

## **2025 Federal 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. The platform 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.

Regional councils have the unique ability to efficiently coordinate and plan across jurisdictional boundaries. The federal government depends upon regional councils and metropolitan planning organizations like MARC to distribute and expend federal funds so they simultaneously achieve both federal and regional goals.

#### **Congressional support needed to reauthorize federal laws and extend programs**

MARC receives federal funds directly from many federal agencies and through Missouri and Kansas agencies. (A listing of the largest grants and their federal grantors follows in the Appendix to this document.) The largest proportion of the funding received is sub-granted, or passed through, to local governments, early childhood education providers, nonprofit organizations serving older adults, meal providers for older adults, etc.

Members of Congress are encouraged to reauthorize important federal laws supporting infrastructure, regional and local economies, older adult services and early education. Members of Congress are also asked 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 FY2025:

**Among the many federal laws authorizing funds to meet national, regional and local priorities, action will be needed in 2025 to advance reauthorization on these important laws:**

The federal transportation law, the **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)** was signed on December 4, 2021, providing additional funding for the nation's surface transportation system. The 5-year IIJA Act authorized \$305 billion through FY2026 for the nation's surface transportation infrastructure. Discussions in Congress are expected to begin in 2025 on reauthorization of the federal transportation law, with a focus on fully funding the Highway Trust Fund and ensuring that electric vehicles using the nation's highways pay a fair share toward infrastructure maintenance.

**The National Federal Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)** enables FEMA to assist states and local communities, business owners and residents to recover from natural disasters. The NFIP Act of 2019 was extended to September 30, 2022, and then again to December 23, 2022, and again to September 26, 2024, and December 20, 2024. Without reauthorization or extension beyond December 20, 2024, this critically important federal program will end.

**Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA)** provides authorization for important water resource projects including flood control and waterway restoration implemented by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Both the House and Senate approved 5-year extensions through FY2028, although Congress has not taken final action. The week of December 2, it was reported that both the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Senate Environment and Public Works Committee have approved reauthorization legislation, which is now being advanced for approval (S. 4367).

**Older Americans Act** was reauthorized in 2020 for 5 years, providing funds for services to assist vulnerable older adults to remain independent in their communities with meals, transportation, in-home care and other support. President Trump signed the law, authorizing appropriations through FY2024. Both the House and Senate have reached agreement on a reauthorization bill, S. 4776.

**Economic Development Administration Reauthorization Act** of 2024 was passed by the Senate on March 12, 2024, but has not been agreed to by the Senate and signed by the President. The EDA is an agency of the US Department of Commerce and was authorized 20 years ago to help the nation invest in economic development of distressed urban and rural areas. Reauthorization would modernize programs to include workforce development, disaster recovery, manufacturing and new technologies. Reauthorization is included in the WRDA legislation being considered this month by both the House and Senate.

**Improving Head Start for School Readiness.** The program is administered by the US Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Head Start. President Bush signed the last

5-year reauthorization in 2007. Funds are awarded directly to grantees for 5-year time frames. MARC's new 5-year grant was awarded in 2023.

**The Farm Bill** was last authorized in 2018, and Congress was not able to reach agreement on its regular 5-year schedule in 2023. The current extension expired on September 30, 2024, and farmers, governors and other stakeholders are urging Congress to pass a new bill that supports agriculture and nutrition programs.

The **Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act (WIOA)**, which supports the public workforce programs, is being advanced this month in Congress. The last reauthorization occurred in 2014 (S. 6655).

## **MARC 2025 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES**

**The following policy priorities align with MARC programs and services:**

### **Transportation**

The region supports investing in the highway, bridge and roadway infrastructure; 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.

**MARC Role:** MARC is designated by the states of Missouri and Kansas as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the 9-county region. MARC works with state and local officials and other stakeholders to plan the region's transportation system and assist in programming the use of federal and state resources to implement the region's transportation plans. MARC's update of the region's long-range transportation plan, Connected KC 2050, will be completed in 2025.

**Key policy positions:** Encourage Congress to support IIA reauthorization, legislation and appropriations that allow for:

- Safe and efficient transportation with appropriate and strategic consideration to regional economic and mobility needs and priorities. Funding is needed for all modes of transportation, including public transit and active transportation. Congress has authorized considerable resources through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for transportation infrastructure. Beyond this special legislation, sustainable and innovative investment solutions to fully fund the Highway Trust Fund through multiple appropriate revenue sources are critical to protect and preserve our transportation system.
- Continued efforts to reduce freight and passenger train bottlenecks throughout the nation, including support for the national rail passenger network and operation of

the Southwest Chief Amtrak route, the Missouri River Runner and the proposed Heartland Flyer.

