



Policy Priorities

Kansas Appleseed

POLICY PRIORITY: YOUTH & ADULT JUSTICE

All Kansans should benefit from a fair and effective system of justice. When our state invests in restoration, instead of incarceration, it invests in Kansans. The positive results are clear; the investments made into the youth justice system show evidence-based programs not only work more effectively, but saves Kansans money compared to detention. We need to keep moving forward in our efforts to expand programs, and establish policies to better support youths' success. We must continue to build on this foundation of restoration and support for a justice system that is safer for all Kansans.

Evidence-Based Programs

Kansas kids should emerge from our justice system better than before, able to have lives free of crime and delinquency, and become successful, happy adults able to pursue their dreams. This means utilizing positive evidence-based interventions focused on helping youth with unmet needs and personal family struggles to achieve stability and find hope.

Kansas' investment in evidence-based programming reduces the use of incarceration, and leads to more positive outcomes for youth with about 77% of youth completing probation, and 93% completing Immediate Intervention Programs (IIP), which has significantly reduced the recidivism rate. Communities need this funding to support important mentorship programs that support young people, and to provide vital resources like mental and behavioral health services, substance abuse treatment, and quality legal defense.

Debt Free Kansas

Kansas must eliminate youth fines and fees, which have been shown to increase recidivism, push youth deeper into the juvenile justice system, undermine family wellbeing, and create barriers to educational and economic stability.

Fines and fees are imposed on youth at every stage of their youth justice system involvement, including court access and defense counsel, docket fees, intervention program fees, law enforcement processing fees, testing fees, court-ordered custody and service fees, fines of up to \$1,000 for each offense, and surcharges for collection agencies. The cost of collecting these fines and fees often outweigh revenue from juvenile fees.



When our state invests in restoration, instead of incarceration, it invests in Kansans. Kansas Appleseed believes to confront deep-set flaws in our state's adult and youth justice systems, we must work together and activate to advance effective policy solutions to build a more just Kansas.



Upgrading the Youth Justice System

Policies in the youth justice space must align with evidence-based best practice. Ending the indiscriminate use of courtroom restraints on kids, and implementing automatic expungements for youth who complete the terms of their sentence, are both significant steps forward in this effort. Youth who pose no threat to themselves or others should not be shackled in the courtroom, a clear deprivation of the presumption of innocence. After a youth has successfully completed the terms of their sentence, they should have their record expunged. This process better aligns with Kansas' focus on rehabilitation and restoration within the youth justice system, allowing youth to move beyond their mistakes to lead productive lives.

The United States Supreme Court has established a clear presumption against adult shackling, but Kansas youth do not have the same protection. Kansas is one of only 11 states that does not have laws, administrative rules, or court rulings establishing a presumption against youth shackling. Similarly, Kansas's youth expungement laws present more barriers than about 39 other U.S. jurisdictions, with 24 states having laws that automatically seal or expunge juvenile records in certain circumstances.

Alternative Sentencing for Primary Caregivers

Our judicial system must be allowed and encouraged to consider someone's role as a primary caregiver to a child when making sentencing considerations.

Without alternative sentencing options, innocent children are needlessly ripped out of their homes and placed in the foster care system, because their primary caregiver is unnecessarily placed in detention. This can negatively impact children's mental health, physical health, and their development of social and behavioral skills. Alternatives to detention are also more cost effective, and reduce the strain on our detention facilities and foster care system, but most importantly they keep Kansas families together.



27%

Despite Black adult population in Kansas being 5%, the population in prisons and jails is 27%

\$40,000

The average cost in Kansas to incarcerate a single youth, annually

< 1%

The revenue collected from youth fines and fees makes up less than 1% of the judicial budget in Kansas

