



# City of Lawrence

## 2019 Legislative Priority Statement

Thank you for your dedicated service on behalf of our community! The City of Lawrence has a long history of working closely with our Douglas County legislative delegation on issues of mutual concern in Topeka.

Please carefully consider the Lawrence City Commission's 2019 legislative priorities set forth below.

### Support for Home Rule and Local Control

The City of Lawrence strongly supports the Home Rule Authority of Kansas cities granted directly by the people of this State through an amendment to the Kansas Constitution. Locally elected officials are accountable to voters for the decisions they make on behalf of their communities. The Kansas Legislature should not erode Home Rule Authority. The Legislature has diminished cities' Home Rule Authority in recent years by enacting legislation prohibiting local ordinances on conceal carry and inclusionary zoning, to name just two examples. Cities' ability to regulate in these areas should be restored.



### Transportation

The City strongly supports funding for the construction of the western leg of the South Lawrence Trafficway/ K-10 expansion. The City does not, however, support the use of a toll road as a means to fund this expansion. Funding to expand the lanes and improve the safety of at-grade intersections should be identified.

The City of Lawrence supports full restoration of KDOT funding and appreciates legislative efforts in 2018 that partially restored funding for state highway projects. State highway funds should be used for highway improvements only. The City-County Highway Fund is essential to maintaining local roads and should be fully funded. The City also supports increasing the amount of State funding which supports maintenance of State highways within city limits. The City of Lawrence encourages increased funding for the connecting links program. The last increase in funding for this program was in 1999 – nearly twenty years ago.

### City and University Relationships

The City will collaborate with and support both the University of Kansas and Haskell Indian Nations University on their legislative issues and agendas. The City supports increased state funding for higher education in Kansas. Investment in higher education is investment in Kansas cities. Aging infrastructure and buildings on state and federal college campuses should be supported by renewed investment, improvements and facility upgrades where needed.



### State Support for Affordable Housing Initiatives

The City of Lawrence has identified access to safe and affordable housing and neighborhoods as a strategic goal of the City. The City is currently pursuing various strategies to fund and find solutions to affordable housing in the Lawrence community. However, affordable housing is not just a City of Lawrence issue. The State needs to partner with cities to study the problem and find statewide solutions and tools for cities to utilize.

### Local Taxing & Spending Decisions Should be made by Local Officials

The Lawrence City Commission urges the Legislature to remove the tax lid imposed on municipalities. Local elected officials should determine the appropriate spending and taxing policies of their community. A repeal of these tax limits would return budgetary authority to where it should be – local units of government. If the tax lid provisions cannot be repealed, the City of Lawrence in conjunction with the League of Kansas Municipalities supports removing the election process under the current tax lid and replacing it with a protest petition. We support additional exemptions to make the law more workable.



## Sales Tax Fairness

The recent United State Supreme Court decision in the case of South Dakota v. Wayfair, Inc. et al., has opened the door for state collection of remote sales taxes. The City of Lawrence supports state legislation to establish a program for statewide collection of state and local sales and compensating use taxes due from in-state purchasers. Remitted taxes should be distributed using existing methods and formulas for the state and local governments. Such legislation will bring tax fairness to our local businesses.

## State Sales Tax

The City of Lawrence does not support raising the state sales tax rate. The City also supports reduction in state sales tax on food, and supports an opt-in for local governments should the state establish any sales tax holidays.

## Alternative Property Valuation

Big box retailers have challenged local appraisers' methods of assessment for property tax valuations. Commercial properties should be appraised at their highest and best use. The City of Lawrence supports legislation requiring the Kansas Board of Tax Appeals to consider the three proven methods of valuation – cost minus depreciation, sales comparison and income when determining a property's true value.



## Property & Sales Tax Exemptions

The City of Lawrence believes the existing property tax base should be protected and encourages the Legislature to resist any expansion of exemptions from taxation. The City supports the existing definition of machinery and equipment and the exemption should not be expanded. The Legislature should review existing exemptions in order to determine whether they are still appropriate and needed. The City of Lawrence supports current law that exempts local government and public construction projects from sales tax.

## Gender and Marriage Equality

The City of Lawrence supports marriage equality in Kansas and opposes any legislation that fails to recognize marriages between two people of the same sex. We also strongly encourage the State to amend the Kansas Act Against Discrimination to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.



