

2024 State Policy Agenda

Mid-America Regional Council

About MARC

The Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) is the association of city and county governments and Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) serving the bi-state Kansas City region, including Cass, Clay, Jackson, Platte and Ray counties in Missouri; and Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami and Wyandotte counties in Kansas. MARC brings local officials, nonprofit organizations, economic development organizations and other groups together to address an efficient and equitable transportation system; a healthy environment; support for vulnerable older adults; a strong early learning system for families and the economy; a competitive economy; safe, secure and healthy communities; affordable housing to meet a range of needs and efficient local government services.

About this policy platform

This policy platform represents a consensus of policy positions and priorities of the Kansas City region as discussed and discerned in various committees, working groups and public engagement forums supported by MARC. It is approved by the elected leaders comprising the MARC Board of Directors as a statement of regional consensus and does not necessarily reflect the views of individual members of the board.

The Missouri General Assembly and the Kansas State Legislature are encouraged to consider the critical needs in the Kansas City region as they deliberate policy issues and appropriate funds for these priority areas of concern in FY2024:

Local government authority

The region supports maintaining home rule authority for local governments. Local governments provide critical infrastructure and services to residents and businesses. Their ability to budget for, and make effective use of tax and other resources, should not be limited by state regulation.

Efficient transportation

The Kansas City region has an extensive network of highway, bridge and roadway infrastructure and an expanding network of facilities for other modes of transportation. The region supports investing in the safety and integrity of current systems; expanded multi-modal transportation, particularly public transit, to support travel to jobs in suburban locations; active transportation to meet both travel and health needs of an expanding population; and freight infrastructure to support a growing logistics industry.

Key policy positions:

- **Transportation Safety:** Strengthen policies and funding to improve enforcement, education, engineering, and emergency responses strategies to eliminate or reduce roadway fatalities and serious injury crashes.
- **Transportation Funding:** Maintain existing transportation funding programs to address the states' growing transportation needs and ensure that the Kansas City region receives appropriate resources as a major economic hub for both Missouri and Kansas. Support expanded funding for multimodal transportation including public transit, active transportation, ports and freight.

Healthy environment

The states' support for a healthy environment includes addressing climate resiliency and energy conservation; solid waste and recycling; water resources and air quality. The Kansas City region is committed to creating and sustaining a healthy environment.

Key policy positions:

- **Energy conservation and renewable energy:** Encourage greater investment in energy conservation, renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies. Encourage investments in energy-efficient housing and building energy retrofits through strategies such as green banks, lender education programs and utility partnerships. The states should work with local officials in the Kansas City region to implement the federal Solar for All funding to help low-income households increase the comfort and affordability of housing.
- **Solid waste and recycling:** Support policies and regulations that enable local governments to address solid waste and recycling in ways that respond to their community's needs.
- **Water resource protection/climate adaptation/hazard mitigation:** Encourage the development of state and local plans and support investments in infrastructure to protect water resources, build climate and economic resilience, and ensure that residents and businesses are protected from the risk of loss of life or damage to property due to more extreme weather conditions.
- **Air quality:** Support the Kansas City region's efforts to reduce ozone and fine particulate matter (PM2.5) pollution and maintain its status as a Clean Air Region.

Quality early learning

The availability of early childhood services for infants, toddlers, pre-K students and before/after school care for K-8 students is at a critical level in Missouri and Kansas. Federal COVID-19 recovery funding for child care is set to expire in 2024, further creating a crisis for the states' economy and education systems. The lack of affordable child care affects the entire state, including employers families.

Key policy positions:

Affordable child care:

- Address the loss of COVID-19 funds in 2024 to enable public and private licensed child care providers to stabilize and expand the supply of quality programs charging affordable rates.
- Reduce barriers to child care subsidy access and increase child care subsidy reimbursement rates for low-income working families.
- Help families who qualify for, and those slightly above, subsidy income limits so low-income working parents may accept increases in wages and not lose their child care benefit.
- Support the child care tax credit (Missouri).
- Support the continuation of the Children's Initiatives Fund (Kansas).
- Expand funding for At-Risk Pre-K.

Qualified workforce:

- Support strategies to develop a pipeline of human capital, including certification, recruitment, retention and funding to support higher compensation.

Strong families:

- Increase access to evidence-based home visitation programs.

