

Douglas County 2025 Legislative Statement

Legislative Priorities

1. Home Rule and Local Authority

Douglas County values its constitutional home rule authority and opposes any further erosion of local governance powers. We request legislative support to preserve counties' ability to manage local issues, such as land use, housing policy, and taxation. Maintaining local control is essential to responding effectively to the unique needs and priorities of our community.

2. Community Health and Human Services

Douglas County is committed to improving behavioral health services, addiction recovery, and human services for our residents. We request additional state support to expand in-patient addiction services and behavioral health programs. The recent success of the Treatment and Recovery Center (TRC) highlights the need for sustained investment. Expanding these services will reduce the overuse of emergency services and improve public safety.

3. Economic Security

Balancing the cost of providing essential services with the cost of living for residents is a priority for Douglas County. Our 2025 budget features a reduced mill rate by nearly three mills, providing relief to taxpayers while maintaining the services our community expects. We recognize that our residents expect both affordable living conditions and access to vital services, and we are committed to delivering on both. Particularly important is the care for low-income seniors, enabling them to age in place with dignity and access to housing and services. In addition, we know that single, female-headed households with young children in Douglas County experience disproportionate rates of poverty and economic insecurity. We ask for legislative support to expand housing assistance and safety net programs, ensuring our most vulnerable populations are supported. Furthermore, we encourage the state's support for the 2026 FIFA World Cup through mutual aid and by honoring appropriations already made, with an emphasis on transportation and public safety assistance. The City of Lawrence (Douglas County) was selected as a potential Base Camp for competing teams, contributing to a regional economic impact estimated at over \$652 million, with up to \$167 million of that impact benefiting Kansas. Douglas County appreciates the state's pledge of \$28 million to support World Cup operations and looks forward to the continued collaboration necessary to ensure the success of this global event.

4. Climate and Environmental Sustainability

Douglas County is actively adapting to the impacts and causes of climate change through our Climate Action and Adaptation Plan. We urge the legislature to support local authority to regulate renewable energy projects and promote environmental sustainability efforts. State collaboration is crucial to developing infrastructure that mitigates the impact of extreme weather caused by climate change and supports renewable energy sources, floodplain protections, water quality and conservation measures, sustainable agriculture, and energy efficiency programs that benefit all Kansans. We support proactive state policies and funding allocation that promote renewable energy and clean air, water and land conservation, water quality, and soil health.

5. Infrastructure Development

To ensure the safety and economic growth of our community, we need state partnership in addressing critical infrastructure issues, including transportation, sustainability, water systems, and broadband access. Douglas County is improving roads, bridges, and pedestrian access, but additional state funding is required for future projects. Expanding K-10 Highway and improving transportation to meet the demands of new developments like Astra Enterprise Park are key concerns. We ask the state to continue supporting local infrastructure funding programs.

Specific Legislation We Support

- **Home Rule.** We support constitutional home rule for counties and oppose any additional erosion of existing statutory home rule authority. We support counties using their current home rule powers when applicable rather than seeking specific legislative remedies.
- **KanCare/Medicaid Expansion.** We support Medicaid expansion to bring more federal dollars to Kansas and extend healthcare coverage to lower-income residents. We support policies that maximize federal funding through Medicaid, the American Rescue Plan Act, and infrastructure bills to benefit our community.
- **KPF and KPERS.** We support including PTSD in workers' compensation claims for law enforcement and first responders. We support assessing changes to KPERS Tier 3 to provide more competitive retirement options for public employees.
- **Affordable Housing and Homelessness.** Douglas County is a member of the Kansas Housing Advocacy Network (KHAN). We believe that Kansas can ensure sustainable economic growth, increase housing security, and end homelessness through a three-part response:
 1. Incentivize development and retention of attainable housing where Kansans need it;
 2. Act upstream to keep vulnerable Kansans housed, and
 3. Invest in critical services plus housing support to stabilize Kansans in homelessness.
- **Spending and Taxing Lids.** We support repealing the statutory requirement for legislative approval of county sales tax decisions. We oppose any constitutional or statutory amendments that impose any additional spending or taxing limitations on county government.
- **Repeal of SB 180.** We oppose SB 180, which limits access to public spaces and services based on gender identity.
- **Healthy School Meals for All.** We support developing and expanding programs and policies that strengthen local food systems and address food insecurity for vulnerable populations.
- **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), SNAP & FMNP.** We support expanding access to the WIC, SNAP, & FMNP programs, including increasing the Fruit and Vegetable Cash Value Benefit.
- **Kansas Food Action Network (KFAN) Policy Platform.** Douglas County is a member of KFAN, a statewide network of food and farm councils advocating for equitable access to healthy, affordable food. We support KFAN's State Policy Platform.
- **Ground Emergency Medical Transportation (GEMT).** Douglas County continues to support the implementation of the GEMT program, which is intended to provide a supplemental payment for uncompensated expenses incurred by public agencies when providing emergency medical transport to Medicaid beneficiaries.
- **Increasing the county portion of the motor vehicle fee.** County Treasurers act as agents of the State of Kansas for providing motor vehicle services. The current fee revenue is not sufficient to cover the operational costs of providing these state-mandated services, and Douglas County relies on ad valorem tax support to cover annual operating losses of over \$560,000.