

State and National News

Legislature passes bill requiring sex-designated driver's licenses, government restrooms

The Kansas Legislature on Wednesday approved a bill regulating the use of restrooms, locker rooms, and changing areas in state and local government buildings based on biological sex at birth. The bill passed the House 87-36 and the Senate 30-9 after more than six hours of debate, two days after advancing from committee. The bill has enough support to override a potential veto by Gov. Laura Kelly.

The legislation also requires driver's licenses and birth certificates to reflect biological sex at birth. Driver's licenses issued before July 1 that do not comply would be invalid, and the state would notify affected drivers to surrender and replace them. Birth certificate records would also be updated to align with the law.

State and local governments would be required to designate public restrooms and similar facilities by biological

sex and take reasonable steps to prevent access by individuals of the opposite sex. Agencies that fail to comply could face civil penalties of \$25,000 for a first violation and \$125,000 for subsequent violations, with each day considered a separate offense. Individuals who violate the law could receive a notice for a first offense and a \$1,000 fine for a second offense.

The bill was expanded this week to include restroom

provisions following an appeals court ruling that allowed transgender Kansans to change gender markers on driver's licenses while litigation continues. The underlying legal dispute stems from SB 180, the 2023 Women's Bill of Rights, which requires state records to classify individuals as male or female at birth. During floor debate, Democratic lawmakers objected to the timing and process used to add the restroom provi-

sions, saying the bill moved forward without a public hearing or cost analysis. Republican leaders said legislative procedures were followed.

Supporters of the bill said it establishes clear standards for public facilities and state identification documents. Opponents said the legislation would negatively affect transgender Kansans and does not address an existing policy problem.



ACA enrollment in Kansas falls almost 4% after tax credits expire

February 3, 2026 - Fewer Kansans signed up for health insurance through the Affordable Care Act this year following the expiration of enhanced tax credits that helped lower monthly premiums.

As the open enrollment deadline passed at midnight Jan. 15, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services reported that 192,811 Kansans had enrolled in an ACA marketplace plan. That total is down about 3.6%, or 7,235 people, from the 200,046 who had enrolled by the same point last year.

Nationally, about 23 million people enrolled in marketplace coverage for 2026 since open enrollment began Nov. 1, according to CMS. That represents a decline of about 5% from the 24.2 million who en-

rolled for 2025 coverage.

Enrollment increased in several states, including California, Connecticut, Idaho, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico and Texas. However, large declines were reported in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Ohio. Enrollment also fell in neighboring Missouri, Oklahoma, Colorado and Nebraska.

Kansas set a record for ACA enrollment last year, when 200,046 people signed up for coverage by mid-January. That marked a 16.7% increase from 2024 and was nearly three and a half times the number who enrolled when the marketplaces first opened in 2014.

The decline this year was expected after enhanced premium tax credits expired at the end of 2025. Those credits,

first enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly reduced premium costs for many enrollees. Five insurers offering plans in Kansas increased rates this year, with average increases ranging from about 12% to more than 33%.

Public health experts cautioned that enrollment figures released so far do not show how many people will ultimately keep their coverage. Final counts will depend on "effectuated enrollment," which reflects whether enrollees pay their premiums and maintain coverage.

"It doesn't look too bad," said Linda Sheppard, senior analyst at the Kansas Health Institute. "But the big question is what happens when people get their first bill."

Sheppard said some con-

sumers may have enrolled hoping Congress would renew the enhanced tax credits, while others may have been automatically re-enrolled without realizing their premiums would increase. Some may also have selected lower-cost plans that come with higher deductibles or out-of-pocket costs.

"That can be tricky," Sheppard said. "Premiums might be lower, but over time people may find the coverage doesn't meet their needs."

Edwin Park, a research professor at Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families, said enrollment declines may continue as consumers reassess their costs.

"We're seeing enrollment declines, but it's a very incomplete picture," Park said. "As

people see their premiums over the next few months, I think there's going to be increasing rates of disenrollment."

