new legislative IT system. Lobbyists and legislators alike are expressing frustration, and while some committees, like House Elections, have plenty of work, other committee chairs have canceled meetings simply because there are no bills to hear, or at least bills they are willing to hear. Bills continue to trickle in, but the situation doesn't appear to be improving much as we approach next week's February 6th deadline for non-exempt committees to introduce bills.

## Convention of States Passes

The Legislature passed [SCR1604](#) last Wednesday, asking Congress to call a constitutional convention under Article 5 of the U.S. Constitution, following a federal court ruling that the measure required only a simple majority rather than a two-thirds vote. The House passed the resolution 80–42, and the Senate passed it 29–11. The resolution seeks a convention limited to imposing congressional term limits, fiscal restraints on the federal government, and limits on federal power and jurisdiction.

Supporters hailed the vote as historic, making Kansas the 20th state to adopt such a resolution, though 34 states are required to call a convention and 38 to ratify any amendments. No constitutional convention has ever been held, despite hundreds of past state applications.

The vote followed a November ruling by U.S. District Judge Toby Crouse, who found that Kansas' constitutional requirement for a two-thirds vote conflicted with the federal Constitution, relying on longstanding Supreme Court precedent that states cannot impose their own constraints on Article 5 powers. Critics argued the court overstepped and warned that a convention could lead to unpredictable or sweeping constitutional changes, noting there is no settled authority guaranteeing limits on a convention's scope or enforcement once convened.

## Tax Exemptions Costing Counties

A new state audit estimates that real property tax exemptions cost Kansas state and local governments more than \$1 billion in forgone revenue in 2024, including about \$1 billion to local governments and \$12 million to the state. Auditors advised that these figures are rough estimates because they rely on assumptions and incomplete data. About \$54 billion, or 15 percent, of the state's \$366 billion in appraised real property value has been exempted from taxation. A large portion of the exemptions is for government-owned property or land used for educational, charitable, or public purposes, with relatively few tied to economic development programs.

The audit found wide variation across counties, with exempt property ranging from 6 percent to 42 percent of total property values. Four counties exceeded 30 percent exemptions, largely due to major federal, tribal, energy, or public land holdings, while 83 of 105 counties had 20 percent or less exempt. Auditors also highlighted data reliability problems, including missing or inconsistent exemption codes, which limited their ability to estimate forgone revenue by category. The review found that about 98 percent of real property owned by Kansas' seven public universities and their foundations were tax-exempt in 2024, primarily because it is used for educational purposes, while a smaller share, largely agricultural land, remained taxable.

## School Cell Phone Ban Woes

Support is beginning to fracture around [SB302](#), which would ban student cellphone use during instructional time in both public and accredited private K–12 schools. While the proposal initially drew broad bipartisan backing in the Senate and support from House leadership and the Governor, concerns began to emerge during a Senate Education hearing last week over applying a state mandate to private schools. Senate Education Chair Renee Erickson (R-Wichita) and advocacy groups argue private schools, which do not receive the same public funding, should retain autonomy, warning that the private school provision is creating “heartburn” that could jeopardize the bill's passage.

Proponents, led by Senate Majority Leader Chase Blasi (R-Wichita), contend the bill addresses student distraction and mental health concerns and should apply equally to all accredited schools, noting that private schools already comply with many state education standards. The measure would require schools to prohibit cellphone access throughout the school day, mandate secure storage, establish discipline policies, and certify compliance to the State Board of Education. Education groups are split, with the Kansas PTA and Kansas Association of School Boards opposing the mandate as an overreach into local control, while others, including the Kansas Catholic Conference, support it. Neutral positions from KNEA and the State Board of Education underscore the growing division as debate centers on local authority versus statewide standards.

