

THE ADVOCATE

A WEEKLY UPDATE
FROM THE KANSAS
LEGISLATURE

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WICHITA REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

2026 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



Intro

Today is a major deadline in the legislative calendar: the last day for committees to meet before turnaround. Thursday, February 19, marks turnaround, the point in the session at which non-exempt bills must have passed through their chamber of origin. Leadership intends to head home a day earlier than that, wanting to wrap up on Wednesday, so many non-exempt bills may be left behind. Compounding the issue is the new budget process. With a condensed calendar and a dual-track, legislature-driven budget process, many Senate committees have spent the entire first half of the session conducting budget hearings only. This has resulted in both a lack of bill hearings and a rushed budget process, resulting in few bills being passed and numerous provisos.

The budget process has moved at a notably brisk pace this session. Particularly in the Senate, which does not utilize standing budget subcommittees, members have been required to make significant fiscal decisions within a compressed timeframe. During debate, there were instances where line items required clarification due to similar naming conventions, and the House revisited and modified several provisos the following day, including provisions related to SNAP funding, CDDO funding sources, and state funding of abortion procedures. These adjustments reflect the complexity of managing a budget of this size and scope under tight deadlines. The accelerated timeline has prompted discussion among legislators about ensuring both the achievement of the Legislature's \$200 million budget reduction target and the protection of priority funding areas. House Appropriations Committee Chairman Rep. Troy Waymaster (R-Bunker Hill) has indicated that a subsequent "trailer bill" may be introduced to address items that warrant further refinement. The Senate Committee on Ways and Means did not meet on Friday and is expected to conclude its remaining budget deliberations today.

With just today left to meet, committee chairs and lobbyists alike rush to get their bills moved before members take to the floor all day on Tuesday and Wednesday. For example, the House Committee on Federal and State Affairs worked a staggering ten bills on Friday, hoping to finish committee work heading into the turnaround break.

First Veto of 2026

Governor Laura Kelly issued her first veto of the legislative session last Friday, vetoing [SB244](#), commonly referred to as a "bathroom bill," after the full 10-day period the governor can wait before making a decision to veto or sign a bill into law. The bill would restrict someone in public buildings to only going into a bathroom matching their biological sex. The governor's office issued a press release explaining the veto, saying the bill was "poorly drafted" and claimed it had a wide range of unintended consequences, such as disallowing a father from taking his daughter to the restroom at a sporting event. She derided the legislature for ignoring affordability issues to focus on "telling Kansans how to go to the bathroom."

Legislative leadership responded to Governor Kelly's press release late Friday night, with Senate President Ty Masterson (R-Andover) stating that the governor had "turned her back on women" and that she had "sided with they/them over simple, scientific truth." Speaker of the House Dan Hawkins (R-Wichita) found the veto "ridiculous" and said that it was "hard to wrap his mind around" the governor vetoing something "so fundamentally commonsense." Both chambers' Republican leaders pledged to quickly override the veto. The bill was originally passed on a 87-36 vote, three votes above the constitutional two-thirds veto override threshold of 84, so the chance of the legislature succeeding in the override vote appears high.

The original version of the bill, [HB2426](#), was brought on behalf of Attorney General Kris Kobach, who requested that the legislature clean up language related to gender markers on driver's licenses after provisions passed last year were struck down in court.

Significant Attorney General Opinion

Passed through the Senate on Monday, February 2, the House took up [SB254](#) the following Thursday. The bill would bar undocumented immigrants from accessing any public benefit. In a razor-thin vote of 19-18, the Senate rejected an amendment that would have excluded in-state tuition from the bill. The House, during an unusual procedural motion where the bill was referred to the committee of the whole and debated on the floor without a traditional committee process, succeeded in excluding in-state tuition from the bill.

However, on Tuesday, February 10, Attorney General Kris Kobach issued an opinion declaring the House position a violation of federal law. The opinion, requested by State Representative Samantha Poetter Parshall (R-Paola), held that KSA 76-731a directly contradicts a federal statute from 1996 that bars any state from considering undocumented immigrants as residents for the purposes of tuition.