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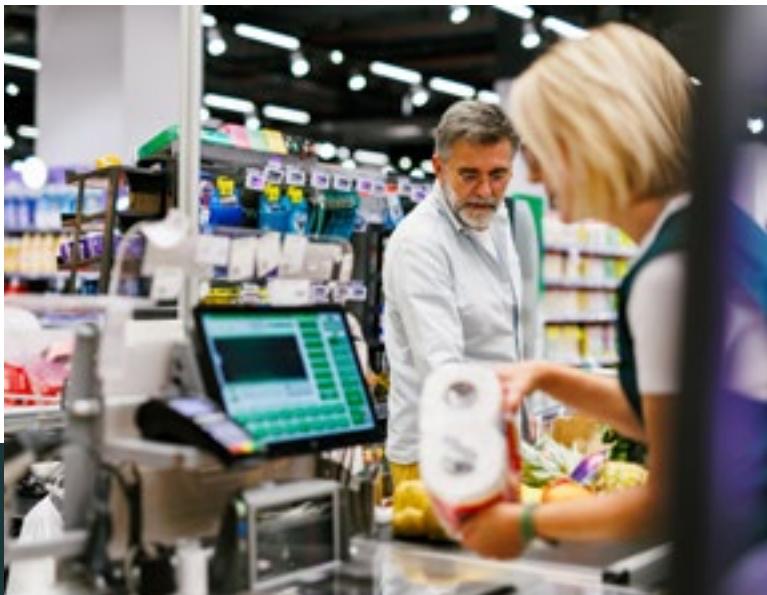
POLICY PRIORITY: SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

With a motto like Ad Astra per Aspera, Kansans know what it means to work hard through difficult circumstances. We feed the world, we take care of our families, and we strengthen our communities. Yet too many of our neighbors still struggle to put food on the table. With one in seven Kansans facing food insecurity, our state must work together to ensure every family has what they need to reach for the same stars.

SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program remains the primary tool we use to fight hunger in Kansas. Each month, 188,000 Kansans rely on SNAP for a modest but reliable food budget. Benefits are provided through an EBT card that works like a debit card, giving families dignity and flexibility in their food purchases. SNAP pumps over \$402 million dollars into Kansas communities each year. These dollars circulate quickly through grocery stores, farmers' markets, and local retailers, supporting jobs and keeping rural and urban economies strong.

Recent changes in the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act, or HR1, created new administrative challenges for states. In Kansas, these changes have added complexity to a program that families depend on every single day. The changes would cost Kansas \$63 million a year in benefits and comes with an additional \$15.5 million in annual administrative costs, the state estimates. The Kansas Legislature has an important role in ensuring that SNAP continues to operate smoothly and reaches every eligible Kansan without unnecessary barriers.



**\$1.50-
\$1.80**

For every \$1.00 of SNAP, it generates between \$1.50-
\$1.80 in local economic activity

410,760

The number of people who are food insecure in Kansas

66%

The number of SNAP recipients in households with children, seniors and people with disabilities

\$402m

SNAP pumps over \$402 million dollars into Kansas communities each year.

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Efficient Eligibility

Kansas families deserve a clear and consistent path to food assistance, one that reflects the hard work and resilience found in every community. They deserve policies that simplify eligibility, reduce errors, lighten administrative workload, and help families stay steadily connected to the support they qualify for.

Broad Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) gives states flexibility in determining SNAP eligibility. It allows families with low incomes to build small savings or take on modest resources without losing help at the grocery store. More than forty states rely on BBCE because it improves accuracy and reduces both administrative and participant errors.

The Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) streamlines SNAP for older adults who face unique barriers in the traditional application process. ESAP shortens paperwork, extends certification periods, and makes it easier for low income seniors to keep the support they need. It is limited to households made up entirely of older adults with no earned income.

But we also have to name the elephant in the room: new federal HR1 requirements will increase pressure on a system that is already strained. Strengthening eligibility is one of the most effective ways to meet these challenges head on, protect families from unnecessary disruptions, and keep Kansas in strong compliance with federal expectations.

Kansas lawmakers should invest in efficient eligibility systems like Broad Based Categorical Eligibility and the Elderly Simplified Application Project so SNAP remains accurate, accessible, and resilient.



Forty-four states and Washington, DC rely on BBCE because it improves accuracy and reduces both administrative and participant errors. We are working to dismantle systemic barriers that contribute to food insecurity through policy solutions that ensure more Kansans can succeed.

