

# THE ADVOCATE

A WEEKLY UPDATE  
FROM THE KANSAS  
LEGISLATURE

ADVOCACY THAT WORKS



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## WICHITA REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2026 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



## Intro

A big week starts in the Capitol building today, with the deadline for any non-exempt bill to pass either chamber coming up on Friday. The legislators will be on the floor voting for most of the week, as the last day for non-exempt committees to meet is tomorrow, March 17. It will be a sprint to the finish as the legislature looks to get major policy goals across the finish line. Specifically, the legislature will look to reevaluate its property tax plan after the Senate's constitutional amendment to cap assessed value increases failed to advance past General Orders in the House last week, and conference work on the budget begins in earnest. More on those items below.

# Cell Phone Ban Passes

One marquee piece of legislation that has already made it to the finish line is [HB2299](#), which would require school districts to enact policies banning the use of cell phones in schools “from bell to bell.” The concept gained major traction at the beginning of the session, with legislative leadership from both chambers making it a priority, including from Speaker of the House Dan Hawkins (R-Wichita), who endorsed the policy in his response to Governor Laura Kelly’s State of the State address, in which she too voiced her support for a cell phone ban in schools. The Senate Substitute for HB2299 was sent to the Governor’s desk on Tuesday when the House concurred with Senate amendments by a vote of [84-39](#).

Despite the bipartisan push, the bill did not have a simple path. A previous version of the bill, the House Substitute for [SB281](#), weathered a storm of amendments in committee and on the floor from both parties. Much of the controversy stemmed from conservative members of the body who objected to the government interfering with private schools’ policies. Private schools were exempted from the bill in the House committee, then added back on the floor, prompting immediate attempts to reverse the change. Eventually, this version did include private schools in the ban. Many House Democrats also objected to the bill, some on grounds of local control, and others saying students should have the ability to communicate with their parents during school hours, especially in case of an emergency. Eventually, the first version passed with a weaker [75-48](#) vote on the floor back in February, which then sat in the Senate Committee on Education.

The Senate committee then incorporated much of the contents of SB281 into HB2299 and sent it to the full body. Private schools were again the focus of contention, with the Senate concerned that the language including private schools within the ban was too broad. The bill was amended on the floor by Senator Bill Clifford (R-Garden City) to clarify that only private schools accredited by the State Board of Education would be included, not those accredited by any other accrediting body. After this change, opposition to the bill was lessened, with the bill clearing the Senate by a convincing [32-4](#) vote, while the House concurred with the aforementioned 84 yeas, nine more than their previous attempt. The Governor, having endorsed the policy at her State of the State Address, is expected to sign the bill.

## New Legislator Selected

The 121st district seat was empty after the tragic and unexpected passing of Representative John Resman (R-Olathe) in early March. He was well respected by his colleagues, with Speaker Dan Hawkins visibly emotional on the House floor as he announced his passing. Two candidates have filed for the seat: former Johnson County Commission candidate Mike Storm and retired Brigadier General Thomas Palenske. Storm took home 48% of the vote in 2024 against incumbent Shirley Allenbrand. Palenske is known for his time as commander of the 36th Air Wing at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, during the base’s recovery from a devastating storm.

After a vote by the county Republican precinct committee last Thursday, Mike Storm was selected to fill the seat for the remainder of Rep. Resman’s term, though he will have to fend off Palenske’s primary challenge and a potential Democratic opponent in a competitive district to retain the seat in the 2026 midterms.

# Higher Education Reform Bill Moves

Last Wednesday, the House Majority Leader Representative Chris Croft (R-Overland Park) made a rare appearance in a committee meeting, introducing [HB2798](#) into the House Committee on Appropriations. Because of the late start, the bill had to be introduced in Appropriations, an exempt committee, and then moved to the House Committee on Higher Education Budget for a hearing on Thursday. The bill is designed to make it easier for the “Big Three” Kansas universities to conduct research by cutting certain Board of Regents rules on procurement, contracting, bidding, building improvements, and more.

