



HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS



2026 Legislature Week Five
February 13, 2026
Volume 12 Issue 5

The Kansas Supreme Court is responding to findings from the Rural Justice Initiative Committee highlighting a widening gap in access to legal services across rural Kansas. While roughly half the state's population lives in rural communities, most licensed attorneys are concentrated in a handful of urban counties — leaving courts struggling to secure representation and raising concerns about long-term access to counsel. The challenge is compounded by an aging legal workforce, with many practitioners nearing retirement.

To address the imbalance, the committee issued strategic recommendations focused on financial and professional incentives to attract attorneys to underserved areas. Lawmakers are advancing proposals that would create student loan repayment and tuition assistance programs for graduates who commit to rural practice. Partnerships with educational institutions are also expanding internship and mentorship opportunities to expose students early to the benefits and needs of rural legal careers.

After seven years of prioritizing expanded health coverage, Laura Kelly has removed the issue of Medicaid Expansion from her final-year agenda. Citing the current legislative climate and federal funding pressures.

The governor is focusing on building bipartisan support for a comprehensive statewide water conservation strategy with momentum behind HB 2558, which would increase annual funding for the Kansas Water Plan to \$60 million from the State General Fund — up from \$35 million — with most of the increase directed to the Water Projects Grant Fund and the Water Technical Assistance Fund. Supporters, including the League of Kansas Municipalities, told lawmakers that local demand for water resources continues to grow as communities confront declining aquifer levels and supply pressures. During recent hearings, no opposition was voiced, and committee leaders acknowledged that Kansas trails other western states in long-term water investment.

Lawmakers have introduced HB 2528 in response to concerns about enforcement practices by the Kansas Board of Nursing. The bill would soften penalties for minor, non-clinical administrative violations, which supporters argue contribute to workforce shortages by discouraging nurses from remaining in the profession. Key provisions include a mandatory 90-day grace period for license renewals, required electronic deadline reminders, and removal of certain non-practice violations from permanent records.

Most testimony favored the proposal, though critics cautioned against solving administrative challenges solely through statute and urged continued collaboration with regulators. Debate centered on ensuring serious patient-care violations would remain permanently documented — a safeguard supporters say is clearly preserved in the bill. A committee vote on advancing the measure is expected soon.

Kansas lawmakers are reviewing a proposal to raise the state's hourly minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$16. The first significant increase since 2009. Supporters say higher wages reduce reliance on state food assistance, shifting costs back to employers. Opponents caution that mandatory increases could drive up prices for goods and services, impacting household budgets. The measure is currently under review by the Committee on Commerce, with a public hearing expected soon.

A central focus in the Kansas Senate is a property tax relief resolution introduced more than a month ago. While public demand for financial relief remains strong, lawmakers are divided over whether the proposal has enough support to pass. The measure cleared committee two weeks ago but has yet to reach the Senate floor. Some members see momentum building, while others argue it closely resembles prior unsuccessful efforts. Legislative leaders expect extended discussion next week to clarify the proposal's merits before any potential vote.

Recent action by the Kansas House Education Committee substantially revised **a bill that initially proposed a statewide ban on student cellphone use during the school day.** The updated version instead allows local districts to set their own policies, reflecting testimony from superintendents who argued local control is more practical. The bill now adds liability protections for schools storing devices, exceptions for students with medical or individualized education needs, and restrictions on two-way digital communication between staff and students. Supporters of phone-free schools continue advocating for stronger standards, citing benefits to student focus and well-being.

A student safety and drug prevention bill has advanced to the full Kansas House of Representatives for debate. The measure targets opioid and overdose risks in schools by requiring fentanyl and opioid education for high school students and mandating that public schools maintain a supply of naloxone (Narcan) to respond to emergencies. Schools would also need clear response policies so staff can act quickly during an overdose crisis. A proposal to extend the requirements to private schools was not adopted in committee.

Kansas drivers enjoy some of the nation's best road infrastructure, according to a January report from ConsumerAffairs. More than 96% of state roads are in acceptable condition, ranking Kansas second nationally for road quality and fifth overall on broader benchmarks for the second consecutive year. Rural and urban roads fared particularly well, with only 2.4% and 10.4% rated poor, respectively. The state's overall ranking was tempered by safety performance, with traffic fatalities slightly below the national average at 1.22 deaths per 100 million miles traveled.

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