



2015 State Legislative Program

**Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas
701 North 7th Street
Kansas City, Kansas 66101**

About This Legislative Program

This Legislative Program is based on the principle that Federal, State and Local Governments are all partners in the effort to make Kansas and its communities great places for people to live, work and play.

The Kansas Legislature should resist efforts to dictate policies and impose laws on cities, counties and schools because locally elected city, county and school leaders are best equipped to address issues and problems in their own communities. Local control allows citizens, working with the local officials they've elected, to decide what laws work best for their children and families. The Kansas Legislature should defend and protect the Home Rule Rights and authority guaranteed in the Kansas Constitution to citizens and their local governments.

The Kansas Legislature should renew a partnership and cooperative spirit with city, county and school leaders to address the issue of increasing property taxes caused by the shifting of costs from state government to local governments and schools. The Kansas Legislature should not continue solving its budget shortfalls by taking revenues belonging to or legally obligated to city and county governments and should reject placing more of the burden for funding education on local taxpayers.

Lobbyist's Pledge

I pledge to be ethical, honest and sincere in my dealings with legislators, staff and citizens.

I will vigorously represent the interests of the Unified Government and its citizens, but my lobbying efforts will be guided by a standard of civility and professionalism.

I will always try to remember every viewpoint deserves a fair hearing and even in the heat of debate, will be reminded that we are all working for the same goal of making Kansas and our communities better places for the citizens we represent.

Mike Taylor
Public Relations Director
Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City

2015 Priority Issues

Kansas Tax System

The Kansas Legislature has contributed to increased property taxes by shifting the cost of providing services and programs from state government to local governments. The Kansas Legislature should renew a partnership and cooperative spirit with city, county and school leaders to address the issue of increasing property taxes caused by the shifting of costs from state government to local governments and schools. The Kansas Legislature should not continue solving its budget shortfalls by taking revenues belonging to or legally obligated to city and county governments and should reject placing more of the burden for funding vital services on local taxpayers.

Local government revenues which need to be protected include: local alcoholic liquor funds; special city-county highway fund; motor fuel taxes; community mental health; and community corrections funding.

Abandoned Housing

The Unified Government supports legislation which streamlines and expedites the process for local governments and neighborhood organizations to deal with the growing blight of abandoned, nuisance and foreclosed housing.

City Elections

City elections should remain non-partisan and separate from state and national elections. Cities should continue to determine when their local elections are held.

Law Enforcement Mutual Aid

The Unified Government supports mutual aid legislation allowing law enforcement agencies to work cooperatively with their counterparts in adjoining states during critical incidents. The State of Missouri has already passed this mutual aid legislation affecting nine counties in the Kansas City metro.

Medicaid Expansion

The Unified Government supports the expansion of Medicaid. The refusal of the state to expand Medicaid puts the burden on local governments to plan health care for the poor. The new insurance market place will target only about 11,000 adults of the approximately 36,000 uninsured in Wyandotte County. This will put pressure on the Wyandotte County Public Health Department and other health care facilities in Wyandotte County to provide care without reimbursement.

Urban Opportunity Zones

The Unified Government supports the creation of urban opportunity zones as a tool to rebuild and revitalize struggling urban neighborhoods.

Legislative Advocacy

The Unified Government supports current law allowing the use of state and local tax dollars to provide information and advocate on behalf of our community and its citizens.

Tax and Finance

City-County Highway Funds

The Special City-County Highway Fund is essential to maintaining local roads and should be fully funded to support the critical infrastructure of our communities. Such funding includes fees from out-of-state commercial vehicles which are now being diverted to the State General Fund contrary to state law. The Legislature should also maintain and enhance funding for the connecting link program.

Alcoholic Liquor Taxes

The Unified Government supports current law with regard to the collection and distribution of alcoholic liquor taxes. Changes in the way that alcoholic liquors are classified or where they can be sold should be revenue neutral for cities.

Unclaimed Checks

The Unified Government supports legislation which reduces the administrative burden and costs of processing unclaimed checks.

Delinquent Property Taxes

The Unified Government supports increasing the statutory interest rate on delinquent property taxes to encourage timely payment by taxpayers.

Tax/Spending Mandates

The Unified Government opposes any state-imposed limits on the taxing and spending authority of cities. Local spending and taxing decisions are best left to locally elected officials and the citizens they serve.

Property Appraisal and Valuation

The Unified Government supports property appraisals based on fair market value and opposes caps on property valuations as inequitable and unconstitutional.

Unfunded Mandates

The Kansas Legislature should oppose reducing the State budget by shifting work to local governments without adequate funding to pay for those increased duties. The Legislature should also not impose mandated functions, activities, or regulations on local governments without providing financial resources to meet the costs of carrying out those mandates.