If having Majority Leader Croft introduce the bill wasn’t enough to signal that the bill is a major undertaking, Governor Laura Kelly sent her chief of staff, Will Lawrence, to testify in favor of the legislation. In fact, Rep. Croft said in testimony that if not for the time crunch, the bill would have been even bigger in scope. While the bill had heavyweight proponents, including University of Kansas Chancellor Douglas Girod, the Kansas Board of Regents’ Chairman Blake Benson appeared in opposition. Benson voiced concern over the bill’s process, noting that it was drafted without input from all stakeholders, including the Board of Regents, the governing body of higher education institutions. He worried that the new legal category created for the three research institutions would weaken state oversight and was concerned about the definition of state monies.

After questions from the members of the committee, Chief of Staff Will Lawrence offered two amendments, one to include the other three regent universities, Pittsburg State, Fort Hays State, and Emporia State, in the bill, and the other to fix the definition of state monies. Chairman Blake Benson said that if these amendments were adopted by the committee, they would flip their position to support.

## Budget

Budget action was limited last week because the conference committee for the budget had not yet been convened. The House Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Ways and Means held a joint session to receive a briefing on the differences between the two chambers’ budget positions, but no formal action was taken. The respective budget committees met several times independently during the week to address ancillary budget issues.

The House Committee on Appropriations held several informational briefings covering the upcoming World Cup and its potential impacts, state bonding projects, statewide mental health spending, and facilities operations within the Department of Corrections. The committee also held a hearing on [HB2543](#), which would require an annual reimbursement to the Department of Wildlife and Parks for lost revenue resulting from free or discounted hunting and fishing licenses, permits, or passes created by legislative enactment on or after July 1, 2027. The bill received one proponent. Additionally, the committee passed out [HB2781](#), authorizing the Kansas Historical Society to acquire the Junior Officers’ Quarters at Fort Dodge and provide for the use, preservation, improvement, control, and maintenance of the property.

Meanwhile, the Senate Committee on Ways and Means passed out [HB2513](#), the annual claims against the state bill, which they clarified would be the “shell” for the state budget. The committee also advanced the reappointment of Donald Wiley to the Kansas Public Employees Relations Board. Later in the week, the committee held a hearing on [SB513](#), directing the Department for Children and Families to develop, procure, and implement software to provide direct child care subsidy payments. The bill had two proponents and was passed out. Additional measures advanced by Ways and Means included [HB2237](#), increasing the threshold for state employee bonuses and retention bonuses, and [HB2393](#), authorizing the Kansas Supreme Court to impose a charge to fund the costs of non-judicial staff. The committee also received a presentation on architectural bonding projects at the University of Kansas.

## Tax

The legislature’s desire to move legislation related to property tax reform had a setback last week, when the Senate and the House’s respective property tax plans were scheduled to hit the floor in the opposite chambers on Thursday.

First, under General Orders on the House floor, Senate Assessment and Taxation Chairwoman Senator Caryn Tyson’s (R-Parker) proposed constitutional amendment, [SCR1616](#), which would cap annual increases in real property assessed value at 3%, kicked off a lengthy conversation, with numerous amendments failing. House Taxation Committee Chairman Representative Adam Smith (R-Weskan) emphasized that “regardless of how you feel about this, this is a chance to give the voters a chance to decide” by putting the proposal to a vote in November. Despite calls for consideration, it was voted down by an overwhelming margin on a voice vote without a call for division, which results in an actual tallied vote. Though House Republicans in large part did not speak out against the bill from the well, they also did not offer much support. More important than any speech, of course, was the resounding no vote.

