

2023 PUBLIC POLICY PLATFORM

United Community Services of Johnson County (UCS) believes in the importance of supporting policies, programs, and services that invest in the health and well-being of our community and provide people the opportunity to achieve their full potential. UCS urges legislators to support a *Family First* approach to fill the gap in quality workforce development through investment in Kansans and health equity.

UCS supports health equity for all Kansans through public policy advocacy, recognizing that everyone should have a fair and just opportunity to be healthy. Institutional racism is taking a toll on our communities of color. Health equity requires intentionally addressing health disparities such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences. This also requires us to remove institutional obstacles to health, like disparities in access to housing, education, voting, employment, and health services.

UCS provides data analysis, leads collaborative planning, and mobilizes resources to enhance the availability and delivery of health and human services.

KANSAS LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY POSITIONS

Prioritize Workforce Development & Families through:

Economic Stability

Advance wage, housing, employment, taxation, health, and business retention and growth policies that support citizens' ability to improve economic stability, achieve self-sufficiency, and address wealth disparities resulting from policy inequity.

Support Job Benefits & Minimum Wage Increase:

Pathways to economic stability include employee benefits such as paid sick leave, paid family leave, stable and predictable work hours, and minimum wage increases that keep pace with cost of living.

Protect State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): This credit allows low-wage earners to retain earned income to help meet their family's basic needs.

Retain Tax Credits for Low-Income Families: Retain the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. Reinstating the homestead property tax refund for renters.

Immediately Eliminate Food Sales Tax: Kansas is one of only six states that tax food at the full retail sales tax rate. Food sales tax disproportionately affects low-income households.

Update Income Eligibility and Benefits for Entitlements: Kansas has very low short-term eligibility for benefits such as WIC, SNAP, and Medicaid; inflation has widened existing cost gaps for families. Research shows that even small increases in WIC and SNAP provide significant family stabilization and improved health, reducing the use of costly foster care systems and emergency departments (<https://jamanetwork.com/> on 10/11/2022).

Increase Funding for Childcare Assistance: Kansas has limited childcare assistance. Lack of childcare is a primary reason caregivers do not enter the workforce. Increased funding reduces other local and state government costs and supports more qualified individuals filling gaps in the workforce.

Allocate American Rescue Plan Act Effectively: Fund economic recovery solutions that efficiently meet housing and utility needs, invests in training and childcare supports that equip workers for in demand employment, and retains and grows living wage jobs for Kansans.

Review Sanctions related to Justice Involvement that are Barriers to Employment, Civic Engagement, and Economic Stability: Amend ineffective fines and sanctions related to nonviolent offenses that disproportionately impact low income households and act as barriers to obtaining or maintaining employment.

Transportation

Invest in Public Transportation: Increase investment to support local and regional transportation options that serve workforce needs as well as a means for access to education, healthcare and other basic services.

Housing

Support Safe, Stable, Attainable Housing: Support policies that promote attainable and sustainable housing choices. Expand eligibility of the Homestead Act and/or SAFESR – Kansas Property Tax Relief for Low Income Seniors. Reauthorize the state mortgage interest and property tax deductions. Maintain the low-income housing tax credit and expand access and usability of the new Affordable Housing Tax Credit Act (AHTCA). Repeal statutes that act as barriers to attainable housing such as KSA §12-16,120 (Mixed Income Housing) and KSA§12-16,138 (Inspection Restrictions).

Healthcare Access

Expand KanCare (Medicaid) Eligibility: Affordable healthcare supports healthy families and a productive economy. Health (physical/mental) impacts employment, productivity, academic achievement and financial stability. Health insurance is critical for ensuring good health. Expand KanCare to maximize coverage to those eligible for Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Create an avenue for thousands of low-income, working people in Kansas to obtain healthcare, support new jobs creation, and protect healthcare providers.

Well-Being & Self-Sufficiency

Increase TANF Support of Core Activities that Help

Prepare Recipients for Work: In 2020, KS ranked 42nd among states for percent of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds spent on core activities, which include basic assistance (7%), work activities and supports (3.4%), and child care (4%). Moreover, KS has failed to spend TANF dollars and, as of 2020, has an accumulated \$61M in unspent TANF funds available. Cash assistance covers only about 50% of HUD fair market rent and has not changed in real dollars since 1996 (representing a > 40% decrease in inflation adjusted dollars). For every 100 poor families with children in Kansas, less than 10 received TANF cash assistance.