Cell Phone Ban Proceeds with Caution

The House Substitute for [SB281](#), which would require school districts to ban cell phones in classrooms, will be debated on the House floor later today. The proposal, which originally garnered widespread bipartisan support, including from the Governor and the Speaker of the House, has encountered several roadblocks. The original Senate bill remains in the Committee on Education after Chairwoman Renee Erickson (R-Wichita) raised concerns about its mandate on private schools. The champion of the bill, Senate Majority Leader Chase Blasi (R-Wichita), has publicly held that the bill needs to include accredited private schools, as the issue is a matter of mental health and educational outcomes for school children, which should take priority over private school funding disputes.

The bill was instead worked in the House Committee on Education, but went through some confusing changes. The bill's wording was amended to a suggestion rather than a mandate, but the next day it was changed back to a mandate and passed out of committee. Many Republican Caucus members share Senator Erickson's concern, including the carrier of the bill, Rep. Sherri Brantley (R-Great Bend), who is expected to try to amend the bill on the floor to exclude private schools. It is unclear in what form the bill will advance.

Budget

The Senate Committee on Ways and Means spent the week passing budget provisos, including reductions on administrative spending and staffing, including multiple FTE cuts and funding cuts within the Attorney General's Office, the Inspector General, and the Kansas Corporation Commission. They added new oversight and efficiency initiatives, including allowing the Inspector General to use AI-supported RFPs to flag inefficiencies, requiring agencies to provide NGO funding transparency, and tying new program funding to performance-based payments.

Significant social services increases included raising certain Medicaid reimbursement rates, behavioral health services, nursing home capacity payments, SUD treatment grants, and waiver workforce wages. Education and community support also saw additions, such as SPED funding increases, library grants, CPR/AED training funds, and support for Meals on Wheels. Transportation and public safety items included funding for highway patrol IT, troop headquarters financing, and 911 mapping improvements. Administrative policy changes addressed ballooning facility rent, employee parking access, tax clearance transparency, and handling of unfilled FTEs. Economic development provisions included adjustments to STAR bond requirements and housing loan language for distressed projects. Additional enhancements supported veterans' services, workforce programs, and nonprofit service providers.

The Senate has not concluded its budget work and will pass the budget out today.

The House Committee on Appropriations got behind quickly last week, not finishing budget subcommittee readouts until Wednesday, despite the intent to finish on Monday or Tuesday. Once they finished readouts on the massive KDADS and Board of Regents budgets, they offered a flurry of provisos on Thursday and Friday.

The committee proposed a series of provisos regarding education funding transparency. One proviso tied \$10 million in new special education funding to a transparency report to be submitted to the legislature. Another forces the Kansas State Department of Education to keep assessment cut scores unchanged while shifting some of the funds designated to KU for their contract on the state assessment to a new innovative assessment pilot in the KCK and Olathe school districts. The money for the Safe and Secure Schools grant program was moved from the Attorney General's Office, which Chairman Troy Waymaster (R-Bunker Hill) noted was never the House's intended position, and returned to KSDE. Rep. Sean Tarwater (R-Stilwell), the Chairman of Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development, brought a proviso to remove language that would have restricted the use of technical education scholarships, a move he said he wanted to make after hearing concern from the business community.

Vice Chairwoman Kristey Williams (R-Augusta) brought a slew of provisos, most notably a repeat of last year's budget-wide 1.5% State General Fund operations cut, which she said would save roughly \$50 million. Long-tenured appropriator Rep. Will Carpenter (R-El Dorado), citing examples of "painful" agency cuts from Kansas' lean 2015-16 budget cycle, appreciated the language that clarified agencies do not have the authority to take the 1.5% cut from specified line items. More recently, he pointed out, a whopping 67% of the appropriation for Hope Ranch in Wichita, which provides services helping women overcome the trauma of sexual abuse, was deleted as part of the 1.5% cut last year. Rep. Williams also included a proviso withholding \$10 million from the SNAP program, placing it within the State Finance Council, and authorizing the release of \$5m upon approval of an application to exempt soda and candy from SNAP, and the remaining \$5m upon implementation.

