



HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS



2023 Legislature Week 3

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A Kansas Bureau Of Investigation Report on 188 sex crimes allegedly committed by Catholic priests across the state only recently came to light because Kansas law currently does not require clerics of any denomination to self-report physical, mental, emotional, or sexual abuse of congregants. The report also revealed that no criminal charges have ever been brought in any of the cases because they all happened to be filed after the statute of limitations had passed for such felony offenses. This is not an unusual scenario since more often than not it can take decades for traumatized victims of childhood sexual assault to give voice to the abuse they suffered. The average age for disclosure of these heinous crimes is 52 for both male and female victims. This information compelled Senator Tom Holland to introduce SB 87 that proposes any and all church personnel including members of the clergy be required to immediately report both suspected harm against children and the suspected perpetrator of such harm. Additionally, Senator Cindy Holscher has asked her fellow lawmakers to pass legislation this session to extend the statute of limitations deadline for such crimes as far as the state Constitution will allow.

K-State And Network Kansas Officials have announced a joint venture that will be part of the K-State 105 initiative to bring resources, research, and professionals to businesses statewide. This collaboration will bring support to Kansas business communities in the form of access to capital opportunities, smart manufacturing, technical and business planning assistance, entrepreneurial education, market research, cybersecurity assistance, grant-writing expertise, and intellectual property protection guidance. The plan is to eventually reach every corner of Kansas but will begin by initially partnering with only a few regional associations at a time with GO Topeka and the Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center being the first.

The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to the U.S. Congress shows the scope of homelessness across our region which includes Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska is significant with 9404 individuals unhoused, 3650 people with children unhoused, 837 unaccompanied children unhoused, 980 veterans unhoused, and 2525 people facing the prospect of becoming chronically unhoused. Recent federal data shows some progress has been made with veteran homelessness falling 11% from its 2020 national level. To counter the recent trend of criminalizing homelessness the federal government has released the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness which is a blueprint to systemically prevent homelessness while also combating the systemic racism that has created racial and ethnic disparities in homelessness. Shaped by public input including that from more than 500 people who have experienced homelessness, as well as from leaders, providers, advocates, developers, and other partners from more than 600 communities, tribes, and territories within our region.

The National School Choice Awareness Foundation spurred more than 200 people to arrive at the Kansas Capitol to voice their concerns to legislators as they look for a change and a choice of where Kansas students may go to school. They were there to say that no matter a family's financial situation or the area they live in, there should be parental choice in how and where their children are educated. They expressed their belief that laws should be put in place to give every child the best options for the best possible education.

The Camber Children's Mental Health Center located in Hays expects to start accepting young patients

beginning in February. The new facility has 14 beds for both inpatient and residential treatment focusing on children's psychiatric services. This comes after an embarrassing 2022 national report ranked Kansas the worst state for providing mental health care for adults and children.

The House Water Committee heard from Kansas Water Office Director Connie Owen about what she termed the "alarmingly severe" drying out of the massive underground reservoir known as the Ogallala Aquifer which has provided water to western Kansas for nearly 100 years. She told the lawmakers that maintaining the status quo is no longer an option as some counties have only 10-20 years of water left if prompt legislative action is not taken to find and implement long-term solutions for saving the state's farming and ranching economy in those areas. At this point however the committee has begun no work on bills to send to the floor, in no small part because one-third of the members are new including this session's chairperson Representative Jim Minnix who stated his committee is working in earnest to review and get up to speed with the vast amount of data they have inherited related to this problem.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture has announced that applications are open for the 2023 Specialty Block Grant Program, funded by the U.S. Agricultural Marketing Service in the amount of \$327K. Specialty crops are defined for this purpose as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops, including floriculture. A team of external reviewers will evaluate and rate proposals on their ability to successfully promote specialty crops in Kansas and make a positive impact on the state's economy. Those recommendations will then be submitted to the Kansas Secretary of Agriculture for final awards. The deadline for applicants is 5 pm on March 15th.

The Special Committee on Education held a hearing on HB 2030, which would authorize students enrolled in any alternatives to traditional, publicly funded education, such as homeschooling, virtual schools, non-accredited private schools, and part-time public-school students to participate in any activities regulated by the Kansas State High School Activities Association. Those students would be required to pay any activities fees or enroll in any specific classes that would be required of regular public-school participants. Committee Chair, Representative Kristey Williams said she is dismayed that Kansas has remained part of a 20-state group that does not afford any extracurricular participation for children of tax-paying parents who have chosen alternative educational opportunities for their students. She claims it is hypocritical to debate the need for diversity and inclusion in our schools while opposing this bill.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it is delaying the scheduled newly reclassified designation for the lesser prairie chicken as threatened in some areas and endangered in others until March 27th. The agency admits the postponement comes after significant pushback from federal and state GOP leaders who criticized the stricter protections as disruptors of infrastructure projects and other economic activity. This stopgap compromise is intended to give regulators and those affected by the changes such as farmers, landowners, loggers, ranchers, and wind turbine operators time to make necessary adjustments to comply with the pending policy.

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