The House leadership-approved property tax plan in [HB2745](#) was on General Orders in the Senate that afternoon; however, the Senate passed over the bill when it was time to address the measure. [HB2745](#) would require a protest petition of the electors to approve increases in property tax revenues for the next year. On Friday, the bill was rereferred back to the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee. The bill, which following amendments from the Senate committee last Monday, was altered so significantly it is now a Senate Substitute, and changes the protest petition to 10% of registered voters, utilizes revenue neutral plus Midwest CPI or 3%, and allows the revenue neutral notice to be returned as the protest petition, which could be collected directly by the county treasurer, county clerk or election officer. Even if it were to make it to the floor, it would certainly not be the same bill introduced by Representative Smith earlier in the session.

Despite countless hours spent on both proposals, property tax reform is again at a standstill. The stalemate mirrors last year, when [HB2396](#), the House’s property tax plan, also involving a protest petition to limit property tax, passed in the House but was withdrawn from the calendar, and [SCR1603](#), a similar constitutional amendment to cap property tax valuation increases on real property, passed the Senate but was not adopted by the House. Leadership appears resolved, nevertheless, to pass something, and is likely to revive both bills; yet, the more time passes without a resolution and the more convoluted property tax reform plans become, it seems increasingly likely that even if something passes, it might be a compromise that neither the House nor the Senate deems ideal.

In other Taxation news, both committees have continued to hold hearings and work bills. The Senate Assessment and Taxation committee met every day last week, including twice on Monday and Friday. Notable bills heard include [SB521](#), which would provide for credits for payment of employees' child care and contributions to a third party for increased child care options, and [HB2464](#), a bill to extend aviation employee tax credits. Both bills were passed out of the committee on Thursday, [SB521](#), after being amended to make it nonrefundable, and [HB2464](#) was revised to a 3-year extension (from 10 years) with a sunset in 2029. In addition to these bills, Senate Chairwoman Caryn Tyson (R-Parker) announced her intentions to work on more bills early this week.

The House and Senate are also exploring a number of alternative solutions to property tax reform, including [SB488](#), which would enact the Kansas Property Tax Freedom Act of 2026, providing for the phased elimination of property taxation and revenue replacement grants to subdivisions. Somewhat similar in name, the House Taxation committee heard [HCR5034](#) last Wednesday, which would establish the Freedom From Taxes Fund. According to Speaker Pro Tempore Representative Blake Carpenter (R-Derby), who testified as the creator of the legislation, the Freedom From Taxes Fund is essentially a sovereign wealth fund. Gradually, the fund would collect money from Kansas' expiring sales tax exemptions, with approval from a newly created Kansas Citizens Freedom Review Board, and gradually eliminate the state motor vehicle tax, state property tax, and state income and privilege tax. Though it's an ambitious plan, the bill is sponsored by 55 representatives, with the intent to be passed as a resolution rather than a bill to ensure constitutional protection.

Additionally, the Senate heard [SB534](#) on Friday, which would impose a nameplate capacity tax and a production tax upon certain wind farms and solar facilities with the intent to transfer revenue to a property tax relief fund, then to a state school district finance fund, ultimately to decrease the statewide property tax levy for schools. The bill's opponents included members of the renewable energy industry, such as Kimberly Svaty from Kansas Municipal Utilities, who argued that states that have imposed nameplate capacity and production taxes on renewable energy often did so in lieu of property taxes, whereas Kansas would likely have both. Representative Awerkamp (R- St. Marys), in contrast, spoke in favor of the bill, citing a direct reduction in mill levies as the most immediate method to property tax relief, also citing increasing taxes on sports wagering revenue as a possible method to gather funds in order to reduce mill levies. Though the House has yet to hear the bill, they heard an informational hearing on Thursday.

Two additional bills passed through House Taxation last week, including [HB2773](#), which was passed as amended. The bill, which would provide 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, was amended to mandate single factor apportionment for all, then quickly referred back to committee to be worked again, and passed out, returning to only apply single factor apportionment to in-state manufacturers. As well, House Tax passed [SB402](#), to combine the homestead property tax refund forms into one form, modify the definition of household income, and to provide an eligibility exception for claimants who are required to live away from the homestead by reason of health or other hardship for the homestead property tax refund or the SAFESR tax credit.