## Budget

Work on the budget continued at a fast pace in both chambers, even during the shortened week. In the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, several subcommittees presented reports, and the agency budgets for the Kansas Department of Labor, Office of Information Technology Services, State Historical Society, and State Library were passed with no major changes recommended. On Friday, additional agency budgets were advanced, including the Board of Barbering, Board of Cosmetology, Board of Technical Professions, Kansas Public Disclosure Commission, and the Legislative budgets. The most significant development came late in the week, when Sen. Stephen Owens (R-Hesston), Chairman of the Human Services Subcommittee on Ways and Means, announced during discussion of KDHE–Health and DCF budgets that the committee would not take any action on enhancement requests and instead defer all recommendations to the full committee.

On the House side, the Committee on Appropriations has progressed even faster, passing out twice as many agency budgets as their Senate counterparts. At this stage, the committee is focusing on usually non-controversial fee-funded budgets. However, on Tuesday, the committee voted to remove \$1 million from the Board of Nursing Fee Fund and place it in a newly created fund to provide restitution to nurses harmed by what the committee perceived as abusive regulatory enforcement. This move came in response to an interim hearing before the House Select Committee on Government Oversight, which found that several Kansas nurses had their licenses revoked and faced permanent, career-ending penalties due to clerical errors. The committee agreed that the million-dollar fund was insufficient and that further action is needed. The House Committee on Appropriations also held an overview of the remaining ARPA funds, which need to be spent by the end of the year or be clawed back by the federal government. \$1.6 million remains unencumbered, and roughly \$223k of it was designated to the State Fair to improve lighting on the fairgrounds.

On Thursday, the House Committee on Appropriations held a hearing on [HB2427](#), which would create two “fiscal integrity auditor” positions that report on agency expenditures to the Speaker of the House and President of the Senate. Vice Chairwoman Rep. Kristey Williams (R-Augusta), who sponsored the legislation, and several other committee members explained the necessity of having live access to agency expenditure information in order to make the correct decisions as appropriators. Skeptical committee Democrats worried about legislative overreach and potential data security risks. As part of this discussion, some committee members expressed dismay at the amount of authority the legislature has ceded to the agencies on government spending, and criticized their Senate partners for not taking the goal to cut \$200 million from the budget seriously and putting their conference committee negotiators in a precarious position. The committee also passed out the Department of Parks and Wildlife’s budget after a heated debate on the agency’s procurement process and trout fishing program.

# Tax

The main priority of the tax committees is still property tax relief. Following last week's trend, most of the action took place in the Senate, where they passed SCR1616, the proposed constitutional amendment to cap assessed valuation increases to 3% a year, out of committee favorably on Wednesday. The proposal was passed out with an amendment by Chairwoman Caryn Tyson (R-Parker) that normal maintenance does not constitute an increase in the property's value. There was only one no vote recorded among committee members, Senator Marci Francisco (D-Lawrence), who cited too many unanswered questions. She was not, however, alone in her doubts, and Senator Stephen Owens (R-Hesston), who voted for the bill, called it a part of the solution but not a solution by itself.

Over the course of the week, several smaller bill hearings were held: the House committee held a hearing for HB2443, a bill that would exempt certain natural gas facilities from being classified as public utilities for property tax purposes, while the Senate committee held two hearings, one on SB319, a property tax rebate for properties that sell at less than 97% of their appraised value, and another on SB303 that would provide Labette County with sales tax authority for the purpose of funding their county fire departments. The Senate committee was particularly engaged with SB319, with Senator Mike Thompson (R-Shawnee) testifying in favor of the bill. Senator Ethan Corson (D-Fairway) asked for further clarification on how many sales in a typical year might qualify for a rebate, and Senator Francisco expressed a concern that the bill may put an onus on the treasurer to send out rebate notices, but the sentiment of providing tangible relief to taxpayers held strong.

On Thursday, both committees met jointly to hear a presentation on the High-Performance Incentive Program (HPIP) by the Department of Revenue and on Renewable Energy Taxation in Other States by the Legislative Research Department. Although the Senate committee had heard a presentation on HPIP on Tuesday, they heard this report from Legislative Post Audit, not KDOR itself, along with a presentation on transient guest tax revenue and the affordable housing tax credit, which were not given to the joint committee.

