

# Intro to Advocacy

# INTRO TO ADVOCACY

*How you can be an effective voice for children at the Kansas Statehouse*

*Advocacy is the foundation for our democracy. It's an attempt to influence public policy, by a person or group, in a way that brings about legislative action or change.*

*It's up to us to speak on behalf of those with little or no political voice of their own, such as children. State legislators look to their constituents to bring important information to their attention and let them know how they want to be represented.*

*When you're passionate about an issue and ready to take action, it's important to understand the legislative process. Additionally, you should be strategic in the relationships you develop and tools you utilize to effectively communicate your position or cause.*

## **Child Care Licensing and Regulation:**

Facilitated complete overhaul of child care licensing to ensure every child care facility in Kansas is inspected and licensed.

## **Children's Health Care:**

Addressed the fastest-growing group of uninsured children in Kansas – those living between 200 and 250 percent of poverty – by extending the eligibility level of the Children's Health Insurance Program.

## **30 YEARS OF SUCCESS**

*Kansas Action for Children has partnered with legislators and other advocates to achieve a number of successes over the past 30 years, including:*

## **Funding for Early Childhood:**

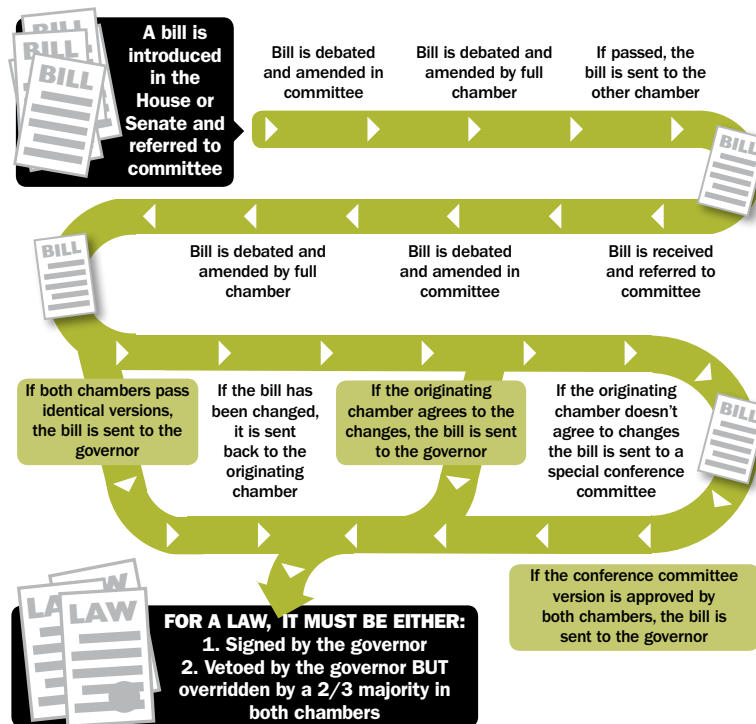
Ensured that the Children's Initiatives Fund remained the cornerstone of early education and health in Kansas.

# LEARNING THE ROPES

*To be a successful advocate, you must gain a basic understanding of the legislative process*

## How a Bill Becomes a Law

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. This system of checks and balances is purposefully complex to ensure that all proposed legislation receives thorough consideration before being implemented. It is not unusual for a piece of legislation to take multiple years to pass.



# GOING UNDER THE DOME

*Understanding how the Legislature works is the first step to successful advocacy*

## Timeline

Kansas has a “part-time” legislature, which means our citizen-legislators spend 90 days working in Topeka in what is called “legislative session.” The session begins in January and ends in early May. Following completion of the session, legislators return to their hometowns and day jobs until the following year, returning only for interim committees during the off-season. By having a part-time legislature, lawmakers are able to stay connected with their local communities and constituents.

### ELECTIONS

*The Kansas Legislature holds elections on even years: Kansas House every 2 years, Kansas Senate every 4 years.*

**MID-JUNE:**  
Filing deadline for candidates

**1ST TUESDAY IN APRIL:**  
Primary election

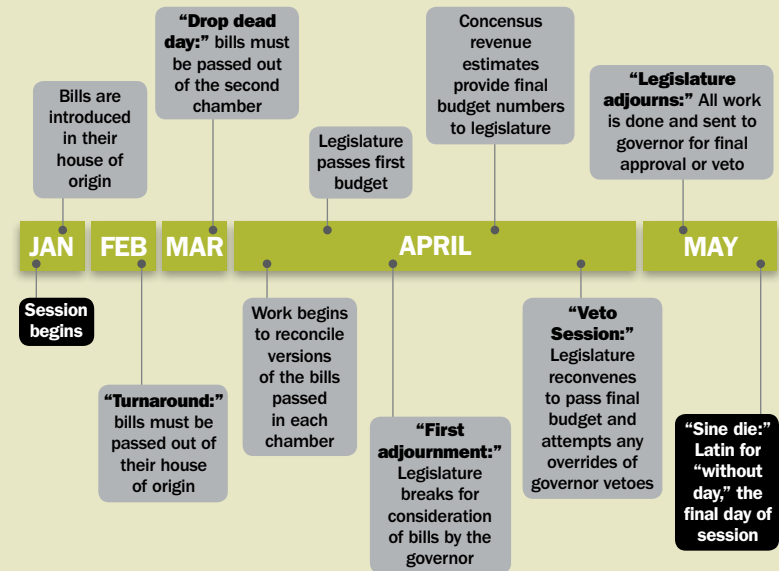
**1ST TUESDAY IN NOV:**  
General election

## Budgets & Taxes

The Kansas fiscal process has two components: budgets and taxes. The budget determines our state’s spending priorities and taxes generate funds to pay for them. The Kansas Legislature is barred from spending more money than the state has. The state must collect enough taxes to pay for the things it provides – such as public infrastructure, education, programs and services.