POLICY PRIORITY: CHILD WELFARE

The Kansas foster care system, in its current form, creates strains on stakeholders throughout; whether you're a child in foster care, a family navigating the system, or someone working as a social worker, attorney, judge, administrator, or foster parent, this system is not adequately safe or effective. There is a deep need to reshape the system to be more supportive and successful, and to hold it to the highest level of accountability to ensure anyone touching it receives the help and resources they need.

Disconnecting Poverty From Neglect

We must pass legislation disconnecting neglect from poverty. Foster care is a needed system to help kids who are not able to safely remain in their home or in the care of other family, not for families who are financially struggling. It is time to stop punishing families for poverty.

Foster placement are expensive, costing Kansas taxpayers \$136,000 a year per family. Rather than funding unnecessary placements, we should focus on channeling these resources to family preservation, and keeping kids who are safe out of the foster care system, an effort that costs \$5,000-10,000 a year per family.

Currently, 12% of Kansas households live below the federal poverty level. Another 27% are households that do not earn enough to afford their basic needs such as housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and taxes. This means 447,000 Kansas households are struggling to make ends meet and are making difficult decisions everyday on how to get by and provide for their family's needs.

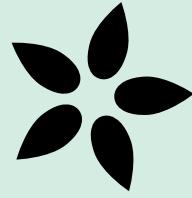
Secure Care

Kansas must address the use of secure care as a placement option for youth who struggle with elopement and chronic running behaviors, and focus efforts on nurturing placement options and the provision of resources that can provide appropriate safety, stability, and support.

It is necessary to grow the availability of placements equipped with the tools needed to keep kids with running behavior in a safe home placement and with access to necessary resources to meet their needs and address the underlying cause of the behavior. If out-of-home placements must be used, keeping kids close to home yields the best results.



To improve the child welfare system, Kansas Appleseed has leveraged legislative advocacy, administrative advocacy, and impact litigation to restore Kansans' access to safety net programs, ensure full funding for child welfare prevention, and end the traumatizing conditions for kids in the state's foster care system.



Kansas should work to invest in making secure care options that have robust, therapeutic wraparound services regionally available so Kansas kids with high needs can remain closer to home. We must reduce the length of secure care placements to a maximum of 45 days, and eliminate extensions. No child should spend up to 180 days locked away in a secure care facility.

SSI Benefits & Survivor Benefits

In 2025, Kansas began upholding foster youth's right to have and maintain their belongings, including SSI and survivor benefits; however, we must establish this protection into law to ensure the state continues to uphold these rights well into the future. Currently all foster youth receiving benefits can have up to \$2,000 in a Personal Needs Account (PNA); youth with disabilities can save up to \$20,000 in an ABLE Account, which have spending limits, and only pay for expenses like uncovered postsecondary education costs, a security deposit on an apartment, or a vehicle to get to work.

The legislature must codify a statute maintaining SSI benefits for kids in care, rather than funneling that money to the state's foster care budget. Doing so will ensure that the impacted kids will continue to receive money meant for them, rather than being expected to fund their own care.

Protecting Foster Youths' Rights

The Representative Gail Finney Memorial Foster Care Bill of Rights must be elevated in importance and impact, as youth in foster care continue to experience extreme instability and lack of access to resources. The state took the time to create this necessary certification of a foster youth's rights, and it must ensure that they do not simply exist as a meaningless collection of words, but a standard that must be upheld with the utmost diligence.

Kansas' Foster Care Bill of Rights, enacted in 2023, exists to provide clear expectations surrounding the treatment and care of foster children; however, there is nothing in place to ensure these rights are adhered to as a child navigates the system. There is currently no expectation to ensure youth are made aware of these rights as they enter care. Often foster youth cite having no idea their rights are being violated, as they were not aware they were afforded these rights in the first place.



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POLICY PRIORITY: ENDING CHILDHOOD HUNGER

One in five Kansas kids are food insecure, meaning they may not know when or where they may get their next meal. No Kansas kid should go hungry, not now and not ever. Food insecurity makes it harder for kids to concentrate, grow, and stay healthy, which limits their ability to reach their full potential.