LPA could not be certain how much business owners have used the investment tax credit due to conflicting data sets, but KDOR was confident their \$1.3 billion in carryforward credit to date would be used. According to the agency, \$192.7 million was claimed in total credits claimed, \$189.2 million of that from investment credits, and \$3.5 million from teaching and education credits. Despite, as Chairman Adam Smith (R-Weskan) put it, the "wealth of information," few questions were asked. The renewable energy presentation, in contrast, was more theoretical but did showcase the unique quirks of Nebraska, Wyoming, and South Dakota's renewable energy tax policies. One item highlighted was a South Dakota policy in which 100% of their nameplate capacity tax goes to local communities, such as the school district and the county, and, in a roundabout way, helps offset the spending necessary by their state government.

# Health

DCF provided an update to the health committees in both chambers this week, including an update on its ongoing Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) project, stating that the design phase would begin in February and extend through December 2027. Testing is scheduled to start in April 2028, with the final product going live in November of 2028. DCF also noted that, in response to Police Protective Custody reform, passed by the legislature last April as [HB2075](#), instances of children being taken into Police Protective Custody have declined by over 42%. The agency also provided its legislative agenda for the year, which included expanding eligibility for Juvenile Crisis Intervention Center funding and adopting revised language for the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children, as all of our neighboring states have.

On Wednesday, the House Committee on Health and Human Services held a hearing on [HB2436](#), which extends the timeline for local governments to keep and use opioid aid antagonists like Naloxone for ten more years. KDADS also provided their 2026 legislative agenda to the committee on Wednesday, which included a variety of both budget and policy items. They requested a \$70 million reappropriation to finish construction on the South Central Regional Mental Health Hospital, \$39 million between Larned and Osawatomie State Hospitals to cover contract nursing costs, and an additional \$24 million for the state's Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waiver program to cut down on waitlists for multiple waivers and avoid a waitlist for the Technological Assistance (TA) waiver.

The Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Insurance introduced a critical Pharmacy Benefit Manager reform bill, SB360, that would create transparency and accountability for PBMs in Kansas. A hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, Jan 28th.

The Bob Bethell Joint Committee on Home and Community Based Services and KanCare Oversight met on Friday to receive oversight updates on KanCare, Medicaid, and home and community-based services. Discussion included MCO performance, audits, waiver waitlists, workforce shortages, rural health funding, and emerging concerns about artificial intelligence in healthcare. Members and stakeholders emphasized continued waiver backlogs, particularly for the IDD and frail and elderly populations.

Introduced bills of note:

[SB360](#) - Enacting the Kansas consumer prescription protection and accountability act and providing for regulation and registration of pharmacy benefits managers.

[HB2506](#) - Establishing the addiction counselor apprentice license and setting fees for such license.

[HB2508](#) - Prohibiting healthcare providers from prescribing medication, administering diagnostic tests or conducting ongoing behavioral health treatments to minors except in certain circumstances.

HB2528 - Requiring all state board of nursing actions related to nonpractice violations be void, allowing for late license renewal for professional, practical and advanced practice registered nurses, setting fees for late license renewal, limiting unprofessional conduct to acts related to the practice of nursing, prohibiting the board from taking retaliatory action against a licensee based on certain lawful actions and creating a civil cause of action for violation thereof, requiring that board members be subject to senate confirmation and requiring the board to issue refunds for overpayment or duplicate payment.

## **Economic Development**

The commerce committees held joint meetings most of the week and received extensive briefings from agencies, with legislators pressing hard on transparency, return on investment, and data reporting for major incentive programs such as PEAK, HPIP, STAR Bonds, APEX, and ROZ. One committee member commented that ROZ “sucked” and that the program would be replaced with something that works. Commerce reported strong headline numbers for 2025, including \$9.5 billion in committed capital investment and roughly 12,000 new or retained jobs, but members repeatedly expressed frustration with the lack of clear net job counts and ROI metrics. Housing policy was also a major focus, with testimony emphasizing that workforce housing investment is key to expanding the property tax base and easing affordability pressures, particularly in rural communities. Programs like the Moderate-Income Housing Program and Reinvestment Housing Incentive Districts were highlighted as effective tools that leverage private dollars and reduce costs for homebuyers.

