

Douglas County 2023 Legislative Statement

Douglas County Initiatives

Douglas County's annual operating budget serves as the most significant policy document, maintaining core County services, while prioritizing key investments that support the prosperity and health of our community.

Ensuring the prosperity and growth of our community is more important now than ever, as the County emerges from the pandemic and prepares to welcome Panasonic to the region. As preparations begin for Panasonic's arrival, Douglas County recognizes the significant impact this will have on the County: from logistics and impacts on County infrastructure to housing needs and the impact on surrounding school districts. It is imperative the Legislature is aware of the impact this historic development will have on the County and the importance of investments in housing and infrastructure that will be key for the County to meet this opportunity.

The County remains focused on opportunities to improve our local criminal justice system utilizing strategies that bolster available alternatives to incarceration through specialty courts, prosecutor-led enhanced diversion, and access to indigent defense services. There are also on-going efforts to examine racial disparities in local jail populations and eliminate the criminalization of poverty. These efforts will be bolstered by the availability of local crisis response services that may prevent incarceration, and prioritize recovery. This includes partnerships with the Kansas Suicide Prevention Headquarters (KSHPQ) to support and enhance the local impact of the new 988 suicide prevention national hotline.

Douglas County is also expanding the role of housing to promote the health and well-being of our vulnerable community members. The County's FY 2023 commits \$1.1 million of ongoing funding to provide housing and supportive housing services to our unhoused and precariously housed community members.

Douglas County Legislative Priorities

- 1. Housing** – The impacts of a national and local affordable housing crisis are having a most profound effect on Douglas County's most vulnerable community members. Douglas County continues to experience high rates of housing instability and homelessness, disproportionately impacting women and young children, community members of color, seniors, and individuals with physical and behavioral health disabilities. A recent needs assessment completed by the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) determined an estimated need of 381 units of supportive housing. Douglas County recently awarded \$10.6 million of American Rescue Plan Act funds for transitional and permanent supportive housing, and rent and utility assistance. The conclusion of the Kansas Emergency Rental Assistance (KERA) program will only put more pressure on Douglas County's homelessness and housing crisis response system. We support counties' home rule authority to address the housing needs of our community through all available methods, including but not limited to:
 - inclusionary zoning
 - landlord incentives

- tenant right to counsel
- reforming tenant-landlord to extend the time period for eviction proceedings
- sources of income and other discrimination prevention measures
- expanded funding to provide housing navigation and stability case management services.

One of the most significant challenges to preparing for the impact of the Panasonic factory will be on the area housing market. The current shortage of workforce housing in Lawrence and non-rural areas of Douglas County will require creative, collaborative strategies to meet the needs of future workers. The passage of HB 2237 in the last Session are great examples of solutions to meeting this need, including but not limited to use of investor tax credits beyond just rural counties on a project-specific basis.

2. **Competency Restoration & Community Interventions** – Douglas County applauds efforts to improve competency evaluation and restoration during the 2022 legislative session. The County is encouraged by a new pilot program that will assist county jails community-based competency restoration, however; requirements that individuals be medically compliant will present challenges to the Douglas County Correctional Facility through extended lengths of stay. Additional considerations of funding to construct another psychiatric hospital in Northeast Kansas remain a focus for Douglas County, as well as additional funding for community-based services for adult community corrections and juvenile services including intermediate interventions.
3. **Infrastructure** – Douglas County applauds the creation of a statewide Infrastructure Hub to coordinate and strategize around the billions of federal funds coming to Kansas following the passage of the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The County and its municipal partners stand to benefit from investments that improve our local and regional transportation network, replace and repair bridges, improve aging water infrastructure, ensure all Douglas County residents have access to reliable, high speed intranet, and promote resilient infrastructure systems to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather and cyber-attacks. Additionally, Douglas County supports the use of these funds to continue the planned expansion of the South Lawrence Traffic way (SLT) at the Lecompton K10 interchange.

Douglas County supports and would like to acknowledge these issues:

Preparing for Panasonic. Douglas County supports a coordinated regional strategy with cities and counties in Douglas and Johnson County to meet the housing, transportation, child care and education needs for the 8,000 new jobs that will be created as a result of the Panasonic battery factory in De Soto. The 2022 Legislature’s passage of several acts and amendments to laws to promote economic development to address rural housing needs will be key resources, which, paired with the **Child Day Care Services Tax Credit**, will be of great benefit to a regional strategy. Douglas County, along with several counties in Kansas has an extreme shortage of quality and affordable child care available to meet the needs of our workforce. Douglas County is investing in this need locally in partnership

with the Douglas County Early Childhood Community Center, but needs continued support and partnership from state agencies and business to meet this need.

Support for Peaslee Tech. The County recognizes the important role Peaslee Tech plays in providing a variety of technical programs to county residents and businesses. The need for a skilled workforce will be greater than ever to fill the thousands of new jobs anticipated as the result of the Panasonic factory and associated suppliers. We support enabling legislation authorizing a countywide election to form a special district to provide stable and sustainable funding for Peaslee Tech.

