



HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS

2026 Legislature Week Ten
March 20th, 2026
Volume 12 Issue 10

K-12 Phone Restrictions Bill Is Now Law

Governor Kelly has signed HB 2299, a legislative measure that requires public and accredited nonpublic K-12 schools to implement policies that restrict students from using personal electronic devices during the school day. The bill limits the way educators can talk to students, limiting the use of social media for official business of the school. There are exceptions for physicians' authorized medical needs, as well as individualized education plans. Supporters of the bill, including Gov. Kelly, Senator Chase Blasi, and Senator Dinah Sykes, say it's needed to reduce distractions, boost academic performance, and address the negative impact smartphones have on kids' mental health. But the legislation has come under criticism from some lawmakers and educational stakeholders. Senator Holscher raised fears that this statewide mandate overrides current local district rules, giving the teachers more and more administrative and compliance work without supporting their resources. Going forward, school districts must create policies to ensure that the new statewide standards are being met, but this transition may be a difficult one as dialogue between the state government and local educators will have to involve ongoing conversations to resolve issues regarding how those standards are going to be enacted.

Bill Aims To Curb Distracted Driving

Kansas House recently advanced legislation intended to reduce distracted driving by prohibiting handheld cell phone use in school and construction zones. Supported by the Kansas Department of Transportation and AAA Kansas, the bill seeks to address the state's high rate of distracted driving incidents, nearly 14,000 crashes and over 70 fatalities in 2024. KDOT indicates these areas demand increased driver attention to prevent collisions between vehicles and pedestrians. Hands-free technology, such as Bluetooth and mounted devices, and exemptions for reporting emergencies, are permitted under the proposed policy. If the ban were passed, it would be enforced first with warnings and gradually increase to a \$60 fine for infractions beginning July 1, 2027. A spokesman for AAA Kansas said, "While numerous other states have implemented comprehensive statewide bans, this targeted legislation represents an initial step toward mitigating the severe cognitive and physical hazards associated with mobile device usage behind the wheel." The measure is now pending consideration in the Kansas Senate.

Defining New Crimes

The Senate has passed legislation the House is now considering that would create a new crime to be known as "unlawful approach of first responders." If passed it would require individuals to not come within 25 feet of active police, federal agents, or emergency personnel after receiving a warning. Additional provisions would give local agencies the authority to assist federal operations

and clear obstructing vehicles. Supporters say the measure will help first responders stay safe and efficient. On the other hand, opponents cited serious constitutional arguments. They cautioned that the ambiguous definition of a "punishable distraction" could violate the first amendment rights of journalists and citizen observers. Should the bill reach the Governor, she is expected to reject the measure.

Deputy's DUI Crash Inspires Tougher Law

Kansas lawmakers are currently discussing HB 2747, a bill to close a jurisdictional gap in state law that allows for a loophole to exist in impaired-driving sentencing guidelines. If passed, the measure would make it permissible for any prior municipal court DUI convictions to be used in enhancing sentences when a later DUI results in injury or death. Under state law, only district court convictions are considered for such enhancements, resulting in disparate penalties based on where prior offenses were prosecuted. The push for such a change has come on the heels of the 2022 death of Sedgwick County Deputy Sheriff Sidnee Carter, who was killed by an impaired driver whose prior municipal DUI convictions were not available for sentencing. Testimony by Sedgwick County Sheriff Jeff Easter and the victim's father, Jerry Carter, who argued in favor of the measure, stressed the need for legal consistency. It is now under Senate committee consideration.

Exploring Online Fraud Responsibility

Kansas lawmakers held an informational hearing on HB 2648, legislation targeted to combat financial fraud by expanding liability to telecom providers and social media companies. Supporters of the measure described catastrophic examples of consumer fraud and said the banks cannot handle them alone. Citing data indicating that platforms such as Meta take profit off deceptive advertising while frequently turning a blind eye to scam reports to users. The bill would require social media companies to verify the identities of advertisers and to investigate claims of fraud within a strict timeframe, in addition to preventing telecom companies from transmitting spoofed caller IDs. Tech interests argued that the bill was unconstitutional, warning that it regulates interstate services under federal jurisdiction, risks violating free expression, and could flood courts with private suits. Representatives of the wireless industry warned the bill unduly punishes lawful service providers, rather than the real actors who commit acts of fraud. The bill will not get passed this year and instead serves as a foundational discussion.

High School Graduation May Depend On Civics

Kansas education standards may soon require a civics test for graduating high schoolers. SB 381 would completely revise K-12 social studies curricula. Students will need to score at least 80% on a 100-question exam that emulates the U.S. naturalization exam to receive their diploma. Senator Starnes, the bill's sponsor, insists that the new rules will add to, not take the place of previous history units. The proposal, however, receives pedagogical and logistical opposition from educators. The Kansas Association of School Boards expressed concern for the age-appropriateness of complex political subjects for early grades and whether it fits within current graduation programs. State Board of Education officials added that civics is already a well-covered instruction in both public and private K-12 schools requiring no additional pointed political ideology. It is now General Orders in the House for further consideration.