Last year, the consulting firm Manatt Health projected that about 108,000 Kansans could lose ACA coverage over a decade following the expiration of the enhanced tax credits. In 45 Kansas counties, at least 7% of residents are enrolled in marketplace plans, with many of the highest enrollment rates in rural areas.

Health policy group KFF estimated that the expiration of the enhanced tax credits would raise premium payments by an average of 114% for subsidized enrollees who keep the same plan. In 2024, the credits saved enrollees an average of \$705 annually, re-

ducing premiums to \$888. Without the enhanced credits, average annual premiums would have been about \$1,593.

The enhanced tax credits were created under the 2021 COVID-19 stimulus law and later extended through 2025 under the Inflation Reduction Act. Opponents of extending the credits cited Congressional Budget Office estimates that a permanent extension would increase the federal deficit by about \$355 billion over 10 years.

Conservative groups, including the Heritage Foundation, have argued the credits disproportionately benefit higher-income consumers and could encourage employers to drop private coverage in favor of marketplace plans.

House panel approves bill expanding school choice tax credits

Brad Cooper, Sunflower State Journal
February 2, 2026 - A House committee on Monday advanced a bill to allow Kansans to opt in to a new federal tax credit approved by Congress last year to encourage school choice in elementary and second education.

The bill also would expand a similar program at the state level that gives up to \$10 million a year in state tax credits to entice businesses and individuals to donate money to a scholarship program for private schools.

Like the federal program, the state provides tax credits to taxpayers who make donations to organizations that give scholarships to certain students who attend private schools.

Eligibility for the state program includes students with an annual family income that is less than or equal to 250% of the federal poverty level.

The program has been operating in Kansas since 2016.

The bill would expand the state cap for those tax credits to \$20 million a year from \$10 million. State revenue officials said the \$10 million cap was exceeded in 2025.

If it's determined that the amount of credits exceeded 75% of the limit, the cap would be increased by 25% for the succeeding year to a maximum of \$30 million.

The state scholarship may not exceed \$8,000 per eligible student for each school year and shall cover all or a portion of the costs of tuition, fees, and expenses of a qualified school.

Fiscal analysts estimate that the expanded scholarship would cost the state about \$622,000 in fiscal year 2027, \$1.6 million in fiscal year 2028 and \$2.7 million in fiscal year 2029.

Approved credits are expected to reach the \$20 million by fiscal year 2034 when it will cost the state about \$8 million.

Republican state Rep. Steve Huebert of Valley Center fought back against critics of the bill who said it would divert tax dollars directly to private schools were wrong.

"This bill in no way uses public tax dollars to fund anything," he said.

"If you want to at least be accurate, I think it's my understanding it could possibly - through the tax credits that are received - have an impact on the bottom line as far as revenues coming in," Huebert said.

"But no taxpayer dollars are actually used to fund scholarships," he said.

The bill drew opposition last week from public education advocates, who renewed their criticism of the current law, which they say uses tax

dollars to subsidize private schools.

They said the state should not expand the tax scholarship program at a time when the state isn't fully funding special education in public schools.

Democratic state Rep. Linda Featherston of Overland Park unsuccessfully tried to amend the bill so it would allow all student to be enrolled in schools participating in the scholarship program.

Featherston said her amendment arose from a situation in Johnson County where a kindergarten student was not admitted to a private school because their parents were gay.

"I don't think I can be part of state-sponsored discrimination," she said.

Republican state Rep. Susan Estes of Wichita, chair of the House education committee, opposed the amendment.

"I fear for the impact that this bill could have because sometimes you might have a parent with a special-needs student that cannot be addressed by that school," she said.

"I think it would be very difficult to require a school to accept what they're not ready to handle," Estes said.

Featherston also tried to amend the bill so the tax credit cap would

not be expanded so long as special education was not fully funded.

The amendment was declared not germane to the underlying bill.

"I don't think we should be using tax dollars to fund other schools when we are not funding our most vulnerable students in the state," Featherston said.