The committees also held a forum on the Kansas City Chiefs stadium and related STAR bond financing. Chiefs representatives outlined projected construction activity of more than \$3 billion, roughly 20,000 construction jobs, and 4,000 permanent jobs, while emphasizing that the project would not rely on the state general fund. Legislators raised pointed questions about bond repayment timelines, sales tax capture, transportation infrastructure, public transparency, and long-term taxpayer exposure, signaling continued scrutiny as negotiations proceed.

On Thursday, the Senate Commerce Committee held an informational hearing on SB30, which would require the Legislature to approve new occupational licenses and changes to existing licenses. Proponents argued the bill would reduce unnecessary barriers to work and expand workforce participation, while opponents raised concerns about public safety and the need for professional exemptions, especially for CPAs and other regulated professions. Committee leadership noted that the bill remains in conference committee and that the meeting was largely an effort to brief newer members ahead of further action later in the session.

Introduced bills of note:

HB2533 - Enacting the occupational therapy licensure compact to provide interstate practice privileges to occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants.

SB355 - Regulating the manufacture, wholesale and distribution of electronic cigarettes in this state and establishing licensure of electronic cigarette manufacturers.

SB357 - Establishing the intercity passenger rail service program and making transfers annually to the passenger rail service revolving fund.

# Local Government

Due to the Senate's new budget process, the Senate Committee on Local Government had an unusual task this week, hearing and passing out the budgets for the Kansas Public Disclosure Commission, Board of Barbering, Board of Cosmetology, and Board of Technical Professions.

The committee also heard the results from two Legislative Post Audit reports. The first was the cost counties incur to comply with state requirements, such as prosecution, motor vehicle registration, and a variety of other tasks the state demands of them. The Legislative Post Audit division reviewed the budgets of 3 counties and concluded that it would have cost the state \$19.1m in fiscal year 2024 to offset the losses those counties incurred in providing just 3 of the many services mandated by state law. Senator Joe Claeys (R-Wichita) questioned if smaller counties have the capacity to function effectively with these high costs, and floated the idea of combining counties, while Senator Ron Ryckman (R-Meade) pointed out that these costs need to be addressed in order to provide property tax relief.

The second audit presented to the committee reviewed how Manhattan, Overland Park, and Wichita spent their transient guest tax revenue. The review found that Manhattan had questionably transferred \$100k to its general fund, and Wichita had spent \$16k on administrative costs rather than on tourism, the intended purpose of the tax revenue.

With Chairman Pat Proctor (R-Leavenworth) making his case for Secretary of State, he's kept the House Committee on Elections busy. On Wednesday, the committee passed out [HB2446](#), which eliminates the requirement for candidates to place their treasurer's names on campaign materials, and [HB2438](#), which restricts which websites can be used to transmit voter registrations, after failed attempts to table the bills by committee Democrats. The committee also held a hearing on [HB2452](#), which moves municipal elections to even years. Proponents such as Rep. Steve Huebert (R-Valley Center) touted increased voter turnout and thus accountability for local officials, as well as cost savings by reducing the frequency of elections, as reasons for the reform. Opponents brought concerns over increased partisanship in local elections and voter drop out.

On Thursday, the committee passed HB2452 after amending it to allow local officers to run for state office, despite committee Democrats again attempting to table the bill. The committee then held a hearing on [HB2451](#), which prohibits the use of public assets by government officials to campaign for or against ballot measures. Sen. Doug Shane (R-Louisburg), who brought the bill, said it was common sense to ban use of tax dollars to influence an election. Opponents were concerned over the vagueness of the language.

Introduced bills of note:

[HB2492](#) - Requiring the county election officer to call a special election to fill a vacancy within the governing body of a municipality if the position remains vacant after 60 days.

