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Advocacy Guide

How to Elevate
Your Voice
in Kansas





Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues.

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What IS Advocacy?

Advocacy is the act of influencing public policy in a way that brings about governmental action or change. When a person advocates, they speak on behalf of those with little or no political voice of their own – like children. This is done with the hope of changing policies, positions, or programs in a way that will make them work better for the people and issues we care about.

In Kansas, influencing the legislative process is an important advocacy opportunity. State lawmakers often turn toward their constituents for information and opinions about the issues they're debating in the Kansas Legislature.

This is where people like you come in. With collective, passionate voices, everyday people can share their experiences, stories, and barriers with the people who represent them. But how that happens depends on many factors, such as legislative timing and deadlines, key decisionmakers, and what avenues advocates have for furthering favorable legislation or stopping something harmful from becoming law.

When you are passionate about an issue, you may feel ready to act. **Understanding how to take action can help you be effective, and that's what is covered in this guide.**

Who Can Advocate?

- ★ People with professional experience, like child care providers, teachers, health care workers, and others



- ★ Everyday people with lived experience, like parents, those who have experienced difficult situations, or those with disabilities



- ★ Nonprofit leaders and workers

- ★ You!



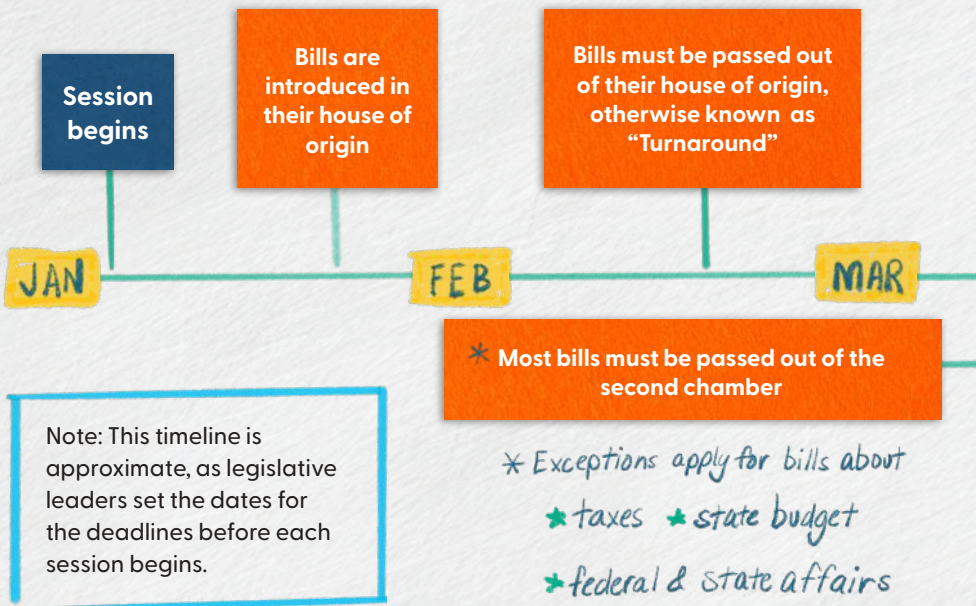
Who Represents You?

The Kansas Legislature consists of two chambers – the House of Representatives (125 members) and the Senate (40 members). **Each Kansan is represented by one member in each chamber.** State legislative elections are held in even years: Kansas House of Representatives every two years and the Kansas Senate every four years.



Primary elections, where individuals from the same political party compete to represent their party on the general election ballot, are held in August. General elections, where individuals from different political parties compete for the elected office, are held in November.