Separately, the bill would allow the state to participate in a new program that allows individuals to claim up to \$1,700 in federal tax credits for contributions to organizations that give scholarships to students to attend private schools.

Eligibility for scholarships is limited to students whose family income is below 300% of their area median income.

Testimony from a recent hearing on the bill indicated that in 2025, the area median gross income for Kansas was \$97,800, meaning students could qualify for scholarships with family incomes up to \$293,400.

The scholarships can only be used for certain expenses, including:

- Tuition, fees, books, supplies, other equipment, academic tutoring and special needs services for students enrolled in an elementary or secondary school student at a public, private or religious school.

- Room and board, uniforms,

transportation, and supplementary items and services if those expenses are required or provided by a public, private or religious school.

- Computers, equipment or internet access and related services if used by the student or their family while the student is enrolled in elementary or secondary schools.

Lawmakers were told that residents in states that don't participate in the program can still make donations and claim the federal tax credit, but those contributions would go to scholarship-granting organizations in other states.

So far, at least six states — Idaho, Nevada, Indiana, Mississippi, Georgia and Montana — have officially opted into the federal tax credit program.

Education Week asked the governors of all 50 states and the mayor of Washington, D.C., whether they would opt into the federal program.

As of Jan. 23, the magazine reported that 20 governors said they plan to opt into the federal tax-credit scholarship, and four have said they won't participate.

Twenty-six governors and the mayor of the District of Columbia had not decided or announced decisions, according to Education Week's analysis.

State News Briefs

National "Declaration 1776" Exhibition on Display in Nine Kansas Communities in February

Topeka, KS - Humanities Kansas (HK) announces the nine Kansas communities that are hosting the "Declaration 1776: The Big Bang of Modern Democracy" exhibition from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History in February 2026: Abilene, Atchison, Dodge City, Iola, Kansas City, Lawrence, Overland Park, Salina, and Topeka. These Kansas communities are part of the 47 locations that will host the exhibition through December 31, 2026. A full schedule with dates and locations can be found at humanitieskansans.org.

When the Declaration of Independence was issued, the idea that "all men are created equal" was revolutionary. With this seminal document, the Founding Fathers unleashed an open-ended driving force that would shape modern history. Around the world, other countries have declared independence taking the US Declaration of 1776 as a model.

"Declaration 1776" uses primary sources to illustrate how Americans and people across the world have been inspired by the Declaration in their pursuit of equality and self-determination. The Kansas "Declaration 1776" traveling exhibition includes a section called "Kansas 1776," which explores what was happening on the land that would become the state of Kansas 250 years ago.

"Declaration 1776" will be on exhibit at the following locations in February:

- February 7-March 8, 2026, at Boot Hill Museum in Dodge City, Bowls Fine Arts Center in Iola, Kansas City Kansas Public Library, and Kansas

Wesleyan University in Salina.

- February 16-August 31, 2026, at the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

- Through March 15, 2026, at the Kansas Studies Institute, Johnson County Community College in Overland Park.

- Through December 31, 2026, at Benedictine College in Atchison, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home in Abilene, and the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka.

"Declaration 1776" is a one-of-a-kind opportunity for Kansas communities to participate in the national commemoration of America's 250th right in their own hometowns," said Mulvihill. "We look forward to robust community conversations about America's founding document and its impact on the world."

The exhibition is part of "Declaration at 250," a Humanities Kansas initiative exploring America's founding document and its impact on the world. Additional "Declaration at 250" events include "Declaration Conversations," community readings and discussions of the Declaration of Independence.

The "Declaration 1776: The Big Bang of Modern Democracy" traveling exhibition is sponsored in part by the State of Kansas through the Kansas Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts and the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund.

For more information about "Declaration 1776" in Kansas visit humanitieskansans.org.

Kobach announces AG's Office fully staffed, serving more Kansans than ever before

TOPEKA - (Feb. 2, 2026) - Kansas Attorney General Kris Kobach testified today before

the Senate Ways and Means' Executive Subcommittee, reporting to lawmakers that his office is fully staffed with attorneys and serving more Kansans than ever.