# Health & Safety

There was a critical hearing in the House Committee on Insurance last week, featuring conferees on [SB360](#), the Kansas consumer prescription protection and accountability act, which would provide regulation for Pharmacy Benefit Managers. Key provisions in the bill include requiring 100% passthrough of rebates to the health insurance plans, banning the practice of spread pricing, requiring transparency in audits and other PBM practices, and a dispensing fee for pharmacies of National Average Drug Acquisition Cost plus \$10.50.

With more small independent pharmacies closing each year amid PBM consolidation, the bill found widespread support in the Senate. Senator Stephen Owens (R-Hesston) testified before the committee, explaining its necessity in today's monopoly-driven healthcare system. Joining him were the State Insurance Commissioner, Vicki Schmidt, and a representative of the West Virginia Department of Insurance to explain how well the reform package has worked in other states. The City of Winfield testified how their employee drug spend dropped by \$200k after switching from a non-transparent PBM. Multiple pharmacists testified that the market manipulation by PBMs has crushed their small Kansas businesses

Opponents of the bill conceded much of the merit of the bill, admitting that transparency was needed in the PBM space. Much of the opposition centered around the \$10.50 dispensing fee, which they claimed was an anti-free market mandate that would raise costs. However, West Virginia's conferee testified that their similar \$10.49 fee did not raise costs in their state, and Sen. Owens pointed out that the free-market objection carries less weight in the heavily regulated healthcare market, where pharmacies don't have the opportunity to negotiate fair rates.

Additionally, House Insurance held an informational hearing on [HB2684](#), which would provide price limits on insulin. Although it wasn't a formal bill hearing, the conferees expressed excitement at the opportunity to demonstrate the need, as the ability to access insulin is life or death for the thousands of Kansans living with diabetes.

The House Committee on Health and Human Services took up a couple of non-controversial and simple reforms. The committee held a hearing on [SB431](#), which would establish the remote practice of pharmacy, which had no opponents in committee after passing unanimously through the Senate. They also worked [SB448](#), which allows expedited partner therapy for treatment of STDs, which was also passed unanimously by the Senate.

In a rare move, the Senate had multiple committees in action on Friday. The Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare met on Friday to hold a hearing on [SB522](#), the Kansas Medical Freedom Act. The premise of the bill is to prohibit people from being fired, prohibited from educational opportunities, etc., for making medical decisions. Though it is not mentioned in the bill, the testimony all focused on being denied opportunities due to being unvaccinated. Opponents said that the bill was unnecessary, since medical and religious exemptions already exist. They also said that it would make workplaces less safe, since basic health procedures couldn't be mandated anymore.

# Economic Development

Both Commerce Committees had a busy week of hearings and bill action focused on housing policy, workforce issues, tax incentives, and regulatory changes. Early in the week, the Senate Committee heard [HB2466](#), which would extend the sunset of the Angel Investor Tax Credit program to 2031. Supporters, including the Kansas Department of Commerce, emphasized that the program has helped support more than 260 Kansas companies and generated hundreds of millions of dollars in investment since its creation. Members discussed the current \$8 million annual cap on credits and how the incentive has been distributed across the state. HB2466 was amended on Friday to include a 3-year sunset instead of 5 years, and to reserve 25% of the credit in the first 6 months for counties with a population of 50,000 or less.

The committee also considered [HB2346](#), which would create a new Kansas Sports Tourism Grant Program administered by the Department of Commerce. Proponents testified that sports tourism has become one of the largest drivers of hotel stays and visitor spending and that Kansas is competing with other states that already offer similar grant programs. Tourism organizations testified that large youth and amateur sporting events can generate millions of dollars in local economic activity through hotel stays, food spending, and travel, and that the bill offers the state a needed incentive that also includes transparency measures.