Another notable change was a reversal of a prior decision, providing \$12.1m in SGF funding for SNAP operations. This decision was made, according to Chairman Troy Waymaster, after leadership discussed the item and determined that it was needed to meet the "maintenance of effort" requirement to receive federal funds.

Other additions by the House included requiring Medicaid nursing home applicants to be informed about home waiver options, as well as funding for Envision, child sexual abuse centers, and PTSD treatment for first responders. Economic development provisions included funding for the Moderate-Income Housing program using ARPA savings, revisions to EDIF allocations, support for an MRO loan project in Wichita, UAV development funding tied to federal matching funds, a continuation of the World Cup funding transfer to KC26, funding for the KSU dairy barn partnership, renaming and extending the WSU digital transformation program, and authorization to reappropriate funds for infrastructure projects like the John Redmond hydro suction effort.

Tax

If it could be said that the House Committee on Taxation started out slowly this session, that is certainly no longer the case. Over the course of three days last week, the committee held 10 hearings and passed 4 bills in a blur of action as we approach turnaround. One notable bill heard was [HB2457](#), which would allow homestead property taxes to be frozen for individuals over 65 and would eliminate a property tax exemption for certain commercial healthcare properties, when in competition with non-exempt properties. The committee also heard 4 proposals for sales tax exemptions for nonprofit organizations, including [HB2388](#), which would provide a sales tax exemption for Friends of Cedar Crest Association. There was no opposition to any of the 4 bills. Introduced this week was [HB2775](#), a bill which would encourage drilling in Kansas, which has been on the decline for over a decade, by providing three years of relief on severance tax for new oil and gas wells. Tax is an exempt committee, so can hear bills after the traditional turnaround deadline.

On Thursday, House Tax held a hearing on [HB2745](#), the House leadership-approved property tax plan that would institute a soft cap of 3% on local revenue, requiring a vote of the electors to approve increases in property tax revenues for the next year, and establish the property tax relief fund for counties that limit their property taxes increases. Brought by Chairman Adam Smith (R-Weskan), the bill hearing had a tremendous turnout, running almost 2 hours. Although all parties agreed that tangible property tax relief is the aim, there was significant disagreement among conferees on whether this bill is the right way to do it. Several city managers and mayors spoke against the bill, taking particular offense at the requirement of a vote to increase property taxes. Spencer Duncan, the Mayor of Topeka and Government Affairs Director for the League of Kansas Municipalities, decried that for years local officials have not been invited to policy discussions, whether it is for this bill or to the 5 taxation committees that occurred over the interim. He suggested changes to the bill itself include the option of a protest petition instead of an election, and to avoid “gutting” the revenue-neutral rate.

When it came time to ask questions, Chairman Smith said that he was “not sure where to start.” Nevertheless, he and the committee appear undeterred in pursuing a solution to property taxes, with plans to work HB 2745 today.

In comparison, the Senate continued to hear and work bills related to property tax and tax credits, such as [SB397](#), a bill that allows a person to stay eligible for a homestead property tax refund claim or the selective assistance for effective senior relief (SAFESR) tax credit if the appraised valuation of the homestead subsequently exceeds \$350,000. They also held a hearing for [SB402](#), which modifies the definition of household income and provides an eligibility exception for claimants who are required to live away from the homestead by reason of health or other hardships for both programs.

