

Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce 2020 Kansas Legislative Priorities Report

Transportation: The KC Chamber was pleased that the legislature passed a comprehensive transportation program, coined “Ike, the Eisenhower Legacy Transportation Program.” The program is a \$10B, 10-year rolling program with projects being selected every two years. The program directs all remaining TWORKS projects to be completed by 2023, prioritizes preservation projects and expansion capacity, and authorizes 5% of funds to be used for alternative delivery, among other provisions.

The Chamber commends the legislature’s passage of this bill that provides the needed flexibility to create a 21st century transportation system vital for moving people and goods, and critical to Kansas’s economic recovery following the coronavirus shutdown. The Chamber’s Transportation Initiative stresses the necessity for adequate funding, strategic planning, and innovation to ensure Kansas’ transportation systems adapt to changing mobility needs of business and workforce. Moving forward, the KC Chamber calls on the legislature to find alternative funding strategies to ensure adequate future investment in our transportation systems.

Covid-19 Liability Protections: Despite a complicated and chaotic process, the KC Chamber was pleased to see the Legislature pass Covid-19 related liability protections for health care providers, PPE makers and businesses. During these uncertain times, our business community needs a sense of certainty that if all reasonable attempts are made at safety, they will not be subject to frivolous lawsuits. Targeted legislation like this provides much-needed stability for the business community during highly uncertain times.

Workforce Opportunities for Returning Citizens: Despite progress being made on a suite of criminal justice reform bills that were recommended to the legislature by the Kansas Criminal Justice Reform Commission, the coronavirus pandemic halted the prospects of a reform package being passed. The KC Chamber was encouraged to see the legislature look at common sense reforms such as driver’s license reform for individuals unable to afford fines and an identification card bill that would have expanded access for justice-involved individuals to gain a state-issued ID. The KC Chamber believes that expanding opportunities for justice-involved individuals is vital to breaking the cycle of violence and corresponding poverty and growing the pool of workforce for Kansas businesses. The KC Chamber will continue to work on these reforms with the Commission and in the 2021 legislative session.

Workforce Development: Under some tight circumstances on a one-day Sine Die session, the Legislature successfully passed some workforce development bills the KC Chamber supported. However, due to a variety of reasons including technicalities, some provisions were vetoed by the governor. Despite these near-wins and progress on other bills in the legislative session, COVID-19 derailed bipartisan efforts to enact several of the measures. Some of these provisions included occupational licensing reciprocity, an expanded junior college and technical school scholarship program and a liability protection bill for employers who engage in internships.



KANSAS

Legislative Update

Kansas Promise Scholarship: The Kansas Promise Scholarship program was passed on Sine Die as part of a larger bill but vetoed would have expanded scholarship opportunities for Kansas high school graduates who wish to attend a junior college or technical college.

Concurrent and Dual Enrollment: Passed on Sine Die but also a part of the veto, the bill would have allowed for school districts to pay tuition for students who complete concurrent or dual enrollment coursework at a school of higher education.

Licensing Reciprocity: The streamlined process for occupational license reciprocity would have allowed military spouses who hold a valid out-of-state occupational license to practice in Kansas and also streamline the process to receive a Kansas occupational license. Despite progress, the bill was a casualty of the coronavirus pandemic's shortening of the legislative session.

Liability Protections: Despite much progress made on a bill to grant liability protections for businesses that wish to engage in an internship, apprenticeship or other program with a school, the bill was derailed due to the pandemic. The KC Chamber looks forward to working on this bill in the 2021 session.

T-21 and Healthy KC: Another casualty of the shortened legislative session due to the coronavirus pandemic is any legislation to confirm the federal government's change of the tobacco purchase age to 21 and a ban on flavored tobacco and nicotine-delivery products in the state. The KC Chamber, through the leadership of its Healthy KC Initiative, encourages the legislature to pass policy measures confirming the federal government's tobacco purchase age of 21 and allowing the state to capture federal dollars and also encourages the legislature to consider a ban on flavored tobacco. Research overwhelmingly indicates that flavored tobacco and nicotine-delivery products leads to addiction. Research also overwhelmingly supports the fact that a person is much more likely to become addicted to nicotine if used before the age of 21. The Chamber looks forward to working with legislators on this issue next session.

Medicaid Expansion: Despite hopes at the beginning of the session for bipartisan cooperation on a Medicaid Expansion agreement, the Chamber was disappointed to see the legislature fail to act on a Medicaid Expansion bill. The Chamber has been a top voice for Medicaid Expansion for several years and continues to call on the Legislature to support programs that provide greater access to coverage for uninsured individuals which will prepare the state's Medicaid system to maximize federal funding opportunities.

Thank you to Kansas legislative leaders for their support of these priorities

The business-friendly policy priorities the KC Chamber advocates for on the behalf of our over-2,000 members are vital to maintaining economic vibrancy of our metropolitan region. The KC Chamber thanks Kansas legislators, legislative leadership and policy makers who supported these business policy priorities as adopted by the KC Chamber and encourages the Legislature to maintain these critical legislative victories and to work next session to expand Medicaid, increase workforce development initiatives, and grow Kansas' economic vibrancy which will foster prosperity across the state.