On Thursday, the committee heard [HB2588](#), which would establish a statewide licensing system for electricians administered by the State Fire Marshal. Representative Sean Wilcott (R-Holton) testified in favor of the bill, arguing that Kansas is one of the few states without a centralized licensing system, forcing electricians to obtain separate licenses in multiple jurisdictions. Supporters said a statewide license would improve workforce mobility and reduce administrative burdens for contractors working across local boundaries. Opponents raised concerns about losing local control and the potential for conflicts with local codes and enforcement processes, while encouraging a pause to allow stakeholders to reach an agreement and return with new legislation next year.

The committee also heard [HB2481](#), removing the two-bedroom requirement to qualify as a hotel, motel, or tourist court requiring the collection of tax from all such qualifying rentals. Supporters included Representative Allen Reavis (R-Atchison) and the Travel Industry Association of Kansas, who stated this would create a level playing field between traditional hotels and platforms like Airbnb while ensuring tourism promotion funds continue to be generated through lodging taxes. Municipal representatives, including the Kansas League of Municipalities, expressed concerns about changes to the room threshold and advocated for restoring the original language of more than one room.

On Friday, the committee passed several bills out favorably, including [SB393](#), allowing 23-hour alcohol sales during the 2026 FIFA World Cup, and [HB2466](#), the extension of the Angel Investor Tax Credit program.

The House Commerce Committee also took action on economic development bills last week. On Monday, the committee worked [SB418](#), the By-Right Housing Development Act, which would streamline local approval processes for certain residential housing developments. The bill was amended to appease opponents, narrowing definitions, and extending the approval timeline from 15 to 30 days. Sponsors of the bill state the measure would help reduce regulatory barriers to housing construction and accelerate residential development across the state. The committee passed the bill out favorably as amended, and the Mayor of Topeka and lobbyist for the League of Kansas Municipalities, Spencer Duncan, said that in its final state, while he still wouldn't like the bill, cities could "live with it."

The joint commerce committees held a hearing on Tuesday on [HB2793](#), the Kansas Sports Authority Act. The bill would create a new public authority responsible for overseeing the construction and management of major sports facilities in Kansas, related to the Chiefs project. Supporters and representatives of the Chiefs testified that the structure mirrors sports authorities in other states, as well as non-sports authorities used in Kansas, and would help manage the multi-billion-dollar development project. Labor groups and business organizations also testified in support, emphasizing the potential for thousands of construction jobs and major tourism impacts. Later in the week, House Commerce took up the bill. Several amendments were considered related to board membership and oversight, but were ultimately rejected before the bill advanced out of committee as introduced. The authority would prevent about a billion dollars in federal taxes from being applied to the STAR bonds used to fund the construction of the stadium and surrounding facilities.

## Local Government

The Senate Committee on Local Government met to hear or work several bills relating to specific local jurisdictions, such as the Eudora library board and prison land in Leavenworth. The committee also heard [HB2571](#), which would mandate that cities and counties sign cost sharing agreements regarding the maintenance of shared roads. Testimony was brought by the City of Bel Aire, saying that these agreements are difficult to get done, but the City of Overland Park said it was unnecessary. Senator Joe Claeys (R-Wichita) was concerned that the bill was an attempt to solve a specific local issue with a statewide mandate, and expressed worry that the bill would lead to an increased cost burden on counties. The committee ultimately agreed, and later in the week, the contents of HB2571 were stripped, and the contents of [SB436](#) were inserted before the bill was passed out favorably. SB436, now HB2571, would increase the cost threshold for when a county is required to use public bids, from \$25,000 to \$100,000, for the construction of any county building, bridge, highway, dam, turnpike, or related structure, or stand-alone parking lot. That bill had been passed out of committee but failed in the Senate due to an unfriendly amendment on the floor that repealed prohibitions on local government ordinances regarding leave and compensation for construction projects.