Behavioral Health. The County is deeply appreciative of the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) efforts to develop crisis intervention center regulations, and looks forward to finalization and approval by the Attorney General's Office to enable operations of the Douglas County Treatment and Recovery Center. Douglas County supports the ongoing implementation and funding of the **Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC)** model in 2023.

Criminal Justice Reform. We support measures to reduce incarceration, improve the competency restoration process, increase funding for community-based services, eliminate the criminalization of poverty, and address racial inequities in the criminal justice system. We encourage the Legislature to allocate increased funding for the Kansas State Board of Indigents' Defense Service in order to reduce public defender turnover and caseloads while implementing a client-centered, holistic defense model. We also encourage the Legislature to take steps to eliminate the criminalization of poverty. Specifically, we support removing all driver's license reinstatement fees, and eliminating the ability to suspend licenses for unpaid court fees. Finally, the Legislature should eliminate mandatory jail sentences for three or more Driving While Suspended convictions.

Clarifying County Authority. We encourage the Legislature to establish additional clarity on issues of emergency powers, local control, and county authority, specifically during states of emergency. We oppose any amendments to the Kansas Emergency Management Act that would limit the County's home rule authority or ability to respond to emergencies efficiently, effectively, and in the best interest of its local citizens.

Community Corrections. Douglas County supports the Kansas Community Corrections Association (KCCA) request for additional State General Fund resources to increase community corrections grants to local community corrections agencies.

Kansas Fights Addiction. Douglas County supports the provision of direct funding to local governments and grant opportunities to expand local efforts to provide access to treatment, harm reduction strategies and recovery opportunities through employment and education opportunities.

KanCare Expansion. We support expansion of the Kansas Medicaid program, KanCare, bringing more federal dollars to Kansas, and extending health care coverage to our lower-income residents. Kansas should also pursue policies that maximize all possible federal funding sources in the Medicaid system, in the American Rescue Plan Act, and the Infrastructure spending bill to ensure our federal tax dollars provide services and

improvements to our community. Additionally, access to the Women Infants and Children (WIC) and SNAP programs should be expanded, not limited, to ensure our most vulnerable access federal and state support our tax dollars fund.

Seniors and Vulnerable Adults. We support measures to expand vital safety net services for low-income, disabled or medically compromised community members that are age sixty and older. Ensuring access to home-based, preventive care for seniors and disabled adults that prevent overutilization and inappropriate use of emergency services should be prioritized for future considerations of funding and program eligibility, including but not limited to accessible and affordable, supportive housing.

Spending and Taxing Lids. We continue to strenuously oppose any constitutional or statutory amendment to impose additional spending or taxing limitations on county government.

Home Rule. We support constitutional home rule for counties and oppose any additional erosion of existing statutory home rule authority. We support counties using their current home rule powers when applicable rather than seeking specific legislative remedies.

Environment & Sustainability

- With historic investments in sustainability and clean energy projects through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act, the County urges the Legislature and state agencies to provide support and coordination to local governments in order to maximize opportunities through these federal investments.
- Natural Resources. We support any legislative initiative to conserve prime farmland, forests, prairies, wetlands, historic areas, wildlife habitat, and scenic views for the benefit of future generations. We support regenerative agriculture and other conservation practices that advance more sustainable and resilient agriculture.
- Renewable Energy. We support public and private incentives to encourage investment in renewable energy sources. We support a statewide plan and program to increase renewable energy goals and increase energy efficiency by establishing a statewide PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) program.
- Statewide Climate Crisis Plan. We support and encourage the Legislature in establishing a statewide climate crisis plan to address global climate change and help our state adapt to the associated risks that climate change places on public health and property. The County supports the use of BIL funds to promote regional planning and resource networks to protect and promote water and groundwater storage, as well as drought-contingency planning.
- Monitoring of Oil & Gas Industries. We oppose the use of high volume, high-pressure salt water injection wells and waste water injection wells used for oil and gas extraction. We support monitoring oil and gas extraction activity as it relates to the increasing frequency of seismic activity and earthquakes across Kansas.
- Kansas Energy Efficiency Investment Act (KEEIA): We support legislation that seeks to expand the types of energy efficiency programs available to businesses, cities, schools, and residences in Kansas.

Food Programs and Systems. Douglas County, and its local Food Policy Council, supports the following statewide priorities, including:

- Farm to School. We stand behind efforts that will increase funding for Farm to School programs.
- Cottage Foods. We support the review of “cottage food regulations” to identify barriers for value-added producers and encourage the Legislature to champion a formal law that would promote entrepreneurship and drive economic activity.
- Statewide Food, Farm, and Policy Council. We favor efforts to form a food council at the state level, providing multi-sector review and representation of food policies which concern the whole state.