The two bills are part of the Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation's wider plan to combine the homestead property tax refund and the SAFESR programs into one, creating a more effective, accessible, and – theoretically – less expensive approach. Senator Kelly Warren (D-Leawood) testified in favor of [SB397](#), arguing that it is “meant to address the value of homes going up,” while a proponent from the Johnson County Board of County Commissioners for the second bill argued that it is meant to “ease the burden on older citizens.” The committee worked and passed [SB402](#) out of committee on Thursday, with an amendment by Chairwoman Caryn Tyson (R-Parker) to increase the cap of homes for the homestead valuation to \$375,000 and an amendment by Ethan Corson (D-Fairway) add an inflation adjustment to the Safe Senior Program with the property tax freeze. Senate Tax also passed out [SB368](#), the Senate version of a bill to enact a health care sharing ministries tax deduction act. Chairwoman Tyson has announced her intent to work more bills on Monday.

Introduced bills of note:

[HB2773](#) - Providing for the apportionment of business income by manufacturers of alcoholic liquor depending on whether the taxpayer is a qualifying Kansas investor or a general manufacturer.

[HB2775](#) - Providing for a three-year exemption from severance tax for new oil and gas wells.

Health

The House Committee on Health and Human Services was working overtime this week, holding marathon hearings and passing out multiple major pieces of legislation. In a big win for healthcare access, the committee passed out [HB2368](#), providing for the licensure of anesthesiologist assistants, or AAs. This moves the AAs one step closer to working in Kansas, rather than commuting to Missouri, where they have been practicing safely and effectively for decades. On Thursday, they passed out [HB2509](#), which would put APRNs under the Healthcare Stabilization Fund. The committee also passed out multiple therapy licensure compacts. The committee also heard [HB2676](#), a bill brought by Social Services Budget Chairman Rep. Dave Buehler (R-Lansing), which would allow pharmacists to practice up to the standard of care they are educated to, and is scheduled to work it today, alongside nine other bills.

The Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare moved at a slower pace, but heard and then passed out [SB448](#), which would allow partner therapy for sexually transmitted diseases. The committee also plans to hear [SB497](#), which would put Kratom in Schedule I, today, as well as work any bills previously heard at the discretion of the chair.

In the House Committee on Insurance on Friday, the committee voted against the Chair's recommendation to pass out [HB2551](#), regulating pharmacy services administrative organizations. The bill had no proponents. The committee also heard [HB2602](#), which would allow portable benefit plans for independent contractors, which conferees, all proponents, claimed would help both healthcare access and workforce development for contractors in Kansas. The bill was passed out on Wednesday.

Introduced bills of note:

[SB504](#) - Enacting the Kansas healthcare professional employment mobility and patient access act to prohibit post-employment noncompete agreements.

[SB508](#) - Increasing the annual limit on transfers from the lottery operating fund to the community crisis stabilization centers fund and the clubhouse model program fund.

Economic Development

The Commerce Conference Committee on [SB30](#) met Monday and worked the bill requiring legislative approval of new occupational licensing requirements or material changes adopted by state agencies. The conference committee adopted language replacing the joint resolution requirement with ratification by enactment of a bill, addressing constitutional concerns raised in prior discussions. The definition of agency was narrowed to apply to the executive branch of state government, excluding the judicial branch, and additional technical changes were made, including requiring agencies to submit written proposals and supporting documentation to the Legislature before implementing changes. The committee agreed to the proposal and passed the bill out of conference.

On Wednesday, the House and Senate Commerce Committees held a joint hearing on [HB2764](#), which addresses unemployment insurance law and prohibits substantive changes to employment security statutes through budget provisos or other temporary measures. Proponents, including The Arnold Group and The Kansas Chamber, characterized the bill as a structural and federal conformity measure designed to restore guardrails following last session's emergency unemployment proviso. Employer-sponsored supplemental unemployment benefit plans would be allowed if all requirements outlined in the bill were met and such plans were authorized by the Secretary of Labor. The Secretary would also be required to maintain and publish a registry of authorized supplemental unemployment benefit plans submitted by employers on the Department of Labor website. In addition, the Secretary would be required to monitor the interaction between supplemental unemployment benefit plans and state unemployment insurance claims to ensure the continued solvency of the Employment Security Trust Fund. Supporters argued the bill protects solvency and preserves Kansas' competitive unemployment tax structure. Opponents, including the Department of Labor and labor representatives, raised concerns about the drafting process, administrative feasibility, and whether compromise language had been adequately incorporated, specifically around temporary unemployment and the eight-week rule. No action was taken on the bill.