KS LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY POSITIONS CONT.

Support Internet Solutions for Low Income Households:

Household internet access (Teleco/ISP) is a necessary utility. A pathway to digital access is needed for low-income households to access education, telehealth and employment.

Youth Supports

Improve Child Well-Being & Outcomes for Youth Aging

Out of Foster Care: Allow young adults aged 18–21 the option to seamlessly re-enter the child welfare system if they chose to leave foster care when they turned 18. Ensure continuity in medical, behavioral health and support services for youth who have exited the custody of the Kansas Department for Children and Families, and an automatic enrollment process for the Medicaid state plan for young adults under age 26 years. Allow extensions for youth in out-of-home placement to receive services until at least 21 years of age .

LOCAL PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITY POSITIONS

Safe, Stable, Attainable Housing

Implement recommendations from the 2021 Johnson County Municipalities Community Housing Study and Toolkit. Research highlights the growing disparity between rising rental and housing costs versus wage growth, impacting residents across all ages and stages of life. Recommendations and case studies addressing housing choice solutions include:

- Review and modify ordinances and update cities' comprehensive plans to eliminate barriers in creating and maintaining varied price and type of housing.
- Incentivize production of affordable and attainable housing stock by sharing risk, reducing gaps in the private market, and removing code uncertainties in the development process and streamlining approval procedures to encourage small lot, townhome, and middle-density.
- Preserve and rehabilitate existing housing stock.

Homelessness

UCS advocates for cities and the County to work together to formulate a sustainable ongoing response for adult residents without minor children experiencing homelessness in Johnson County and policies that support solutions.

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY POSITIONS

Support Health Care Accessibility: Affordable healthcare supports healthy families and a productive economy. Health impacts employment, productivity, academic achievement and financial stability. Health insurance is critical for ensuring good health.

Increase Federal Allocations to TANF:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant funding to states has not changed since its creation in 1996. In every state, benefits are at or below 60% of the federal poverty level and have not kept pace with rising costs of housing.

Support Fair & Balanced Immigration Policies:

Access to supports and services that enable immigrant families to become self-sufficient is vital to ensure an able and ready workforce, stable families, and healthy children prepared to learn and thrive.

Fully Fund the Early Childhood Education Act & the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The years before a child reaches kindergarten are the most critical to influence learning. Many children do not have access to early education before entering kindergarten. Early learning programs such as Early Health Start give infants, toddlers, and children a positive start in life.

Fund Child Tax Credit & Create Permanent Childcare

Support Solutions: Financial stability and attainable childcare solutions are needed to support a ready and able workforce. In Johnson County, 71% of children 0-5 have both parents in the workforce, for children 6-17 that figure grows to 77%.

STANDING POSITIONS

- ⇒ Ensure adequate state agency resources, staffing levels, and technology investments needed to deliver timely, effective services.
- ⇒ Increase investments in health and human services that support workforce development and self-sufficiency.
- ⇒ Expand early learning supports, such as pre-K to support workforce development and protect and preserve the Children's Initiatives Fund (CIF).
- ⇒ Support the successful high school graduation of every Kansas resident and opportunities for post-secondary education and workforce training.
- ⇒ Support access to and participation in the voting process.
- ⇒ Protect and ensure fair housing access and availability.
- ⇒ Protect and ensure adequate funding of VOCA, VAWA, and FVPSA to support survivors of domestic violence.
- ⇒ Enhance access and increase funding to healthcare including preventive care, dental care and mental health care.
- ⇒ Provide continued state funding for RSI and expanded funding for the further establishment of a mental health crisis center.
- ⇒ Improve the criminal justice system's response to people who are mentally ill.
- ⇒ Maintain the current distribution formula for the alcohol excise tax in order to support community-based alcohol and substance use programs.
- ⇒ Maintain current federal Johnson Amendment protections.

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