No More Falling Back in Kansas

Sponsored by Senator Kenny Titus, SB 1 proposes to abolish bi-annual clock changes, putting Kansas on permanent standard time. The proposal is driven by the number of studies that show sacrificing Daylight-Saving Time is a greater good for public health by bettering learning, sleeping, and mental health. While some opponents call the proposed change irrelevant, much public testimony echoed these imperatives pointing to the health and lifestyle benefits of consistent morning light. One important suggested amendment is that the change only go into effect if Missouri also passes a sister bill thereby avoiding time zone disruptions in the shared Kansas City metro area. Having passed a Senate committee, the legislation is now in the full House for potential floor discussion.

Renter Help For Unlivable Conditions

Lawmakers are working on SB 415, which would increase legal protections and safeguards for renters in unlivable housing spaces. The bill, brought in after years of critical maintenance neglect and property condemnations at housing complexes throughout the state, explicitly expands the Kansas Consumer Protection Act to landlord-tenant disputes, essentially working around a 1979 state Supreme Court limitation. Under the proposal, if a government agency determines a rented property is unlivable, state or local prosecutors — like the Attorney General or district attorneys — can sue landlords who do not comply on behalf of displaced residents. Damages would be capped at \$10,000 per tenant. Supporters emphasize that the legislation establishes basic business accountability for property owners and addresses a statewide housing crisis. People who oppose this bill say it infringes upon property owners' rights or that the bill does not give renters enough justice. The measure has passed the Senate and is yet to be considered by the House.

Respecting Veterans By Meeting Needs

Governor Kelly has signed HB 2274 that will expand veterans' access to essential services while also formally recognizing their combat contributions. One cornerstone of the bill, promoted by Senator Faust-Goudeau, gives homeless vets a way to obtain a state ID card without a residential address by showing their military discharge papers at the Kansas Office of Veteran Services. The policy eliminates administrative hurdles that in many cases prevent veterans from securing a job or obtaining needed medical care and social services. The bill also designates Kansas as a Purple Heart State to honor soldiers injured or killed in action. As part of this official designation, the governor will make an annual declaration every August 7 with the Kansas Office of Veteran Services conducting statewide observance of Purple Heart Day

Rural Road Improvement Grants

The Department of Transportation Secretary and Governor Kelly announced an allocation of \$8.77 million in federal funds to support thirteen safety improvement projects on rural roadways across Kansas. Administered by the High Risk Rural Roads Program that will use an additional \$1.4 million in local matching funds to resolve pressing infrastructure vulnerabilities with the essential aim to reduce traffic deaths. Rural and local roads are currently the hub of over half the state's serious and fatal traffic accidents. Thirteen projects were selected from thirty-two applications to cover systemic network as well as site specific improvements such as adding

2-inch asphalt widening and pavement marking on Road 21 from K-25 east 4.5 miles in Grant County and upgrading signage on all major and paved minor collectors in Kearny County.

Water Bill Awaits Governor's Signature

Sponsored by Representative Wasinger, and awaiting Governor Kelly's signature, HB 2433, formally cements state jurisdiction over water appropriations and transfers in Kansas. The legislation explicitly prohibits counties from mandating permits, imposing restrictions, or levying fees on water transfers passing through the counties' rights-of-way. Edwards County sought to set up a parallel local water authority to prevent a pipeline intended to transport water from the R9 Ranch to the municipalities of Hays and Russell, and that decision laid out the policy. The infrastructure project was previously authorized by the Department of Agriculture's Chief Engineer. With regulations in place retroactively, the act eliminates a patchwork of state regulation and helps counties retain control over domestic wells. The core policy implication is also the final statutory preemption of county-level endeavors to usurp or duplicate state-authorized water rights, ensuring that future infrastructure and water projects are subject to the one-stop-shop supervision of the state, rather than a series of jurisdictional mandates being overlapped across regions.

KANSAS HOUSING ASSOCIATION, INC.

513 SW VAN BUREN STREET, TOPEKA, KANSAS 66603

PHONE: 785-235-6283 FAX: 785-235-8676

KHA@KANSASHOUSINGASSOCIATION.COM

WWW.KANSASHOUSINGASSOCIATION.COM

HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS IS A WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY
PREPARED BY KHA, INC. KANSAS GOVERNMENT AND STATEWIDE
NEWS ARE GATHERED AND COMPILED INDEPENDENTLY FROM
VARIOUS MEDIA REPORTS.

KHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

KELSEY HERR, PRESIDENT
JOSH YUREK, VICE PRESIDENT
TONY KRSNICH, SECRETARY
AUSTIN KACK, TREASURER
TREY GEORGE, PAST PRESIDENT

DIRECTORS AT LARGE

Director - Andrew Danner
Director - Matt Fulson
Director - Chris Hite
Director - Lloyd Rainge
Director - Dan Sallier
Director - Mollea Lightner