## Unfunded Mandates

The City of Lawrence opposes unfunded mandates that take limited local tax dollars to support priorities and needs of state and federal governments. If the Legislature is going to impose new requirements on municipalities, it should provide adequate funding to the municipalities to comply with those requirements.



## Biosciences and Technology Business Center – BTBC.

We urge the Kansas Legislature and our local delegation to continue providing support and funding for biosciences and technology development, including support for the BTBC.

## KPERS and KP&F Funding

The City's ability to hire and retain qualified public employees is dependent upon an attractive and well-balanced benefit package including the KPERS (and KP&F) retirement programs. Any modifications to the KPERS and KP&F programs should not negatively impact public organizations' ability to recruit and retain qualified employees. The City of Lawrence supports full funding of the KPERs and the KP&F retirement systems, taking into consideration the ability to pay and other matters of local concern.

## Annexation

The City of Lawrence supports allowing cities to make their own decisions regarding growth through annexation. We oppose legislation that limits local elected officials' decision-making authority regarding annexation.

## Renewable Energy & Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Legislation

The City supports public and private incentives to encourage investment in renewable energy sources. The City supports the goal of having a 20% renewable portfolio for regulated utilities by 2020. We encourage the State to work with cities to pursue manufacturing facilities for wind, biomass, solar and other energy related industries in Kansas. The City also supports PACE legislation that would allow for the assessment of clean and energy efficient improvements to properties to be assessed on a parcel's property taxes over a period of years.

## Energy Efficiency

The City of Lawrence encourages legislation and programs that support and promote reasonable building energy efficiency improvements in new constructions and building renovations.



## Mental Health Issues & Expansion of Medicaid

State funding for community based mental health services must be restored and expanded across the State in order to provide for a mental health system that is stretched beyond its ability to provide the right care at the right time in the right place for Kansas citizens. The City of Lawrence supports the Kansas Legislature committing to investments to close gaps in the continuum of care and restore the over \$15 million in grant funding that has been cut from Community Mental Health Centers across the State of Kansas. Expansion of Medicaid would also provide coverage for those who have a mental illness so they can access needed mental health treatment in their communities. The City of Lawrence is in support of Medicaid expansion and restoration of the 2016 cuts to Medicaid reimbursement rates which have negatively affected our local hospital and treatment providers.



## Funding for the Arts

The City of Lawrence supports restoration of State funding for the arts. Funding arts initiatives is another form of economic development for the State and municipalities. Research shows the arts industry provides jobs, generates economic activity, produces tax revenue, and enhances a community's quality of life. A recently completed Arts & Economic Prosperity study showed the nonprofit arts and culture sector in Lawrence-Douglas County is a \$30.8 million industry that supports 1,061 full-time equivalent jobs and generates \$2.8 million in local and State government revenue.

## Children's Initiative Fund

The City of Lawrence opposes reductions in the Children's Initiative Fund and opposes transfers from the Children's Fund to the State General Fund. The Children's Initiative Fund which receives proceeds from a national settlement with tobacco companies, funds programs that benefit children.

## AMTRAK Rail Service & Intercity Transit

The City of Lawrence supports existing and enhanced passenger and freight rail service in Kansas. We applaud the efforts of our Kansas Congressional delegation to encourage Amtrak to retain service on portions of the Southwest Chief Route. We support efforts to expand Amtrak service in the state via the Northern Flyer route. We urge the State to support maintenance of passenger train routes and to explore light rail development in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The City encourages state involvement to help neighboring cities and counties use public transit to reduce traffic congestion on State highways.



## Ad Hoc Committee Report on Bonding Practices, Fines, and Fees in Municipal Courts

An ad hoc committee appointed by the Kansas Supreme Court in 2017 to review bonding practices, fines, and fees of Kansas' municipal courts presented its findings in September 2018. The City encourages the Legislature to authorize municipal and district court judges to modify mandatory minimum fines when there is sufficient evidence of the defendant's inability to pay, as the Committee report recommends. The City also supports the Committee's recommendation that municipal court judges should be able to determine whether a driver's license should be suspended, rather than having it automatically suspended by law. Losing the ability to drive can have dire consequences on a defendant's ability to get to and from work, and to handle other critical personal and family obligations. Further, the City supports the recommendation to provide municipal judges with the explicit legal authority to impose nonfinancial conditions on appearance bonds to protect the public's safety and to diminish the discriminatory impact of a money-only bail system on defendants of lesser financial means.

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