During the same meeting, House Commerce passed [HB2346](#), establishing a Kansas sports tourism grant program administered by the Secretary of Commerce, after adopting an amendment to change the application timeline, cap the fee at \$100,000, and add NASCAR and NBA exhibition games to the eligible sports.

On Thursday, House Commerce held a hearing on the Kansas Chamber's tax overhaul bill [HB2757](#), which repeals or sunsets several income tax credits, extends the angel investor tax credit to 2031, modifies the High Performance Incentive Program, and contains the aviation tax credit. The bill modifies the HPIP wage standard to 125% for rural eligibility and expands transferability for certain corporations. Testimony focused heavily on the fiscal note, particularly the projected state general fund impact associated with expanded HPIP eligibility. Eric Stafford with the Kansas Chamber described the bill as a starting point for modernizing and cleaning up the state's tax credit structure. Chairman Sean Tarwater (R-Stilwell) stated at the end of the hearing that he believes the tax credits belong in the tax committee, but that his committee would examine the rest of the bill. [HB2737](#), a bill enacting the taxpayer agreement act to provide an alternative method of tax increment financing for municipal economic development projects through taxpayer agreements, passed out at the end of committee after the bill was amended to correct an erroneous reference to strip clubs.

Introduced bills of note:

[SB504](#) - Enacting the Kansas healthcare professional employment mobility and patient access act to prohibit post-employment noncompete agreements.

[SB508](#) - Increasing the annual limit on transfers from the lottery operating fund to the community crisis stabilization centers fund and the clubhouse model program fund.

Local Government

While much of the focus for local governments is on the all-important property tax front, local government committees heard multiple bills last week that would ease the day-to-day operations of local officials. The House Committee on Local Government heard [HB2698](#) on Monday, allowing for the seizure of animals that judges find to have violated county resolutions, giving counties the authority they need to keep communities safe from dangerous dogs. [SB436](#) was heard in the Senate Committee on Local Government, which would increase the cost threshold on public bidding processes to \$100k for construction projects. Conferees noted that, given the significant inflation in construction costs, the previous \$25k limit was woefully out of date.

Many bills related to local government continue to be routed to the commerce committees. The House Committee on Commerce passed out [HB2588](#), creating statewide licensure for electricians, after a balloon amendment to address various opponent concerns, as well as [HB2737](#), which would change how tax increment financing for municipal economic development projects works, discussed in the above economic development section. The committee also heard [HB2739](#), banning local governments from mandating sprinklers in dwellings of four housing units or fewer. Intended as a much-needed cost-saving measure for housing development, the measure raised concerns about safety and the creation of a patchwork of changes to the outdated fire code.

Introduced bills of note:

HB2769 - Requiring members of governing bodies of subordinate service taxing areas to be residents of such taxing areas.

HB2771 - Establishing requirements for the county sheriff operating a jail for the enforcement of United States immigration and customs enforcement detainers, requiring municipal insurance pools to provide coverage for law enforcement that enforces federal laws, requiring the state to pay certain judgements in a federal court action, requiring the attorney general to provide representation in certain civil actions and authorizing county sheriffs to enter into certain interlocal cooperation agreements without the approval of the board of county commissioners

SB501 - Requiring law enforcement agencies to adopt policies related to racial and other biased-based policing using technology and criminalizing violation of racial and other biased-based policing policies.

