

2026 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 *Build Thriving, Sustainable Communities* by investment in Kansans and health equity through workforce supports like housing and health insurance.

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 and Civic Engagement

Advance wage, housing, employment, taxation, health, and business 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: Paths to economic stability include employee benefits such as paid sick leave, paid family leave, stable and predictable work hours, and minimum wage that keeps pace with cost of living.

Protect State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): Allows low-wage earners to retain earned income to help meet basic needs.

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

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 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.

Review Sanctions that Act as Barriers to Ending Homelessness and Maintaining Employment, Civic Engagement, and Economic Stability: Reduce or eliminate ineffective fines and sanctions related to nonviolent offenses

that disproportionately impact low income households and act as barriers to obtaining or maintaining employment. Incentivize localities to connect households experiencing homelessness to services and housing supports of the Continuum of Care.

Support civic engagement by supporting increased access and availability of voting.

Transportation

Invest in Public Transportation: Capitalize on 2026 FIFA World Cup planning by increasing investment to support local and regional transportation options that serve workforce needs and 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. Recognize new federal investments in the federal low income housing tax credit and restore the Affordable Housing Tax Credit (AHTC) which provides a state match and makes Kansas competitive with surrounding states and resulted in over 400% increase in the number of attainable housing units being built.

Dedicate a state revenue source for the Moderate Income Housing (MIH) program, which supports workforce housing in rural areas, and for the State Housing Trust Fund for strategic rental assistance and home repairs. Many Kansas homes are over 60 years old and require modification, repair, and weatherization so Kansans can safely age in place.

Respond to corporate private equity investment in Kansas rental housing and resulting increased rents, evictions, and reduced property quality by supporting policies that ensure property owner transparency and accountability, eviction sealing and expungement, income and payment protection, and inspection and enforcement mechanisms to ensure Kansans get healthy, safe housing promised in the Residential Landlord Tenant Act.

Healthcare Access

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 and avoiding medical debt that can lead to housing insecurity. Local hospitals are critical to support local economies and well-being. 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: The maximum monthly benefit for a family of four living in Johnson County is \$497 per month, or \$5,964 per year. A family would need five times this amount to be above the federal poverty level. Moreover, KS has failed to spend TANF dollars and, as of 2021, had accumulated \$62M in unspent TANF funds which are available for use. Cash assistance covers only about 50% of HUD fair market rent and has not changed in real dollars since 1996 (representing a > 47% decrease in inflation adjusted dollars). Less than 2% of all children living below the poverty level received TANF cash assistance in 2021.

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

Recognizing that all residents are on the housing continuum, implement recommendations from the 2023 BoCC Housing Subcommittee and 2021 Johnson County Municipalities Community Housing Study and Toolkit. Research highlights the growing disparity between rising housing costs versus wage growth, impacting residents across all ages and stages of life:

- 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 attainable housing stock by sharing risk, reducing gaps in the private market, removing code uncertainties in the development process, and streamlining approval.
- Preserve and rehabilitate existing housing stock.
- Continue the 10th District Eviction Mediation program.
- Provide for local rental registration and periodic inspections to ensure safe, habitable housing for Kansans.
- Support a year-round non-congregant services center with intensive case management for adults experiencing homelessness in Johnson County.

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY POSITIONS

Restore Health Care Access and Supports: Affordable healthcare supports healthy families and a productive economy. Health impacts employment, productivity, academic achievement and financial stability. Health insurance, especially Medicaid and Medicare, are critical for ensuring good health, housing security, and sustainable economic growth.

Increase Federal Allocations to 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:

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

FEDERAL PRIORITY POSITIONS CONT.

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.

Create Permanent Childcare Support Solutions & Fund Child Tax Credit: Financial stability and attainable childcare solutions are needed to support a ready and able workforce. In Johnson County, 60% of children 0-5 have both parents in the workforce, for children 6-17 that figure grows to 79%.

STANDING POSITIONS

- ⇒ Restore federal resources and ensure adequate state agency resources, staffing levels, and technology investments needed to deliver timely, effective services.
- ⇒ Restore investments in health and human services that support workforce development and self-sufficiency.
- ⇒ Restore early learning supports, such as pre-K to support workforce development.
- ⇒ 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 and the work of the Secretary of State.
- ⇒ Protect and ensure fair housing access and availability.
- ⇒ Protect and ensure adequate federal funding to support survivors of domestic violence.
- ⇒ Restore and increase funding to healthcare including preventive care, dental care, and mental health.
- ⇒ Provide continued state funding for RSI crisis center 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 for opioid settlement dollars and 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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