"When I walked into the Office of Attorney General in January 2023, there were 35 attorneys. Today, there are 60 attorneys in the Attorney General's Office," Kobach said.

The Attorney General also announced that the Office of the Attorney General is representing more Kansas counties in appellate courts than ever before. The AG's office now represents 62 counties, compared to 44 in FY '22 during the prior administration. That's a 41% increase.

In addition, his office recovered \$85 million last year for the state of Kansas and its citizens in new and old consumer protection settlements and through restitution in criminal matters.

Insurance Commissioner Vicki Schmidt proposes law to help with costs of breast cancer screenings

Topeka, Kan. - Kansas Insurance Commissioner Vicki Schmidt, today, testified in support of SB 409, a bill introduced by her department that would eliminate the out-of-pocket expenses for supplemental and diagnostic breast cancer detection services including MRIs, ultrasounds, and diagnostic mammograms. These additional procedures, frequently prescribed following inconclusive mammogram results, may be due to abnormalities or dense breast tissue, which affects nearly half of all women over 40.

"As a breast cancer survivor, early detection saved my life, but in so many cases additional screening tools are needed to find suspicious areas," said Kansas Insurance Commissioner Vicki Schmidt. "No matter the reason - be it

abnormalities, dense breast tissue, or other concerns - Kansans should not have to pay higher out-of-pocket costs for these screenings."

The bill would eliminate cost-sharing barriers. If an insurance plan already covers diagnostic and supplemental breast imaging, SB 409 ensures there are no out-of-pocket costs seeking those necessary tests.

The bill was heard today in the Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Insurance. The hearing proceeds the Susan G. Komen Day of Action on the Capital scheduled for Wednesday, February 4, where Commissioner Vicki Schmidt will provide remarks.

The full text of the bill can be found here: <https://www.kslegislature.gov/>

Evergy to award Hometown Grants for community impact projects

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - February 2, 2026 - Non-profit agencies have a shot at receiving up to \$10,000 through Evergy's Connecting for Good Hometown Grants Program.

This year's Connecting for Good Hometown Grants will support a project or program for organizations that focus on basic needs. Examples include, but aren't limited to, food insecurity, housing, hygiene, and bill payment. The one-time \$10,000 grant is geared toward expanding capacity or special projects outside of normal operations.

Qualifying organizations can apply now through March 4. Evergy's Community Relations team will select the top ten projects to be put up for public voting through the Evergy Facebook page. The three agencies with the most votes will receive up to \$10,000 each. The organizations must serve residents in Evergy's service area.

"The Connecting for Good

Hometown Grants program is another way we can help communities build stability, strengthen families, and create a foundation for long-term well-being," said Elizabeth Danforth, Evergy's director of corporate social impact. "We want to help organizations that are out there every day helping our customers with basic needs."

Online voting will take place March 16 - 25. Evergy will announce the three Hometown Grant recipients on March 31.

Completed applications must be received by 5 p.m. Central time on March 4, 2026. Evergy will select ten finalists after thoroughly reviewing project proposals. They will be based on criteria set forth in the application guidelines. The top ten projects will be posted for public voting on Evergy's Facebook page. The top three vote recipients will be named the 2026 winners and receive up to \$10,000 each.

More information and full rules and eligibility requirements can be found by visiting <https://www.evergy.com/landing/hometown-grant/rules>.

January Total Tax Collections at \$988.2 Million; 1.2% Above Estimate

TOPEKA - The State of Kansas ends January 2026 with total tax collections at \$988.2 million. That is \$12.2 million, or 1.2%, above the estimate. Total tax collections were up 4.8% from January 2025.

Individual income tax collections were \$542.3 million. That is \$7.3 million, or 1.4% above the estimate. Individual income tax collections were up 8.4% from January 2025. Corporate income tax collections were \$86.2 million. That is \$16.2 million, or 23.2% above the estimate, and up 18.1% from January 2025.

Combined retail sales and compensating use tax receipts