Utilites

The House Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications Committee spent significant time this week on two major utility measures. On Tuesday, the committee held a full hearing on HB2483, the Transparency and Reform of Utility Expenditures (TRUE) Act. The bill proposes substantial changes to transmission cost recovery, Southwest Power Pool oversight, competitive bidding requirements, KCC transparency provisions, nuclear development policy, and authorization of third-party power purchase agreements. Kansans for Lower Electric Rates, the bill's sponsor, argued that Kansas electric rates remain comparably higher than those of neighboring states and that transmission spending and the annual Transmission Delivery Charge adjustment mechanism are driving costs upward. They called for requiring competitive bidding of certain SPP projects, expanding legislative oversight of major transmission lines, and allowing third-party PPAs to provide long-term price certainty. Opponents, including the Kansas Corporation Commission and Evergy, insisted that several provisions would destabilize the regulatory framework and create credit rating concerns, while TDCs would just be implicated in more frequent rate cases. This comprehensive piece of legislation is likely dead in the water this year, but proponents are expected to continue efforts to promote transparency and combat consistently rising rates.

On Thursday, the House committee heard the compromise in HB2435, modifying the Gas System Reliability Surcharge framework, and passed the bill out favorably. The substitute bill narrows recovery to growth-related capital investments, excludes allocated corporate costs, removes automatic inflation adjustments, and maintains a \$1.35 monthly residential cap. Kansas Gas Service argued the measure reduces regulatory lag to roughly fifteen months and supports infrastructure expansion and safety modernization tied to economic development opportunities. The KCC indicated the revised language aligns with state energy policy goals and testified neutrally, stating it was now a policy decision up to the legislature. CURB continued to oppose the bill, raising concerns that growth-related investments lack clearly defined economic development targets and could expand surcharge usage without sufficient review. After the substitute bill language was adopted, the bill advanced out of committee.

In the Senate Utilities Committee, the week's attention focused on [SB439](#), the Utility Railroad Crossing Act. The committee held a hearing on Tuesday and began working on the bill on Thursday. The proposal establishes a statewide process governing utility crossings and limited parallel use of railroad rights-of-way, sets standardized notice requirements and fee structures, and creates a dispute resolution pathway through the KCC. Utilities and broadband providers, including Kansas Gas Service and Ideatek, testified that inconsistent railroad permitting timelines and fees create costly delays that threaten energy, gas, and broadband deployment projects, particularly as Kansas prepares to deploy substantial broadband funding. Railroad representatives countered that the bill risks undermining railroad property rights and safety protocols, arguing that rigid timelines do not account for engineering complexity and that safety oversight should not be diluted. During the working session, the committee adopted amendments clarifying compliance with rail safety laws and extending review timelines to sixty days for crossings and 120 days for parallel projects. A conceptual amendment to remove the parallel provisions was tabled for further discussion. The bill has been blessed, allowing the committee to work on it after turnaround.

Important Dates

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

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

The Week Ahead

The following bills are scheduled to receive hearings this week.

Monday, February 16

8:30AM in Senate Public Health and Welfare

Hearing on [SB497](#) - Adding kratom to schedule I of the uniform controlled substances act and making conforming amendments to the definition of fentanyl-related controlled substance in the criminal code

1:30PM in House Child Welfare and Foster Care

Hearing on [HB2734](#) - Requiring expedited procedures for children who are under two years of age at the time that a petition is filed requesting such child be adjudicated to be a child in need of care, requiring permanency for such a child within 12 months and directing the secretary to report on such expedited procedures

1:30PM in House Health and Human Services

Hearing on [HB2718](#) - Creating a right for an adult care home resident to use such resident's pharmacy of choice without being charged a fee or financial penalty by the adult care home because of such choice.

3:30PM in House Judiciary

Hearing on [HB2696](#) - Providing for the modernization of notarization and the notary public process with respect to real estate documents for the purpose of mitigation of real estate document-related fraud, requiring the development, implementation and administration of a two-tiered authentication system for notarization of real estate documents and requiring use of a 3D biometric antifraud system by all notaries public by December 31, 2027.

Tuesday, February 17

No committee work, legislators will be on the floor all day.

Wednesday, February 18

No committee work, legislators will be on the floor all day.

Thursday, February 19

No session.

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.

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