- Expanded funding and access to expertise for planning, designing and building policy and infrastructure frameworks to cope with likely changes induced by the expanding use of electric, connected and autonomous vehicles.
- Continue to rely on local government officials working through MARC to guide the use of surface transportation funds to address priority needs in the Kansas City region.

## Environment

### Minimizing the Costs of Extreme Weather

The Kansas City region is confronted with a variety of risks and vulnerabilities from the global rise in air and sea temperatures, including flooding, severe thunderstorms, drought and extreme heat. In March 2021, the MARC Board of Directors adopted the Kansas City Regional Climate Action Plan to lead and support a coordinated, equity-centered effort among local governments, institutions and others to increase the region's resilience to these risks. The focus of the regional plan comports with the goals of proposed federal efforts to comprehensively address climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience initiatives tied to energy efficiency, renewable energy, public and active transportation, fleet electrification, resilient infrastructure improvements, sustainable agriculture and food systems, integrated watershed management, innovation and finance, urban heat mitigation and green infrastructure. MARC has received federal funds to update and extend its prior work to create a Comprehensive Climate Action Plan, which will be completed in 2025.

**Key policy position:** MARC supports reauthorization and modernization of the Federal Flood Insurance Program, which is set to expire on December 20, 2024, including new mapping of the 100-year floodplain to ensure areas throughout the nation are aware of the hazards faced through increased flood risks.

MARC serves local governments in air and water quality, stormwater management, solid waste, green infrastructure and energy conservation program areas.

**Key policy position:** Federal support for water and wastewater system improvements is essential for local communities to ensure adequate water supply and water quality and to achieve the multiple benefits that accrue from effective water resource management.

Federal management of national waterways and investment in key flood control and ecosystem restoration projects are critical to the Kansas City region.

**Key policy position:** MARC supports funding and authorization requests for flood control and watershed planning and projects in the Kansas City area as outlined by MOARK, the

Missouri and Associated Rivers Network. Projects include flood risk evaluation, green infrastructure, ecosystem restoration, bank stabilization, and river navigation.

**Key policy position:** Federal support for energy conservation and renewable energy sources are important to enhance our region's quality of life and lower operating costs for residents and businesses.

## Economic Development

MARC has received support from the U.S Economic Development Administration since 2006 and serves as sponsor for the region's Economic Development District. In 2024, MARC actively participated in helping the region achieve EDA designation as a Tech Hub. In addition, EDA grants have been instrumental in supporting important economic development projects attracting businesses and expanding the region's job base. EDA also coordinates federal economic development assistance to communities affected by natural disasters to promote their long-term recovery and resiliency to future events.

**Key policy position:** The Congressional delegation is urged to approve reauthorization of the EDA as an important federal agency helping communities and regions advance economic progress. Through EDA and National Science Foundation designations, the Kansas City region and the states of Missouri and Kansas have the opportunity to broaden and strengthen important industries, including life sciences and the biologics industry, critical minerals and electric vehicle battery manufacturing, cybersecurity and other emerging technologies. Continued support for EDA and federal investment in regional economies results in stronger economies, better paying jobs, more widely-shared economic benefits and less dependency upon federal resources in the future.

**Key policy position:** The Congressional delegation is urged to support EDA and NSF grants for investments in emerging industries in the Kansas City region, in particular, bioscience and critical minerals.

The Kansas City region has been selected as one of 16 regions across North America to host the 2026 World Cup. The event and related activities are expected to attract thousands of international and US visitors. Federal support will be important to ensure that the region's infrastructure, public safety, health and medical and other systems are able to meet the increased demands of the events and showcase the region to the world during the summer months of 2026.

**Key policy position:** The Congressional delegation is urged to support resources for the Kansas City region as a host city to address safety and security requirements and transportation system needs to fully support the 2026 World Cup.

## Public health

Congress has supported state and local public health agencies to meet the population's health needs. These resources have been essential to maintaining the nation's public health infrastructure.

**Key policy position:** Congress should continue to support foundational capabilities for disease surveillance, epidemiology and lab capacity; the capacity to respond to all hazards preparedness and response; and equity to end health disparities and promote optimal health.