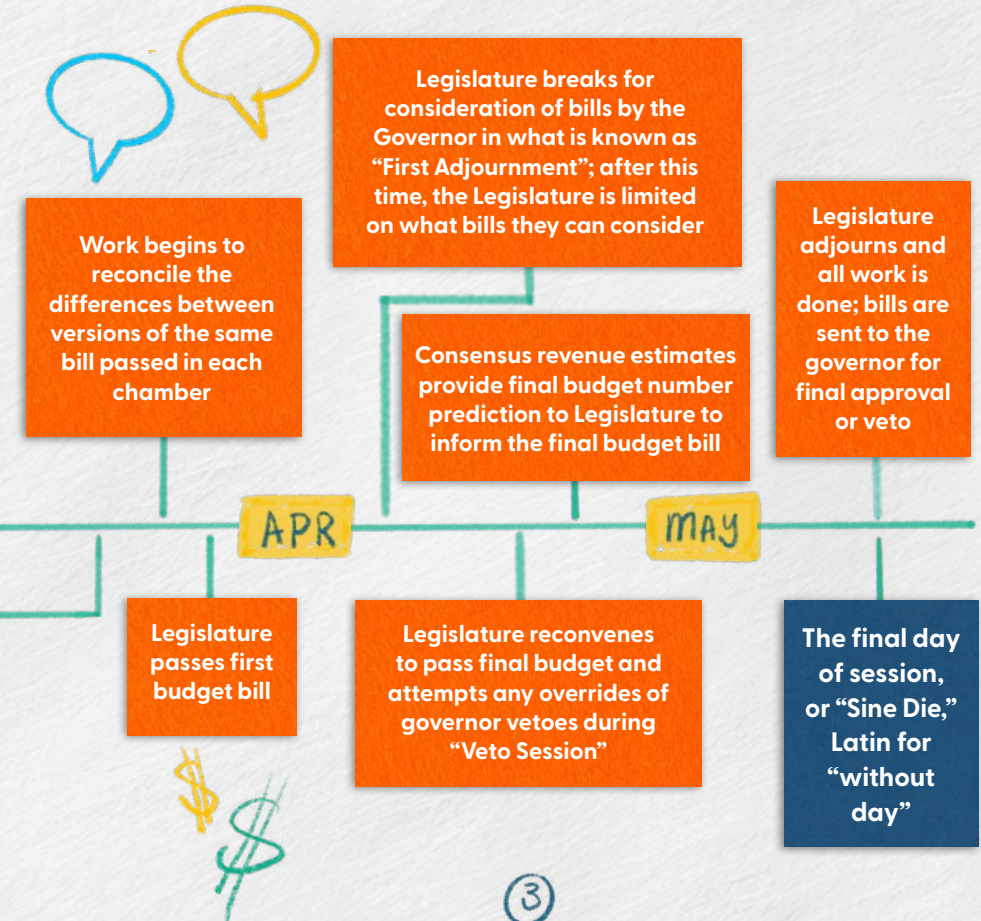
Kansas Legislative Session



Legislature Basics

Kansas has a “part-time” legislature, which means lawmakers convene every year in Topeka for approximately 90 days in what is called the “legislative session.” It typically begins in January and ends in early May. Following the end of the session, lawmakers return to their hometowns and day jobs until the following year, coming back to Topeka only for “interim committees” in the summer and fall.

By having a part-time legislature made up of everyday Kansans, constituents should feel better represented in the Kansas Statehouse.



How a Bill Becomes a Law

The legislative process is complex – and for good reason. Each bill being considered has the potential to change state law, so it needs thorough vetting by lawmakers and those who will be impacted. It is not unusual for a piece of legislation to take multiple years to pass.

Generally, a bill must pass through two parts of the Legislature (the House and Senate) before heading to the governor's desk for approval or a veto. There are many avenues a bill can take, and many often take detours from the easiest route. Knowing what steps of the process are ahead for a bill can help you understand where to exert your advocacy energy for the greatest impact.



Remember Budget & Taxes



The only requirement of the Legislature, according to the *Kansas Constitution*, is to pass a state budget bill by the end of each legislative session. This yearly budget determines our state's spending priorities, like Kansas roads, K-12 education funding, family support programs, child health insurance access, and child care system investments.

While the federal government can spend more money than it has on hand (resulting in "national debt"), the *Kansas Constitution* bars state lawmakers from passing a budget plan that isn't "balanced." Because of this requirement, the state must collect enough taxes to pay for the things it provides, and taxes are often discussed to determine what's possible within its budget.

As you advocate for your cause, it's important to understand that financial resources are limited and what, if any, fiscal impact your policy ideas may have on the state budget. Be sure to have data that will convince lawmakers that investing in your cause makes good financial sense and why it should be a priority over other issues.

