

2017



Unified Government 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 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.

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 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

2017 Priority Issues

Medicaid Expansion

The Unified Government supports the expansion of Medicaid. The refusal of the state to expand Medicaid increases the burden on local governments to plan and fund health care for the poor. Wyandotte County has an overall uninsured rate of 19% compared to 12% in Kansas. Refusal to expand Medicaid burdens local healthcare facilities with providing tens of millions of dollars in uncompensated care every year.

Property Tax Lid Election Process

The Unified Government supports replacing the current election process for the tax lid with a protest petition. The current procedures do not coordinate with local government budget timelines and are unworkable. The costs of holding an election are excessive and unnecessary.

Abandoned Housing

The Unified Government supports legislation which streamlines and expedites the process for local governments, neighborhood organizations and private businesses to deal with the blight of abandoned, nuisance and foreclosed properties to protect the rights and property values of surrounding property owners.

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. Absent repeal of the current concealed carry law, cities should be provided civil and criminal immunity from the action of employees not required to carry a weapon, but choose who choose to carry a concealed weapon. The Unified Government also supports the local regulation of weapons and firearms.

Tax Appeals

The Unified Government supports procedural changes to the tax appeals process that are balanced and sensible for both the taxpayer and county government.

Prevailing Wage

The Unified Government supports paying prevailing wage on public works projects and economic development projects where tax incentives are given. The Unified Government strongly urges the Kansas Legislature to repeal the law banning the use of prevailing wage on public works and economic development projects.

Kansas Tax System

The Unified Government urges the Kansas Legislature to reconsider the imbalance in the Kansas tax system by returning to the long established philosophy of balancing revenue from income, sales and property taxes. The income tax cuts approved by the Kansas Legislature in 2012 impacts the ability of the state and local governments to provide the services citizens want and need.

Cities and counties are important partners in creating jobs, reviving the economy, delivering vital services and providing quality of life. The Governor and Kansas Legislature should include local government leaders in discussions about restructuring the Kansas tax system and any changes should fully assess the resulting financial impact on local taxpayers.

Tax and Finance

Protecting Local Government Revenues

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 funds; motor fuel taxes; municipal court revenues; civil asset forfeitures; community mental health funding; and community corrections funding.

Property Appraisal and Valuation

The Unified Government supports a fair and expedient appeals process for county classification and valuation disputes. This includes policies which encourage timely payment by taxpayers. The Unified Government supports property appraisals based on fair market value and opposes caps on property valuations as inequitable and unconstitutional.

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. The Unified Government supports repeal of the unnecessary and unworkable property lid.

KPERS

Changes to the KPERS system should not reduce benefits promised to public employees nor impact the ability of a city/county to hire and retain qualified public employees while keeping costs reasonable for local governments.

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.

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.

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. 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

Casino Gaming

The Unified Government supports legislative measures which assist The Woodlands in reopening as a gaming facility so long as The Woodlands provides benefits to the local community which are on par with the benefits provided by the Hollywood Casino at Kansas Speedway.

The Hollywood Casino is a significant tourism and economic community partner with Wyandotte County. The Unified Government opposes any changes in State gaming laws which put the Hollywood Casino at a competitive disadvantage with Kansas City area casinos and gaming facilities.

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 jeopardizes existing programs.

Public Education

Quality schools are the foundation for the future economic success of Kansas. A public education and Community College 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 students have the opportunity to receive a high quality education regardless of where they live and that Kansas schools are funded at a level which meets or 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. The Kansas Legislature is encouraged to consider the use of State-based visas for qualified immigrant workers.

Economic Development

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

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.

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. The Unified Government supports legislation allowing buses to operate on highway shoulders.

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.

Public Safety

Asset Forfeiture

The Unified Government supports the current Kansas Standard Asset Seizure and Forfeiture Act as a way to reduce financial gains from criminal acts. All assets forfeited, or proceeds from the sales of seized assets, should remain with the local which seizes the property.

Municipal Courts

The Unified Government supports local control of municipal courts and the judicial authority of municipal court judges to determine the best procedures for operating the court. Municipal courts must not be limited or restricted in bonding decisions.

Emergency Medical Services

The Unified Government supports legislation permitting Kansas to take part in the Ground Emergency Medical Transport Supplemental Reimbursement Program. The GEMT program would allow public EMS operations to receive additional reimbursement from the Federal Government for life-saving services being performed but not paid for.

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.

Juvenile Justice

The Unified Government supports changes in the way the system deals with juvenile offenders, however, the financial responsibility and burden for these changes cannot be passed down to local units of government.

Community Corrections

The Unified Government supports 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.

Mental Health and Jails

The Unified Government supports full state funding for community mental health services and policies that promote treatment over incarceration of the mentally ill in county jails.

To prevent the escalation of behavioral health crises and avoid unnecessary incarcerations and hospitalizations of people with behavioral health disorders, the Kansas Legislature should amend K.S.A. 59-2946 to give behavioral health providers in communities with 24-hour state designated crisis receiving centers the authority to keep individuals in crisis for up to 72 hours for emergency observation and treatment. The Kansas Legislature should also fund such treatment centers.

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

Protecting Home Rule and Local Control

The Unified Government supports the ability of local elected officials to make decisions for their communities, particularly local tax and revenue decisions, as called for by the Home Rule Amendment of the Kansas Constitution approved by voters in 1960. The Unified Government urges the Kansas Legislature to respect the philosophy of local control and honor the Home Rule Amendment of the Kansas Constitution.

City Elections

City elections should remain non-partisan and separate from state and national elections.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Public Health and Environment

Local Health Department Funding

The State of Kansas ranks near the bottom nationally for state support for local public health; a 2015 study conducted by Trust for America's Health, ranks Kansas 46 for state support to public health in FY 2013-2014 down from 38 in FY 2007-2008. State "Aid to Local" funding has remained level since 1995; when calculated for the rate of inflation, this equates to approximately a 12% reduction. In the ensuing 21 years, both the costs and need for funding have grown. Recent events, such as the Kansas measles and pertussis outbreaks and the national response to the Ebola virus, underscore the necessity of maintaining a strong public health system. We urge the Governor and the Legislature to increase funding for local public health departments and remove Kansas from the bottom of states supporting public health.

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.

Infrastructure Funding

The Unified Government supports increased Federal spending on infrastructure and urges the State of Kansas to ensure those funds are shared with cities and counties through direct grants and revolving loan programs.