Broadband infrastructure and digital equity

The states will be receiving billions of federal dollars over the next three years to support investments in broadband infrastructure and digital equity. While much of the Kansas City region is reasonably well served by existing internet service providers (ISPs), there are urban, suburban and rural areas with inadequate infrastructure or where the presence of one provider has resulted in high costs to consumers relative to the quality of the broadband service. The Kansas City region's economy depends upon reliable, affordable broadband for businesses and residents. Many anchor institutions (schools, hospitals, libraries, local governments, etc.) lack access to quality broadband for their facilities or lack the resources to connect in ways that enable more efficient operations. While the majority of households have broadband subscriptions, there are a number of households that, due

to lack of training, lack of resources or inadequate infrastructure, are not able to make use of this important technology. Many of those households reside in urban core neighborhoods.

Key policy positions:

- **Address metro area gaps:** Both states should invest a portion of federal infrastructure funding to address the needs in the Kansas City region, including urban, suburban and rural areas. Funds should be allocated to support anchor institutions in the region to improve access to reliable, quality broadband and to connect important facilities together.
- **Targeted populations:** Both states should support digital access for low-income households, older adults and other target populations for education, employment, telehealth, civic engagement and social interaction through support for devices, internet connections and digital training.

Affordable housing

The Kansas City region, like much of the nation, lacks an adequate supply of affordable housing. State actions could help to address this critical need.

Key policy positions:

- **Local housing development tools:** Support policy and innovative strategies to achieve safe, stable and attainable housing. Enable local jurisdictions to dedicate public funds to support the development, rehabilitation and preservation of attainable housing.
- **Low-Income Housing Tax Credit:** Support the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program for the acquisition, rehabilitation and construction of rental housing for lower-income households.
- **Related household expense relief:** Support policy and innovative strategies that lower the cost of housing through energy efficiency and transportation improvements.

Safe, secure and healthy communities

The Kansas City region has a strong network of emergency medical service (EMS) agencies, as well as local public health services critical to healthy residents and communities. While each local public health department offers different programs and support based on the needs of their service area, all public health focuses on disease prevention and health education.

Last year in July, the national 988 program launched. Agencies across the nation, including in Kansas and Missouri, are answering more calls in response to suicide and behavioral health crises.

Health care insurance is also critical to ensuring that all residents are able to live healthy, productive lives. The state of Missouri is working to fully implement Medicaid expansion for those eligible; the state of Kansas has yet to take action to enable more residents to have access to health insurance. Community health workers have become an important part of the health care system, supporting patients with chronic diseases and facing barriers due to social determinants of health (food and housing insecurity, mental health challenges and domestic violence).

Key policy positions:

- **Emergency medical services:** Support reimbursement payments and program regulations that enable EMS agencies to provide the highest quality pre-emergency care. EMS agencies in the Kansas City area work closely with one another, both within their home state and across the state line.

Missouri: Support regulations that enable EMS agencies to ensure a quality time critical diagnosis program.

Kansas: Support EMS agencies to establish community paramedic programs to improve care to patients in their homes, reduce the need for costly transports and save scarce hospital emergency room resources.

- **988/opioid settlement/mental health:** Support the full implementation of the essential elements of an integrated crisis system, including the 988 call centers, mobile crisis response teams and crisis stabilization facilities. Focus opioid settlement and federal resources to reduce deaths from opioids and heroin by expanding behavioral health services for children, youth and adults and implementing harm reduction programs.
- **Community health worker reimbursement:** Support allowing agencies that use community health workers to be reimbursed through Medicaid and other public health care programs.
- **Medicaid:** Health insurance is important to communities to support a healthy population.

Kansas: Authorize the expansion of Medicaid in Kansas. Enable Medicaid reimbursement for community health worker services to connect patients to resources.

Thriving older adults and communities

As residents in the region grow older, they may require services to remain in the community.

Key policy positions:

- **Funding for older adult programs:** Provide additional funding and flexibility for regional and local agencies to respond to specific needs within their service areas.

Missouri: The Missouri Senior Services Growth and Development Program requires funding to allow the Area Agencies on Aging to support the infrastructure and technology needed to scale programs and services to the growing population. A funding cliff is anticipated after federal COVID-19 relief dollars are exhausted.

- **Maintain programs for older adults:** Restore programs important to older adult health and well-being that have been demonstrated to be effective.

Missouri: Restore funding for the Missouri Rx Program, offering assistance to older adults where their health insurance coverage was inadequate to meet prescription costs. Maintain the Adult Protective Services Program initially funded through ARPA dollars to serve older adults at risk of abuse.

Kansas: The state should continue to support the Kansas Department of Transportation's Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program, which helps older adults with essential support in securing services.

- **Food security:** Continue to support enrollment in the federal SNAP and WIC programs to enable low-income families and seniors to afford healthy food.

Missouri: The state should continue strong support of statewide home-delivered meals infrastructure enhancements.