Bill is introduced by a lawmaker or a committee in first chamber (House or Senate) and referred to a committee

Bill receives a hearing and **may be amended** by the committee before it's **voted on by the full committee**

Bill is debated and may be **amended** before **full first chamber votes**

Debated/ amended/ voted on by second full chamber

Referred to committee in second chamber and **debated, amended, voted on by committee** in other chamber

Bill is sent to the other chamber (also referred to as "second chamber") and same process begins again

If bill has been changed by the second chamber, it's **sent back to full first chamber to vote on**

If the first chamber doesn't agree to the second chamber's changes, **bill is sent to "conference committee,"** where three people from each chamber negotiate their differences

If both chambers pass same version of bill (the second chamber didn't amend) **then sent directly to governor**

If the first chamber agrees to changes, **bill is sent to governor**

If conference committee version is approved by both chambers, **bill is sent to governor**

If the conference committee version is not approved by both chambers...

...the **conference committee process must begin again or the bill will fail to move forward**

Governor receives the bill after both chambers have passed it, and has three options

Sign the bill

Allow it to become law **without signing**

Veto bill, but 2/3 of both chambers can vote to override



Note: Just because a bill is introduced doesn't mean it's *required* to have a hearing in committee or receive a vote by the committee or either chamber. The "majority" party (the party that has the most members in the chamber) ultimately has the power to determine whether a bill moves forward.

Key Players

Before advocating on any issue or legislation, it's important to know who can assist you so you can be more strategic with your resources.

1 Your lawmakers: Each Kansan is represented by one Senator and one Representative. Reach out to the legislators from your district and build a relationship. You can find who they are at pluralpolicy.com.



2 Other key lawmakers: These may include committee members who will be hearing the bill. If a supportive legislator is not on the committee hearing the bill, their ability to assist you is likely limited. You could also influence legislative leaders, like the Senate President, Speaker of the House, or the Minority Leader of either chamber, to champion your cause.



**Senate
Minority Leader**



**Senate
President**



**Speaker of
the House**



**House
Minority Leader**

What is the role of legislative leadership?

★ Assigns bills to committees

★ ★ Assigns members to committees

★ Sets the bill calendar

★ ★ Meets with party members

★ Oversees the chamber

★ ★ Hold internal elections

3 Committee leadership: It's important to build support for your bill by reaching out to the **chair, vice chair, and ranking minority member** of the committee hearing your bill.



The chair is often especially important to persuade, as they decide whether to hold a hearing on or vote a bill out to the full chamber. Gaining their approval is usually key to moving a bill forward!

4 Full committee: Try to persuade all members on the committee that will hear the bill. Each House committee has up to 24 members and each Senate committee has up to 12 members. Without the committee's support, your legislation will not reach the full House or Senate to be voted upon. For a bill to pass a committee, it will likely take support from at least some members of the majority party.

Testimony

A "bill hearing" involves members of that committee hearing testimony from impacted stakeholders, including those representing businesses and organizations, interested lawmakers, and everyday Kansans.

This is an important time to be able to tell the Legislature on the record why a bill should or shouldn't be passed, or how it should be changed before it moves forward in the legislative process.



Your Voice Matters

The relationship between an elected official and a constituent is mutually beneficial, but requires flexibility on each side. While lawmakers can offer their support of a bill and influence their colleagues, advocates can:

- ✓ Provide information and data
- ✓ Share community stories
- ✓ Offer professional expertise
- ✓ Hold informational sessions about bills in the Legislature
- ✓ Show support on social media
- ✓ Attend rallies, advocacy days, or other events
- ✓ Invite a legislator to speak at a civic club or faith group
- ✓✓ Vote!

Cultivating a relationship with your elected officials in the months before the legislative session builds a good foundation for your efforts later on and increases your chances of having your voice prioritized by your lawmakers.

Communicating with Elected Officials

When communicating with lawmakers, keep two things in mind: any communication is better than nothing at all and putting a personal face on an issue is impactful. The schedule during the legislative session is incredibly hectic and ever-changing, so be flexible – especially as meetings you may get with a lawmaker are likely to be less than 15 minutes long.

Additionally, be prepared to talk with lawmakers in an open space, as offices are often shared or they may only have an opportunity to chat while walking to their next meeting.

If you would like to set up a personal meeting at the Statehouse, remember that most lawmakers share office assistants, so communications may be delayed. When you meet with them, don't forget to ask a specific question: "Will you vote for House Bill 2000?" instead of "Will you support kids this year?"



Building Relationships

Starting your advocacy efforts can begin in small ways, but likely will lead to big results! Engaging with your lawmakers can feel intimidating, but they are regular people who represent you and your neighbors in the Statehouse. Sometimes the simplest way to start is through email or a message on social media. You can tell them that you appreciate their effort, and you hope that they can take time to listen to your story.