## Early education

**Background:** One of the greatest challenges facing the return of workers to the labor market is the availability of affordable childcare. Data shows that many women who were in the workforce prior to the pandemic have not been able to return due to the lack of childcare. Low wages and limited benefits have resulted in fewer professionals entering the field of early education and many in the field are now leaving due to low wages and stress of being essential workers. The Child Care Development Block Grant program has been instrumental in enabling many childcare programs to continue to operate and to assist low-income working parents to stay in the workforce.

Research has shown that the Head Start program with its comprehensive approach to child development and family support has tremendous long-term impact on helping low-income families succeed. However, despite serving over a million low-income children nationwide, fewer than half of eligible children are able to benefit from Head Start Preschool and less than 8% participate in Early Head Start.

MARC has worked with broad community interests for 35 years to address early education needs in the Kansas City region. Since 2005, MARC has served as the grantee for the Head Start program serving 2,400 children and their families each year.

**Key policy position:** The federal government should support:

- Increased funding for Head Start to serve more eligible children with comprehensive services and enhance support for the Head Start workforce.
- Full funding for the Child Care and Development Grant Program to help low-income working households to return to or remain in the labor force.
- Increased funding for Preschool Development Grants to allow states to implement improvements to their systems.
- Making the Child and Dependent Care Tax credit fully refundable and adaptable so families receive credit for the types of childcare they choose.

- Continue to appropriate funds for the Refugee Family Childcare Microenterprise Development Program

## Older adults

The Older Americans Act provides resources to support vulnerable older adults in urban, suburban and rural areas to keep them in their homes and avoid expensive institutional care. The need for home delivered meals, in-home services, caregiver services, adult protective services and other supports are critical to address the needs of this large and growing population group.

MARC serves as the Area Agency on Aging for the region's five Missouri counties and has established a Community Care Hub bridging community-based organizations and health care entities to assess and address health related social needs. The Mid-America Community Support Network (CSN), a Community Care Hub, is a person-centered care model meeting people where they are and in their lived environments.

**Key policy position:** As the nation's number and needs of older adults continue to increase, additional funding is needed to serve this population through the Older Americans Act to promote healthy aging and wrap-around services allowing older adults to age in place. Funding for nutrition must grow to mirror an increasing trend in the number of eligible older adults, to offset provider food costs, and to address food insecurity.

## Food Security

MARC operates the Double Up Heartland program across Missouri and Kansas, supporting SNAP households to double the value of their SNAP dollars in purchasing fresh, healthy produce at area grocery stores and farmers markets. The program matches the SNAP household dollar with one dollar of federal grant funds from the USDA and one dollar of philanthropic funds.

**Key policy position:** The Congressional delegation should support the reauthorization of the Farm Bill with provisions to support the Midwest region's farmers and maintain important nutrition programs for the health of families and older adults with limited incomes.

## Housing

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of affordable housing was already at crisis levels in many places, and those on limited incomes have continued to feel the pressure of rising

housing costs. Following the pandemic, increasing interest rates and higher housing costs created a shortage of for-sale housing, depressing the nation's homeownership rates.

MARC works with the Greater Kansas City Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in building the Regional Housing Partnership to enhance systems for creating and preserving affordable and accessible housing. Federal programs that help make housing affordable – such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, HOME Investment Partnerships Program, Historic Preservation Tax Credit, public housing and housing vouchers – have enabled millions of low-income households to secure safe and adequate housing and are critical in continuing this work. Additionally, new programs like the Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Housing (PRO Housing) allow for regional collaboration in creating programs and policies that encourage housing diversity and affordability. MARC submitted a collaborative application with community partners to take advantage of this federal program.

**Key policy position:** Congress is urged to continue to appropriate funds for housing for low-income persons and families and to encourage cross-jurisdictional collaboration and innovation for housing programs. Congressional members are also encouraged to support initiatives to increase the supply of attainable housing for all Americans.

## Workforce development

Since its adoption in 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act has never been fully funded at levels authorized in its legislation. The funding formula works against urban and suburban job centers with a significant employment base and many employers facing challenges in finding trained talent. The formula looks at the number of workers rather than available jobs. Business engagement and services metrics should be included in the program's funding formula to ensure support for employers is taken into consideration when allocating funds.

**Key policy position:** MARC supports the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act with funding at the authorized level and with particular focus on helping workforce boards assist businesses in finding and training potential job seekers.

MARC supports the following goals to support the capacity of higher education institutions to meet the needs of both workers and employers to stabilize and grow our regional economy.

