

Douglas County 2022 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
- human services

Douglas County has implemented several innovative programs to provide alternatives to incarceration, including indigent defense services and prosecutor-led enhanced diversion. 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, including two housing projects— Transitions, and The Cottages which opened in January 2021. Campus construction is expected to be completed by 2022 with the opening of the Treatment and Recovery Center of Douglas County.

Douglas County Legislative Priorities

1. Treatment & Recovery Center.

The County's investment in integrated single-entry behavioral health crisis services depends on maintaining 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 implementation of the State's Crisis Intervention Act to address additional needs of our crisis center.

2. Competency Restoration & Community Interventions – Douglas County supports efforts to improve the competency restoration process, including additional support and allowances for community-based competency restoration, or consideration of funding to construct another psychiatric hospital in Northeast Kansas. Individuals frequently experience extended stays in Douglas County Correctional Facility for long periods of time awaiting a bed in Larned State Hospital for competency restoration. We support additional funding for community-based services for adult community corrections and juvenile services including intermediate interventions.

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

We urge the Legislature to continue the commitments to fully fund the Eisenhower Transportation Plan, which includes the expansion of the SLT. Passage of the federal Build Back Better infrastructure legislation will positively impact state and county budgets that can sustain funding of our transportation infrastructure needs that 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. The long-lasting impacts of COVID-19 on both public health and the economy, we support sustained availability of funding and resources for the coordination of public health response, and preserving the viability of current vaccination policy. Local public health departments continue to be on 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 for our communities.

Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC). Douglas County applauds the 2021 Legislature's passage of the CCBHC model and encourages the further implementation of the model in 2022.

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.

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 Emergency Rental Assistance (KERA) 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. In relation to our most vulnerable community members, the provision of safe and accessible supportive housing is a top priority. Douglas County is working with the Corporation for Supportive Housing and the KU Center for Public Partnerships to complete a supportive housing, homelessness needs assessment to support a short and long term framework that provides housing to individuals that frequently utilize crisis emergency services due to a lack of housing.

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.

Fiscal Support of District Courts. We support the Office of Judicial Administration’s inclusion of an additional Douglas County District Judge and support staff in the budget. o 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.
- **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.

Sales Tax on Food. We applaud bipartisan efforts to eliminate the state sales tax on food and encourage the Legislature to repeal the state 6.5% sales tax on food.

Food Programs and Systems. Douglas County, and its local Food Policy Council, supports the Kansas Food Action Network’s (KFAN) 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.