

Navigating Legislative Session: A Guide to Effective Advocacy

Introduction

It's time for the legislative session in Kansas! At Kansas Appleseed, we know all too well how hectic this time can be, how it can feel difficult to be informed on what is happening in the Kansas Legislature, and how you can make your voice heard. In this toolkit, we will explain all the whos, whats, wheres, whys, and hows of the Kansas Legislature so you can be up to date, in the know, and most importantly, an effective advocate for yourself and your community.

What is the legislative session?

Let's start it off: what even is the legislative session? Glad you asked! The Kansas state legislature convenes in the legislative session to create, debate, and pass new laws. In Kansas, it begins on the second Monday in January and ends typically in early May. They take a break for a couple of weeks in April and reconvene for a week in May for what is known as a "veto session," but more on that later. Kansas Appleseed's role during this time is to advocate for and against different policies. This year, we will follow various issues, including food insecurity, youth and adult justice, child welfare, and voter suppression.

How does it work?

A bill goes through several stages before it can become law. First, the bill is introduced in either the House or Senate and assigned to a committee for review. Bills can also be introduced in committees themselves. The committee may make changes to the bill, hold hearings to gather input from stakeholders, and vote on whether to recommend it for passage. If the committee approves the bill, it moves to the House or Senate floor for debate and a vote. If the bill passes in one chamber, it goes through the same process in the other chamber. If both chambers pass the bill, it goes to the Governor for signature. If the Governor signs the bill, it becomes law. However, if the Governor vetoes the bill, the legislature can override the veto with a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers.

What's your role?

Legislators need to hear from their constituents in order to make decisions on policies that will affect the people they represent. This is why advocacy during the legislative session is super important. We need you to use your voice, share your story, and speak up and out on issues that are important to you. You can do this by contacting your legislator by phone or email and by providing testimony on a piece of legislation.



How to stay informed

There are so many bills introduced during the legislative session that it can feel overwhelming to sort through and find the ones you feel strongly about. Don't fret; there are several ways you can stay updated! The Kansas Legislature's website is a great place to start. Their site, kslegislature.org, contains all of the information about the legislative process, including bill tracking, committee schedules, and legislative calendars. Other options are to look at news outlets and social media. You can often see real-time updates by following advocacy organizations like Kansas Appleseed. You can follow those updates by searching #ksleg on platforms such as Instagram and X.

At Kansas Appleseed, we send a weekly newsletter that includes updates on the legislative session and brief analyses of proposed legislation. You can also sign up for our legislative texts [here](#) to receive short updates and urgent action alerts to contact your legislators.

Contacting your legislators

We cannot overstate the importance of talking to your legislators. You can find your state legislators' contact information by going to the Kansas Legislature's website or by going [here](#). We encourage you to reach out to them via phone and email. In your communications, be sure to be clear and concise and share your perspective and any other relevant information.

Phone calls can be scary for some if you don't know what to expect. Don't panic. When you call, you'll leave a voicemail or speak with a secretary or intern. In both cases, you'll leave a brief message. It should include your name, that you are a constituent, the bill number you are calling about, how you'd like them to vote, and a short statement explaining how it will affect you and your community.

If you are interested in a specific issue or bill, you can even request a meeting with your legislator to discuss your concerns in person. During that meeting, you can explain why the policy matters and provide data and lived experience supporting your position. You can even use the time to ask how the bill aligns with their policy position.

Remember to be respectful and professional in whatever way you choose to communicate, even if you disagree with them on an issue.

Example of phone message: Hi, my name is [your name], and I live in [State Senator]'s district. I'm calling today to ask them to vote NO on SB 1234 and keep in place the plan to eliminate the sales tax on all groceries. The price of groceries is skyrocketing and families like mine need relief. I urge [State Senator] to vote NO on SB 1234.

Example of email: As your constituent, I urge you to vote NO on both HB 1234. Grocery prices are skyrocketing and Kansas children and families need your help. This bill decreases access to SNAP food assistance and will increase the number of people in our state experiencing food insecurity. Voting no will help ensure all Kansans are able to thrive.



Submitting Testimony

If having one-on-one conversations or leaving brief messages aren't really your jam, you have another powerful option! Submitting testimony is a great way to make friends and influence people. Well, at least a great way to influence people. I can't make any promises on the making friends part.

To submit testimony, you'll need to identify the relevant committee and then follow the written and oral testimony guidelines for that committee. Again, that handy dandy Kansas Legislature website has the information you need. You'll be able to find the committee considering your bill and the process for submitting it. When you submit testimony, you must follow the committee's guidelines regarding the length, format, and deadline for submission. Remember to include whether you are submitting your testimony as written only or oral testimony. You can always contact an advocacy organization working on the bill for any clarification, and they will be happy to help you. You can find an example of what testimony should generally look like [here](#).

Delivering Oral Testimony

Oral testimony is a great way to open a dialogue with legislators. There are two ways you can do this: virtual or in person. Either way, you must include that when you submit testimony to the committee.

It is very important to dress professionally, arrive early, and respect the committee's rules. Be sure to practice what you will say and be ready to answer any questions from the committee members. When it is your turn to speak, they will call your name. Introduce yourself, speak clearly, stay on topic, be concise, and do not read your testimony verbatim. It is best to summarize your written testimony and highlight the important points. When you are done speaking, thank the committee for their time and let them know that you will stand for any questions.

What happens next?

Ok, so the bill was introduced, you provided testimony, and now the committee needs to vote on it. If the bill passes out of committee, it will then go to the floor for a vote. At this point, every legislator in that chamber can vote on the bill. Often, this is another point where advocacy organizations need people to speak out and contact legislators.

If the bill passes out of that chamber, the process starts again. It will now go to the other chamber, in a relevant committee. Once again, testimony will be necessary. If the bill is passed out of that committee, it then goes to the floor vote in that chamber. If it passes there, it goes to the governor to sign or veto.



Vetoes

In Kansas, the governor has ten days to veto a bill after receiving it. This doesn't mean that the bill is dead, though. The legislature can override a veto with a two-thirds majority vote in both the House and the Senate. If a bill is vetoed, and you agree with that decision, you will contact your legislators and urge them to uphold the veto. The same is true if a bill is vetoed and you disagree with the veto. Contact your legislators and tell them your thoughts.

Conclusion

The legislative session can be daunting, but it is also a time when citizens can make a real impact on the policies that will affect their lives. The important thread that runs through all of the legislative session is you. By staying informed, using your voice, and contacting your legislators, you can be an effective advocate for yourself and your community. No matter how difficult it may seem, together, we can help all Kansans reach those stars.

For more information:

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