KPERS

Achieving a fully funded public employee retirement system within a reasonable time period is an important goal, but should be done in a way which does not place an undue financial burden on local government employers or employees.

Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction Fund

The Unified Government urges the Legislature to restore its commitment to reducing city and county property taxes by following state law and honoring previously made commitments. This should include reinstating the Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction (LAVTR) program and use of casino gaming revenues to reduce property taxes. Under LAVTR, sales tax dollars shared with local governments are directly applied to lowering property tax levies. This time-tested partnership—cancelled in 2003—provides dollar for dollar reductions in property tax bills. This partnership is a far better way to influence property tax rates than artificial and arbitrary controls such as caps on assessed valuations or tax and spending lids on local governments.

Community and Economic Development

Comprehensive Transportation Program

We support the continued funding of the Kansas T-Works comprehensive transportation program. We oppose any further use of these funds to balance the State's general fund budget. Any reduction in T-Works funding would jeopardize existing programs.

Public Education

Quality schools are the foundation for the future economic success of Kansas. A public education system which helps create a well-educated and trained workforce is crucial to successful communities. The Unified Government urges the Kansas Legislature to ensure that all children have the opportunity to attend equally funded public schools regardless where they live, and that Kansas schools are funded at a level which meets and exceeds the needs of our children.

Immigration

The Unified Government opposes State immigration enforcement measures because they place unreasonable and expensive burdens on local government.

Casino Gaming

The Unified Government opposes changing provisions in the expanded gaming statute, including banning smoking on casino gaming floors. The Unified Government supports greyhound and horse racing operations with the addition of slot machines at The Woodlands under current gaming law.

Economic Development

The Unified Government encourages the Kansas Legislature to work with local governments in developing innovative new economic development tools to help highly distressed urban and rural areas attain economic success and build quality communities, including the creation of Urban Opportunity Zones.

Tourism

Wyandotte County offers destination attractions which draw millions of visitors a year to Kansas. The Unified Government urges the State of Kansas to enact a comprehensive tourism plan and increase funding of tourism promotion and marketing.

Public Transit

The Unified Government supports increased state funding of public transit. The Unified Government also supports regional partnerships to improve and expand public transit options for Kansas City area residents. The Kansas Legislature should help, not hinder, efforts to fund regional public transit in the metropolitan Kansas City area.

Infrastructure Funding

The Unified Government supports increased federal and state funding to assist local communities with their water, wastewater, storm water, dam and levee infrastructure and associated security needs.

University of Kansas Medical Center and Hospital

The Unified Government recognizes the unique and vital role played by the University of Kansas Medical Center and University of Kansas Hospital and strongly supports efforts to create and promote the region as a nationally recognized center for life sciences, cancer research and treatment. The Unified Government supports actions and efforts which will increase the presence and impact of both institutions in Wyandotte County.

Alternative Revenue Sources

Locally elected officials and the citizens they represent should be allowed authority to structure and implement taxes and revenues which best suit the individual community without prohibitions and restrictions imposed by the Kansas Legislature. This includes local earnings/income taxes, development excise taxes, and other local taxes and fees now prohibited by state law.

Public Safety

Weapons and Firearms

The Unified Government supports the ability of local governments to set policies regarding the carrying of weapons and firearms by their employees while they are engaged in the course of their employment. The Unified Government also supports the local regulation of weapons and firearms.

Emergency Medical Services

The Unified Government supports a provider assessment program for ambulance services in order to increase Medicaid payments. The program must be cost-neutral or benefit all ambulance services and treat all ambulance services equally. The Unified Government also urges the Kansas Legislature to evaluate the current Medicaid payment rates for emergency medical services and supports increasing the payments.

Emergency 911 Services

Cities and Counties should maintain local control of the 911 system and the 911 tax should continue to include both wireline and wireless communications. The Unified Government supports legislation providing flexibility for local governments to utilize these funds to provide emergency services.

Community Corrections. We support full funding for community-corrections programs and grants, including programs for behavioral-health initiatives. Community corrections programs for adults reduce community risk and offender recidivism, which decreases taxpayer expense. In addition to serving violent, high-risk offenders, local community corrections also provide juvenile offender supervision. The juvenile programs should include graduated sanctions, evidence-based practices, separate juvenile intake, and prevention funding to stop juveniles from entering the correctional system. Additional funding produces a significant return on investment through reduced crime, incarceration, and recidivism, which means it is essential for the Legislature to provide full funding for the Department of Corrections.