As you advocate for your cause, it’s important to understand that financial resources are limited and what, if any, fiscal impact your legislation may have on the state budget. Be sure to have data on hand that will convince lawmakers that investing in your cause makes good financial sense.

## Kansas Legislative Session



## Key Players

Before advocating on any issue or legislation, it is important to know who can assist you in being more strategic with your resources.

- 1. Your legislators:** Reach out to lawmakers from your district and build a relationship with them.
- 2. Other key legislators:** Identify others who can be helpful, such as 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 will be limited.
- 3. Committee:** Convince 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.
- 4. Chair, vice chair, ranking minority party member:** It’s important to reach out to each of these lawmakers on the committee hearing your bill to build support for your legislation.

*To get a full list of committee assignments, visit the Kansas Legislature’s website, [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org)*

# YOUR VOICE MATTERS

***Effective communication and relationship building are the keys to successful advocacy***

## Give & Take

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

- Provide information and data
- Share stories of community impact
- Offer professional expertise
- Contribute financial support to campaigns
- Host a fundraiser
- Show public support
- Invite a legislator to speak at a civic club or faith group
- VOTE!

Cultivating a relationship with your elected officials during their off-session months builds a good foundation for your efforts when they are in session and increases your ability to achieve results.

## Communicating with Elected Officials

When communicating with your legislators, keep two things in mind: any communication is better than nothing at all and putting a personal face on an issue is advantageous. The schedule during the legislative session is incredibly hectic and ever-changing so be prepared and be flexible.

**Meeting.** If you would like to set up a personal meeting at the Statehouse, be understanding of their changing schedules and respectful of your legislator's time. Don't forget to ask a specific question: "Will you vote for House Bill 1000?" instead of "Will you support kids this year?"

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

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

**Follow Up.** It is critical to follow up with your legislators after making a specific request because it increases their accountability and lets them know you are monitoring the issue. If legislators did not support you after saying they would, send a message saying you're disappointed in their lack of support. If the legislator did support your issue, say thank you.

## Getting Your Message Out

Many voices are stronger than one. Increase your effectiveness by getting others to share your message. If your advocacy efforts advance, turn your attention to formal groups and make sure your message is coordinated.

### Follow Along!

Stay connected with *Kansas Action for Children* on social media:

**ON FACEBOOK:** [facebook.com/ksaction](https://www.facebook.com/ksaction)  
**ON TWITTER:** @KansasAction



## Making the Most 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 Twitter to see what they care about or find out what's happening at the Statehouse with the hashtag #ksleg.

## Communicating with the Media

Local media can be a useful and far-reaching medium to share your message. In the case of newspapers, choose an unlikely messenger to pen a letter to the editor. Readers expect a working parent to support after-school programs, but having the local sheriff support the issue because of its impact on crime reduction is far more effective. Additionally, meet with the editor to discuss whether he or she would consider an editorial in support of your issue.

# WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

*Now that you know the basics, it's time to get out there and take action*

## Lobbying Limitations

Advocacy allows non-profit organizations to serve their constituencies and promote their causes. Lobbying is a more direct and formalized appeal to lawmakers about a specific issue or piece of legislation. All non-profits can engage in advocacy, but the scope and extent of their lobbying activities vary according to the tax exempt status of the organization.

**Remember that organizations have lobbying limitations, but individuals have no lobbying limitations.**

For specific information on what is required at the state level, please contact:

**Kansas Governmental Ethics Commission**  
[www.kansas.gov/ethics](http://www.kansas.gov/ethics) | 785-296-4219

## Voter Registration

Kansas elections are conducted by the 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 party affiliation (a valid Kansas driver's license or state-issued ID is required). The deadline to register to vote is the 15th day before any election.

**Kansas Secretary of State**  
[www.sos.ks.gov](http://www.sos.ks.gov)

**Voter information**  
[www.voteks.org](http://www.voteks.org)

## Data

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

### KIDS COUNT

[www.kac.org/kidscount](http://www.kac.org/kidscount)

### KU Institute for Policy & Social Research

[www.ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/ksah/vital](http://www.ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/ksah/vital)

## Legislative Activity

### Kansas Legislature

[www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org)

The Legislature's website features calendars and journals that summarize daily activities. You can also download bills and find a complete listing of legislators with office phone numbers and email addresses.

### Legislative Hotline

**800-432-3924 (in state), 785-296-2149 (out of state)**

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

### Kansas Action for Children

[www.kac.org/sign-up](http://www.kac.org/sign-up)

Sign up to receive our action alerts, monthly e-newsletter or our Capitol Connection report, emailed weekly during the legislative session.



Kansas Action for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to shaping health, education and economic policy that improves the lives of Kansas children and their families. Since 1979, KAC has worked to make Kansas the best state in the nation to raise a child.

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