[HB2503](#) - Repealing the mail ballot election act.

[HB2504](#) - Prohibiting cities and counties from restricting the discretion of landlords not to rent residential or commercial property on grounds including prospective tenants receipt of housing assistance or eviction or criminal history, and permitting cities and counties to prohibit discrimination by landlords on the basis of receipt of veterans benefits.

SB351 - Requiring correctional facilities and jails to allow inmates and prisoners to make telephone calls at no cost.

SB365 - Providing for the election of county appraisers and discontinuing the authority to form appraisal districts with district appraisers.

## Utilities

The House Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Telecommunications heard testimony on HB2435, which would allow natural gas utilities to defer depreciation and carrying costs for new infrastructure and recover those costs through an interim rate adjustment mechanism. Proponents, led by Kansas Gas Service, argued the bill would reduce regulatory lag, support economic development, and allow more gradual rate impacts while remaining subject to KCC prudence reviews. Opponents, including the Kansas Corporation Commission, Citizens Utility Ratepayer Board, and Kansans for Lower Electric Rates, warned the bill would weaken existing consumer protections, allow frequent surcharges outside of rate cases, and provide gas utilities with preferential regulatory treatment beyond what is already available through the gas system reliability surcharge. It is notable that the KCC came out as full-fledged opponents, something the regulatory agency will typically avoid by testifying neutral with concerns.

Senate Utilities held a hearing on the less contentious SB348, which would exempt any electric public utility that is a not-for-profit wholly-owned subsidiary of an electric cooperative public utility from the jurisdiction of the state corporation commission, while preserving customer protections. Proponents testified that the cooperative model is incompatible with full KCC regulation, citing high regulatory costs, lost economic development opportunities, and the need for local control, while neutral testimony from the KCC and CURB emphasized the importance of protecting ratepayers. The committee adopted an amendment allowing the option to opt back into KCC regulation through a petition process and then passed SB348 as amended, sending it out for further consideration.

Introduced bills of note:

HB2483 - Enacting the transparency and reform of utility expenditures act.

SB348 - Exempting any electric public utility that is a not-for-profit wholly owned subsidiary of an electric cooperative public utility from the jurisdiction of the state corporation commission.

## Important Dates

January 26th - Last day for individuals to introduce bills

February 6th - Last day for non-exempt committees to introduce bills

February 16th - Last day for committees to meet before Turnaround Day

February 19th - (Turnaround) Last day for non-exempt bills to pass original chamber



# Important Dates The Week Ahead

January 26th - Last day for individuals to introduce bills

February 6th - Last day for non-exempt committees to introduce bills

February 16th - Last day for committees to meet before Turnaround Day

February 19th - (Turnaround) Last day for non-exempt bills to pass original chamber

## The Week Ahead

The following bills are scheduled to receive hearings this week.

The following bills are scheduled to receive hearings this week.

### Monday, January 26

9:00AM – House Committee on Appropriations

Hearing on [HB2434](#) - Making and concerning supplemental appropriations for fiscal year 2026 and appropriations for fiscal years 2027 and 2028 for various state agencies, authorizing certain capital improvement projects and fees, authorizing certain transfers.

10:30AM – Senate Committee on Judiciary

Hearing on [HB2329](#) - Increasing the cumulative detention limit for juvenile offenders and criminal penalties for juvenile offenders who use a firearm in the commission of an offense or who are repeat offenders, providing for increased placement of offenders in non-foster home beds in youth residential facilities, requiring the secretary of corrections to pay for the costs associated with such placements and authorizing the secretary to make expenditures from the evidence-based programs account of the state general fund moneys to contract for such beds

1:30PM – House Committee on Health and Human Services

Final Action on [HB2218](#) - Amending the definition of "psilocybin" in the uniform controlled substances act to exclude the pharmaceutical composition of crystalline polymorph psilocybin and adding crystalline polymorph psilocybin to schedule IV of the uniform controlled substance act.