When school is in session, Kansas children rely on school breakfast and lunch to stay nourished and ready to learn. When school is out, many of those same children lose access to the consistent meals they count on. Strong school feeding programs, paired with strong summer nutrition options, help ensure that kids do not fall through the cracks simply because the calendar changes. These programs keep children fed and healthy, support local economies and help students return to the classroom ready to learn. Developing robust nutrition programs for both the school year and summer guarantees that every Kansas child receives consistent support, regardless of the time of year.

SUN Bucks

Summer should not be synonymous with hunger for Kansas kids. Unfortunately, when school is out for the session, many children lose access to the reliable meals they count on during the year. Children who experience food insecurity over the summer are more likely to lose academic ground. Consistent nutrition supports attention, memory, and emotional regulation, which are all critical for learning when school resumes. Sun BUCKS is one of the most effective ways to fill that gap by helping families with groceries when school is out.

Approximately 127,000 Kansas kids participated in the SUN Bucks program in 2024. The total summer benefit is \$120 per child. Therefore, the estimated economic impact of the SUN Bucks program in Kansas in the summer of 2024 was up to \$22,860,000. Sun BUCKS is one of the strongest tools we have to reach kids who lose regular access to meals when school is out, yet tens of thousands of eligible Kansas children are being missed because outdated state systems do not communicate across agencies. This gap makes it difficult to automatically identify many children who qualify through Medicaid. With deeper investment in system alignment and secure data sharing, Kansas can ensure that every eligible child is reached. Improving this infrastructure is a practical way to reduce summer hunger, support families, and help more kids start the school year healthy and ready to learn. The impact would be significant: more than \$7 million dollars would flow into Kansas each year, strengthening family budgets, supporting local grocery stores, and keeping more food dollars circulating in our communities.



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Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

School meals are one of the most effective and efficient tools Kansas has to reduce childhood hunger. Policies like the Community Eligibility Provision allow schools to serve more students with less paperwork, less stigma, and greater consistency. In many communities, the school cafeteria is the largest restaurant in town, providing the dependable nutrition students need to focus, learn, and thrive. Strengthening school feeding programs improves attendance and academic performance while easing pressure on family budgets. Legislative support for these policies brings additional federal dollars into Kansas schools and communities, helping local economies and ensuring that every child has the nutrition they need to succeed.

School Meal Debt Elimination

Eliminating school meal debt and ending the reduced price meal copay are simple, high-impact steps that support our state's students and schools. In Kansas, the current meal debt for families is approximately \$23.5 million. When families struggle to keep up with meal charges, the burden falls on school districts that must absorb the debt, diverting resources from classrooms and staff. Removing these costs ensures that no child is singled out, shamed, or denied a meal because of their family's financial situation.

Kansas has an opportunity to build a school meals system that works seamlessly for students, families, and schools. State leaders, school districts, and school boards should align policy and practice to reduce financial and administrative barriers and eliminate stigma in school nutrition programs. This approach allows schools to do what they do best: teach and help students learn, not operate as debt collection agencies.



Kansans share their stories.

“Children need healthy food. As an educator, I know the importance of good nutrition to fuel learning as well as future success.”
- Educator from Newton, KS

“It’s hard enough to pay our bills and rent. We need SUN Bucks to help feed our kids.” - A mom from Cherryvale, Kansas

KANSAS APPLESEED

OUR VALUES

Kansas Appleseed believes in the policy process. We believe changing policy and faithfully implementing those policies in practice can truly change the lives of Kansans.