The biggest movement on the local government front came from the Senate Committee on Commerce, which worked [HB2343](#). The bill, known as the no-impact home-based business act, would make it easier for people to start small businesses in their homes without licensure if it doesn't disrupt the neighborhood. The bill has long been sought by the House Commerce Committee, as well as by Rep. Adam Turk (R-Shawnee), the committee's former Vice Chairman. After many concerns were raised by local governments, particularly about the lack of health and safety standards, the undermining of zoning, increased noise and traffic, increased parking in residential neighborhoods, and more, the committee decided not to act on the issue last year.

These problems, the local governments argue, are solved by proper zoning and licensure, which this bill undermines. Though those concerns remain, the committee decided to pass the bill out last week without making any additional changes, sending it to the Senate favorably for passage.

## Utilities

All was relatively quiet in utilities again last week, as both committees worked on bills for only a single day. On Tuesday, the Senate Committee on Utilities met for a little over five minutes to work and pass [HB2435](#) favorably. The bill would allow natural gas infrastructure investment projects that could increase revenues by directly connecting to new customers to be considered eligible infrastructure system investments under the Gas System Reliability Surcharge. It would also reduce the time the Kansas Corporation Commission is allowed to complete a GSRS docket from 120 days to 90 days and increase the cap on the monthly GSRS charge from \$0.80 to \$1.35 per residential customer over the base rates in effect for the initial filing of a GSRS or the monthly charge established in the most recent filing of a GSRS. The committee expressed support for increasing the GSRS cap, as it had not been adjusted since 2018, and the bill passed out unanimously. The House previously passed the measure 115-7.

The House Energy, Utilities, and Telecommunications Committee met on Thursday and looked at two Senate bills that had previously been heard by the committee. Members first worked [SB380](#), addressing the regulatory treatment of electric-vehicle charging stations. The bill requires electric public utilities to offer fair, reasonable, and nondiscriminatory rates and services to all charging stations, and that certain costs cannot be included in the utility's rate base, except for costs and expenses incurred to provide electric service for a customer's charging station. Chairman Leo Delperdang (R-Wichita) amended the bill to exclude KCC regulation of co-ops and municipalities, allow recovery of costs incurred for facilities to the charging station, and added a 10-year sunset to 2036 to replace a future legislative review. The amended version of the bill was then passed out favorably.

The committee then opened discussion on [SB379](#), which authorizes the state 911 board to establish a statewide program for emergency medical dispatch and telecommunicator cardiopulmonary resuscitation, medical direction, and quality assurance services. Chair Delperdang voiced his concern that the bill was not ready to be presented to the House this year, and that he wanted to prioritize stakeholder engagement and return next year with legislation that modernizes practices, accounts for technological advances in next-gen 911, and provides proper and necessary training across the board. Several members advocated for the legislation's goal but agreed it needed more work. No action was taken on the bill.

# The Week Ahead

The following bills are scheduled to receive hearings this week.

## Monday, March 16

9:00AM in House Federal and State Affairs

Hearing on [SB502](#) - Authorizing the adoption of administrative rules and regulations concerning sports wagering by the Kansas racing and gaming commission.

9:30AM in Senate Assessment and Taxation

Hearing on [HB2769](#) - Requiring members of governing bodies of subordinate service taxing areas to be residents of such taxing areas.

1:30PM in House Transportation

Hearing on [SB404](#) - Modifying the registration period for personalized license plates and authorizing county treasurers to charge increased fees for vehicle registration transactions.

1:30PM in House Education

Hearing on [SB340](#) - Prohibiting promise scholarship awards from being used to fund corequisite courses.

## Tuesday, March 17

1:30PM in House Transportation

Hearing on [SB439](#) - Enacting the utility railroad crossing act and establishing a process and limitations for utilities to interact with railroad right-of-way.

## Wednesday, March 18

No committees meet; legislators will be on the floor all day.

## Thursday, March 19

No committees meet; legislators will be on the floor all day.

## 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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