1:30PM – House Committee on Transportation

Hearing on [HB2467](#) - Prohibiting past convictions or sanctions for failure to comply with a traffic citation that are more than five years old from being considered by courts or the division of vehicles and eliminating certain notice requirements for the division of vehicles related to suspended or restricted drivers' licenses.

### Tuesday, January 27

10:30AM – Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs

Hearing on [SB355](#) - Regulating the manufacture, wholesale and distribution of electronic cigarettes in this state and establishing licensure of electronic cigarette manufacturers.

1:30PM – House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

Hearing on [HB2464](#) - Extending the number of years that new credits may be issued or earned for contributions to graduates of aerospace and aviation-related educational programs and employers of program graduates.

3:30PM – House Committee on Judiciary

Hearing on [HB2479](#) - Authorizing electronic monitoring with victim notification as a condition of release prior to trial for certain offenders charged with a domestic violence offense, domestic battery, stalking or violation of a protective order.

3:30PM – House Committee on Taxation

Hearing on [HB2440](#) - Excluding owners of oil leases from having to file request for exemption with the board of tax appeals for property tax exemptions.

3:30PM – House Committee on Taxation

Hearing on [HB2408](#) - Providing that leased ground owned by a county-recognized community land trust shall be considered as a factor in determining fair market value for property tax purposes.

### **Wednesday, January 28**

8:30AM – Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Hearing on [SB322](#) - Removing the authority of the state board of pharmacy to authorize individuals to access the prescription monitoring program database by rules and regulations.

8:30AM – Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Hearing on [SB328](#) - Permitting a pharmacist to distribute pre-measured doses of epinephrine to a school for emergency medication kits.

9:00AM – House Committee on Local Government

Hearing on [HB2433](#) - Clarifying county authority over the transfer or appropriation of water by placing such authority, except for domestic use, with the chief engineer and water transfer hearing panel.

9:30AM – Senate Committee on Local Government

Hearing on [SB144](#) - Invalidating restrictive covenants that limit or prohibit the installation of solar panels and allowing the adoption of reasonable rules by homeowners associations concerning solar panels.

10:30AM – Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs

Hearing on [SB314](#) - Prohibiting the use of public assets by government officers and employees to advocate for or against proposed amendments to the constitution of the state of Kansas and ballot questions submitted to qualified electors.

1:30PM – House Committee on Health and Human Services

Hearing on [HB2506](#) - Establishing the addiction counselor apprentice license and setting fees for such license.

3:30PM – House Committee on Judiciary

Hearing on [HB2480](#) - Creating an exception to certain mandatory reporting obligations for licensed social workers when working under the supervision of an attorney and permitting an attorney to require a licensed social worker to keep ethical obligations of attorney-client privilege while working under the supervision of such attorney.

**Thursday, January 29**

9:00AM – House Committee on Energy, Utilities and Telecommunication

Possible hearing on [HB2483](#) - Enacting the transparency and reform of utility expenditures act.

9:00AM – House Committee on Appropriations

Hearing on [HB2463](#) - Creating the rural health transformation fund, prescribing powers and duties of the state finance council concerning such fund and the rural health transformation program, crediting all federal moneys for the rural health transformation program to such fund and making and concerning appropriations for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027, for the state finance council and other state agencies.

1:30PM – Senate Committee on Commerce

Hearing on [SB334](#) - Facilitating nursing workforce development by providing education levels for instructors at nursing schools as a requirement for state approval.

1:30PM – House Committee on Health and Human Services

Hearing on [HB2157](#) - Expanding pharmacist's scope of practice to include point-of-care testing for and treatment of COVID-19.

## **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.

## **Government Relations Staff**

Toni Porter, Vice President, [tporter@wichitachamber.org](mailto:tporter@wichitachamber.org)

Jason Watkins, Legislative Consultant, [jason@wsks.us](mailto:jason@wsks.us)

# GOVERNMENT RELATIONS INVESTORS

## PINNACLE



## VISIONARY



## PROSPERITY



## LEADERSHIP



## SUCCESS



## OPPORTUNITY

Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas