

Douglas County 2021 Legislative Statement

Douglas County Initiatives

The annual operating budget serves as the most significant policy document for Douglas County. It determines what services are most crucial, who receives those services, at what cost, and how those costs are paid.

During the past several years, Douglas County's budget has included expanded services and initiatives to help meet critical needs in our community:

- alternatives to incarceration
- behavioral health services

Douglas County has implemented several innovative programs to provide alternatives to incarceration, including pre-trial release, house arrest, substance abuse diversion for women, behavioral health court and drug court. There are also on-going efforts to examine racial disparities in local jail populations and eliminate the criminalization of poverty.

The County was successful in securing state funding in June 2020 for the Treatment and Recovery Campus of Douglas County, construction on the two housing projects—Transitions, and The Cottages—is currently underway. Campus construction is expected to be completed by December 2021.

Douglas County Legislative Priorities

1. Crisis Center of the Treatment & Recovery Campus of Douglas County.

The County's investment in integrated single-entry behavioral health crisis services depends on securing ongoing, annual state funding for the crisis center that will be located on the Treatment and Recovery Campus of Douglas County. State funding for a small portion of community crisis services ensures a coordinating effort to provide crisis services. State funding provides treatment and services for individuals who do not have insurance or are not eligible for any other funding. We support the State's finalization of the State's Crisis Intervention Act to address additional needs of our crisis center.

2. Expansion of the South Lawrence Trafficway (SLT).

We urge the Legislature to continue the commitment expressed in 2020 to fully fund the Eisenhower Transportation Plan, which includes the expansion of the SLT. COVID-19 impacts the state budget but sustained funding of our transportation infrastructure promotes safety, economic recovery, and mobility for our state and region. We oppose any reductions or transfers of transportation program funding.

Douglas County supports and would like to acknowledge these issues:

Support for Public Health. Due to the long-lasting and unforeseen impacts of COVID-19 on both public health and the economy, we support increased funding and resources for the coordination of public health response, including for the deployment of a COVID-19 vaccine. Local public health departments are the front line in this ongoing pandemic; therefore, we need resources for our public health workforce, disease investigation and

other tactics to mitigate disease spread, as well as resources to support a successful vaccine rollout to our communities.

Criminal Justice Reform. We support measures to reduce incarceration, eliminate the criminalization of poverty, increase funding for community-based services, 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 support additional funding for community-based services for adult community corrections and juvenile services including intermediate interventions.

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.

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.

Fiscal Support of District Courts. We continue to urge the legislature to fully fund the state's district court obligations as set out by existing state law. Douglas County continues to pick up ever increasing portions of the district court budget as state funding has failed to keep pace with the fiscal needs of the court system.

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

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

- **Energy Choice:** Prohibits municipalities from adopting policies that ban a certain type or source of energy. Legislation proposed by natural gas companies.
- **Kansas Energy Efficiency Investment Act (KEEIA):** Legislation that seeks to expand the types of energy efficiency programs available to businesses, cities, schools, and residences in Kansas.

Housing. We support counties' home rule authority to address affordable housing needs, which are now at a crisis level, through all available methods, including inclusionary zoning. This includes a repeal of the prohibition in state law that removes this option for local governments. Additionally, recognizing COVID-19's disproportionate impact on low-income Kansans, the County supports additional measures to help Kansans secure ongoing access to safe and affordable housing including the Kansas Eviction Prevention Program. Other, longer-term efforts to help include intervention rental assistance measures as a more effective alternative to rapid rehousing and requiring landlords to offer payment plans prior to eviction of a tenant.

Local Food System Support. We support the recommendations of the State's Local Food and Farm Task force to create a statewide Local Food and Farm Plan with policy and funding recommendations to increase production of locally grown foods.

Sales Tax on Food. We encourage the legislature to follow the Governor's Tax Council recommendation to lower the State sales tax on food for low-income citizens by establishing a food sales tax rebate.

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. We support enabling legislation authorizing a countywide election to form a special district to provide stable and sustainable funding for Peaslee Tech.