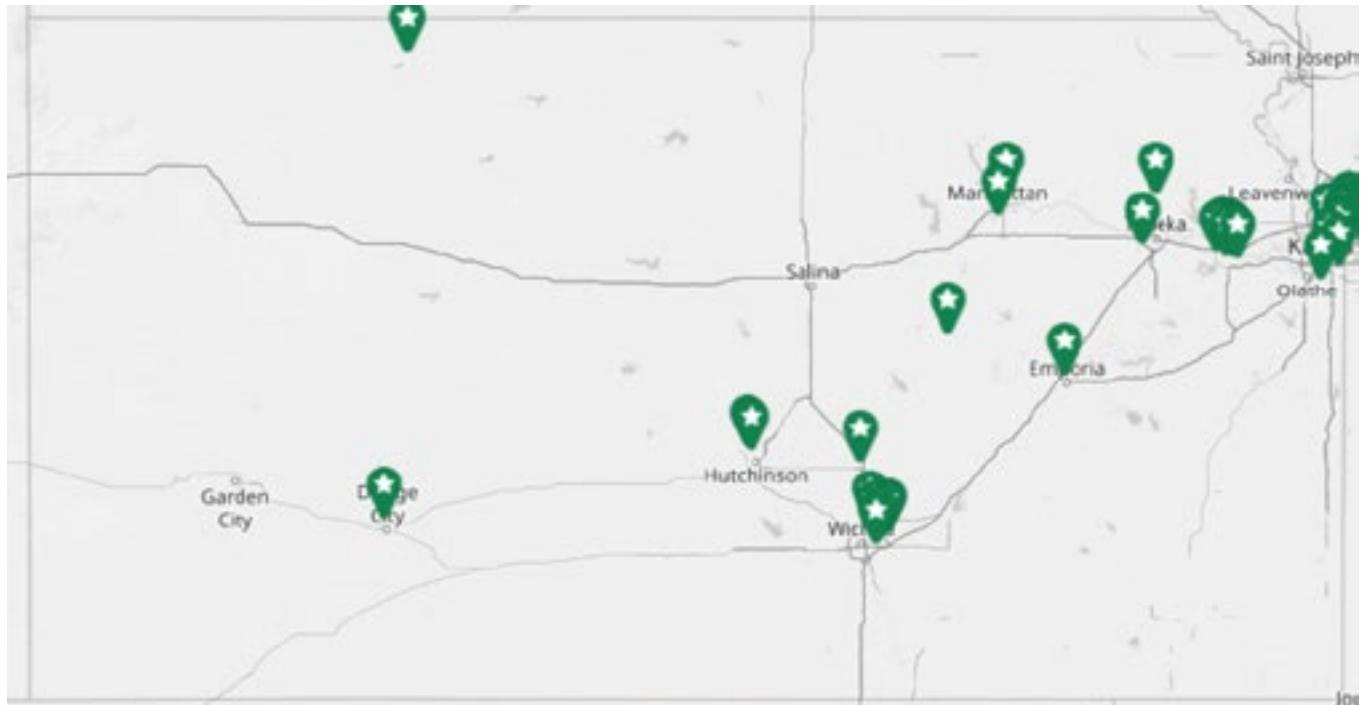
This is not a political game for us. Our goal is that the decisions made at all levels of government improve the lives of Kansans and help our communities thrive. There's no doubt we are all united in that shared goal. We also know that there are many opinions about how we achieve that goal, and oftentimes it's difficult to know what choice is best.

For Kansas Appleseed, it is connections with communities that help us identify the problems that are troubling Kansans and their communities. And it is facts, data, and research that help us decide which policies merit our support. When we identify a problem, we dig in – researching issue-specific Kansas data, talking with stakeholders, and reviewing policies around the country that could help show a path towards a solution. We will always have data and research to support our selected policy position. This data-centered approach that weaves in the lived experiences of our fellow Kansans allows us to advocate for the most effective solutions to the problems facing our state.

Kansas Appleseed is truly a nonpartisan organization, and that is the spirit we bring to our work every day. We are deeply committed to working with partners from all walks of life to create good policy to help Kansans. Together, we can create a state that allows every Kansan to succeed.

- The State of Kansas is stronger when more Kansans vote and participate civically in their communities.
- The State of Kansas is healthier when Kansans and their families have the food they need.
- The State of Kansas is safer when interventions for justice-involved youth are aimed at breaking negative societal influences and generational cycles of poverty, substance abuse, and violence.
- The State of Kansas is responsible for every child in foster care and they deserve the same love, care, and support as any other Kansas child.
- The State of Kansas can be a leader in reducing crime and improving health by investing in mental, behavioral, and substance abuse treatment access for Kansans.
- The State of Kansas is more prosperous when policies are targeted at removing barriers to economic mobility for poor and working class Kansans.

*Kansas Appleseed is a statewide organization
can build a state full of thriving,*



Kansas Appleseed is a statewide organization with over 40 staff and board members working across communities to build a more thriving, inclusive and just state.

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on that believes Kansans, working together, inclusive, and just communities.