Remember to keep your comments short, simple, to the point, and civil. Include these five elements:

- 1) Your full name and address
- 2) Brief background about the issue (and bill number if available)
- 3) Supporting data
- 4) Story of personal or community impact
- 5) A specific request

Don't assume their level of knowledge about your issue – consider leading with a question about how much they know. Then tailor your comments to their response. A personal story or explanation of the impact on your community also helps.

Following Up

It is critical to follow up with your legislators after making a specific request because it increases accountability and lets them know you are monitoring the issue. If legislators did not support you after saying they would, you could send a short message politely requesting more information on what changed their stance on the issue. If the legislator did support your issue, be certain to thank them.

Dear [Lawmaker Name],

Thank you for representing our district in the [House/Senate]. I am [give a few details about yourself].

I am [concerned about X bill/issue or excited at the possibility of X passing].

Can we schedule a time to [have a phone call or meeting] to discuss [issue/bill you care about]? I can be reached at [your contact information].

Get Your Message Out

Many voices are stronger than one! Increase your effectiveness by getting others to share your cause, either by encouraging people to reach out to their lawmakers or by working with a formal group to coordinate your message.

Making the Most Out of Social media

Social media makes it simple to connect your friends to your issue and is the fastest way to disseminate information among them. Follow your legislators on Facebook, LinkedIn, X, Bluesky, TikTok, Instagram, or other sites to see what they care about or what they are saying about particular issues.



Communicating with the Media



Local media can be a useful and far-reaching medium to share your message. In the case of newspapers, letters to the editor or opinion pieces can educate others in your communities about issues you care about. If you aren't the best messenger, help an impactful voice to share their story.

For instance, many probably expect a working parent to support after-school programs, but having the local sheriff support the issue because of its impact on crime reduction could be far more effective due to the person's community influence and connections with other officials.

Additionally, you may email reporters to pitch a story on the issue you are trying to publicize. If taking this route, be prepared to speak on the issue publicly or offer up another voice that the reporter can use as a source of information. Remember to be polite, responsive, and understanding if your story can't be published.

Ways to Get Involved

Lobbying

Lawmakers hear from lobbyists every day about a number of causes. These individuals are compensated or appointed to influence lawmakers to vote a certain way. **Because of this, it's even more important for everyday Kansans to speak to their elected officials!**

For advocacy purposes, lobbying allows nonprofit organizations to serve their constituencies and promote their causes in a direct, formal way to advocate for or against a specific bill.



All nonprofits can engage in advocacy, but the scope and extent of their lobbying activities vary according to their tax status. Remember that organizations must report lobbying activities because they are paying staff to advocate for a cause, but most individuals don't have to report advocacy efforts.

For specific information on what is required at the state level, please contact: Kansas Public Disclosure Commission | www.kpdc.kansas.gov | 785-296-4219.

Voter Registration

Kansas elections are conducted by counties with oversight by the Secretary of State's Office. **Through the Secretary of State's website, you can register to vote in Kansas, change your name or your address on your registration, affiliate with a political party, or change your political party affiliation (a valid Kansas driver's license or state-issued ID is required).**

The deadline to register to vote is the 21st day before any election. Voter information is available at www.voteks.org.



Resources to Support Your Advocacy

Data

Statistics support our messages and add credibility, as well as help advocates identify and evaluate changes over time. Here are some helpful resources for accessing Kansas-specific data and information:

KIDS COUNT | www.kac.org/kansas_kids_count

KU Institute for Policy & Social Research | www.ipsr.ku.edu



Legislative Activity

Kansas Legislature | www.kslegislature.gov

The Legislature's website features legislative schedules, bills, and a listing of lawmakers, including their office phone numbers, email addresses, and committee assignments.

Legislative Hotline | 800-432-3924 (out of state), 785-296-2149 (in state)

The Legislative Hotline is a toll-free number that operates all year long. The Hotline provides bill numbers, bill status, and a way for constituents to contact their legislators.

Kansas Action for Children | www.kac.org/join

Sign up to receive our action alerts, monthly newsletter, or our Statehouse Snapshot emailed weekly during the legislative session.

Follow us on Facebook and LinkedIn, too!



Notes:

My State Senator

Name:

Office phone number:

Email address:

My State Representative

Name:

Office phone number:

Email address:

(Find who they are at pluralpolicy.com)

TO THE *stars* THROUGH *difficulties*



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