State Prisoners in County Jails

As the State continues moving felons from the Kansas Department of Corrections to county jails, we support state funding to reimburse counties for the entire cost of housing convicted felons. Further, the State should keep accurate records of the number of felons in county jails and make such information available to the public.

Local Control and Police Powers

The Unified Government opposes all legislation which restricts the regulatory authority of cities to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public.

Local Government Operations

Home Rule and Local Control

The Home Rule Amendment of the Kansas Constitution is the foundation of local government, the bedrock of our belief in independence and the benchmark of the right to determine our own destiny. The Unified Government urges the Kansas Legislature to defend and protect the Home Rule Rights and authority guaranteed in the Kansas Constitution to citizens and their local governments.

Prevailing Wage

The Unified Government supports paying prevailing wage on public works projects and economic development projects where tax incentives are given. Prevailing wage fits the nature of our community and is supported by our citizens. The the Unified Government Board of Commissioners strongly urges the Kansas Legislature and Governor Sam Brownback to repeal the law banning the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas from implementing policies requiring the use of prevailing wage on public works and economic development projects.

Unfunded Mandates

The Unified Government believes the State Legislature should not impose mandated functions, activities, or regulations on local governments without providing financial resources to meet the costs of carrying out those mandates.

Publications and Notices

The undeniable right of the public to be informed about the actions of its government should not be compromised. At the same time, government officials have a responsibility to ensure the tax money required to keep citizens informed through legal notices and publications is spent in an effective and efficient way.

Budget Timing

The Unified Government supports increased flexibility regarding the statutory requirements for filing city budgets.

Public Land

Local government and the citizens they represent should be allowed to control and manage public lands and right-of-way as they see fit. This includes collecting franchise fees and other revenues from private companies and individuals which use public lands for personal benefit or profit.

Municipal Utilities

The Unified Government supports the ability of cities to operate municipal electric, water, sewer, storm water, solid waste, telecommunications and broadband services. We further support the ability of cities to set and control the rates of municipal utilities.

Open Meetings

The Unified Government believes openness in government is essential to building public confidence. But, there are times when privacy or other legitimate reasons require executive sessions. Requiring executive sessions to be tape recorded would impose unreasonable demands on elected and appointed officials and raise questions as to the custody of tapes. All levels of government should be subject to the same open meetings requirements. These laws should not be unduly burdensome.

Open Records

Open records laws should balance the public's right to know with the necessity of protecting private individuals and the ability of public agencies to conduct the essential business of the public. All levels of government should be subject to the same open records requirements.

Eminent Domain

The Unified Government supports the use of eminent domain for economic development projects which eliminate blight and allow revitalization and rebirth in urban areas.

Public Health and Environment

Community Mental Health Funding

The Unified Government supports full funding in state grants for community mental health services, allowing community mental health centers to annually serve 90,000 uninsured and underinsured county residents ineligible for Medicaid. Without adequate state support, mentally ill individuals too often end up in contact with law enforcement, jails, emergency rooms, and state psychiatric hospitals—all of which impact county governments. State grants ensure proper treatment of the mentally ill and improve the community for all.

The state's reduction in mental health dollars has strained the ability of community mental health centers to provide services to the uninsured and underinsured. Further cuts could result in services for the most vulnerable populations being reduced or eliminated. The Unified Government supports restoration of state funding to community mental health centers (CMHCs) to pay for state required mental health treatment of low income uninsured and underinsured persons who do not qualify for Medicaid or other state funded benefits.

Local Health Department Funding

County health departments have many mandated, but unfunded duties which compete for limited resources. Increased funding for public health, especially for the purchase of vaccines, would help ease the demand on public health dollars and allow better protection of citizens.

Serving Senior Populations and Area Agency on Aging Issues

The Unified Government supports legislation to provide improved support for aging populations in local communities, including full funding of Home and Community Based Services for the Frail Elderly waiver; funding Access to Core Services; and legislation to allow unused prescription drugs from nursing homes, hospice and other health care agencies to be distributed for use by medically indigent seniors.

Energy Efficiency

The Unified Government supports energy efficiency and the development of a statewide energy policy which enables local governments to act individually or in cooperation with others to address energy efficiency. Funding for the Efficiency Kansas program which assists homeowners in improving their homes should be restored.

Energy and Environmental Mandates

The Unified Government opposes federal and state mandates which regulate the operations of municipal electric, water, solid waste, storm water, telecommunications and broadband utility services. Any mandates imposed on cities should come with adequate funding to address the mandate.

Storm water Management

The Unified Government encourages the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Environmental Protection Agency to work with cities and provide technical support in the implementation of reasonable regulations related to storm water management. We endorse cooperative solutions to storm water quality and quantity challenges.