**Key policy positions:**

- Invest in community college-business partnerships as part of Higher Education Act reauthorization.



- Modernize and expand apprenticeship programs and ensure sufficient funding for workforce systems to assist businesses in development and implementation of such programs.
- Expand Pell Grant eligibility to cover high-quality, short-term credential programs; increase funding for career and technical education and adult basic education.

### **Broadband / Connectivity**

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) supported by the Federal Communications Commission assists low-income households to enroll in affordable broadband services - essential for working, learning and community connections. The program's resources were depleted in April 2024. While Congress has appropriated sizable funds for broadband infrastructure and digital equity programs, funds are not included for affordable broadband subscription services.

**Key policy position:** MARC supports an extension of the Affordable Connectivity Program.

### **Homeland security**

MARC has served an important role since 2001 in bringing community stakeholders together through the Regional Homeland Security Coordinating Committee to plan for, prevent, mitigate and respond to incidents involving terrorism and natural disasters.

**Key policy position:** MARC supports the continued designation and financial support of the Kansas City region as an Urban Areas Security Initiative region to ensure the area's ongoing capacity to protect, respond to, and recovery from man-made and natural disaster events.

### **Emergency services and public safety**

MARC brings the region's local Emergency Medical Services' agencies and 34 hospitals together to ensure quality pre-hospital emergency care. The Mid-America Regional Council Emergency Rescue Committee ensures the region has the capabilities to respond to large scale incidents, having built relationships and capabilities to work across city, county and state line boundaries.

**Key policy position:** Medicare and Medicaid programs should utilize the capacity of local EMS agencies to provide cost-effective emergency response, preventive care and non-emergency services.

MARC supports the operation of the region's 911 emergency response system, serving 11 counties in Missouri and Kansas.

**Key policy position:** Encourage the Congressional delegation to support H.R. 1629, the 911 SAVES Act, to reclassify public safety telecommunicators from clerical to a protective service occupation within the standard occupation classification system.

**Key policy position:** MARC supports H.R. 1784 to amend the National Telecommunications and Information Administration Organization Act to provide for further deployment and coordination of Next Generation 911.

## Appendix A – Federal Grants Supporting MARC Programs and Initiatives 2023

10.331	Department of Agriculture	GusNIP Nutrition Incentive Program Produce Prescription Program
11.302	Economic Development Admin.	Planning Partnership 2024-2027
93.042 –	Health & Human Services	Older Americans Act
93.053	(MODHSS)	National Family Caregiver Support Nutrition Services Incentive
93.243	Health & Human Services (MODHSS)	Substance Abuse & Mental Health (Mobile Crisis Response)
93.495	Center for Disease Control And Prevention (KDHE)	Community Health Worker Support
93.575	Health & Human Services (MO Dept of Elem & Sec Ed)	Child Care & Development Block Grant
93.600	Health & Human Services, OHS	Head Start Cluster
93.667	Health & Human Services (MDHSS)	Social Services Block Grant
93.737	Health & Human Services (MDHSS)	Empowering Older Adults Chronic Disease
93.747	Health & Human Services (MDHSS)	Elder Abuse Prevention & Intervention
93.889	Health & Human Services (MDHSS)	Natl Bioterrorism Hospital Preparedness
97.067	Dept of Homeland Security	Homeland security Grant MO and KS
16.745	Dept. of Justice	Criminal & Juvenile Justice Mental Health Collaboration Co-Responder Connect & Prevent Program
20.205	US Dept of Transportation (MO & KS DOT)	Highway Planning & Construction
20.505	US Dept of Transportation (MO & KS DOT)	Metro PI & Non-Metro Planning & Research
20.507	Federal Transit Admin.	Formula Grant
20.703	US Dept of Transportation (KDEM)	Hazardous Materials Training & Planning
20.941	US Dept of Transportation (MO Dept of Public Safety)	SMART – Operation Green Light
66.001	Environmental Protection Agency	Air Quality – Kansas

		Air Quality – Missouri
66.046	Environmental Protection Agency	Climate Pollution Reduction Planning
66.306	Environmental Protection Agency	Environmental Justice Problem Solving
66.454	Environmental Protection Agency (MDNR)	Water Quality Management & Planning
66.461	Environmental Protection Agency	Regional Wetland Program
66.808	Environmental Protection Agency	Solid Waste Mgmt & Food Waste
66.818	Environmental Protection Agency	Brownfields

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