



# Intro to Advocacy

*Understanding the process, relationships and communications necessary to be an effective voice for Kansas children.*

## WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Simply put, advocacy is the foundation for our democracy. It is an attempt to influence public policy, by a person or group, in a way that brings about legislative action or change.

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead*

The concept of fair representation depends on citizens letting their elected officials know how they want to be represented. And, for those people with little or no political voice of their own, such as children, it’s up to all of us to speak on their behalf. Legislators are not experts (nor mind readers), but rather they are people like us who have accepted the challenge and responsibility of representing their communities. They look to you, their constituents, to bring important information to their attention and let them know how you want to be represented.

When you’re passionate about an issue and ready to take action, it’s important to understand the legislative process. Additionally, you should be strategic in the relationships you develop and communications you utilize to effectively communicate your position or cause.

Lobbying is a more direct and formalized appeal to lawmakers about a specific issue or piece of legislation. However, unlike general advocacy, lobbying has specific rules surrounding what an organization can and cannot do. For more information on nonprofit lobbying limitations, please see the “Resources” section on page four.

### How Lexie’s Law Came to Be

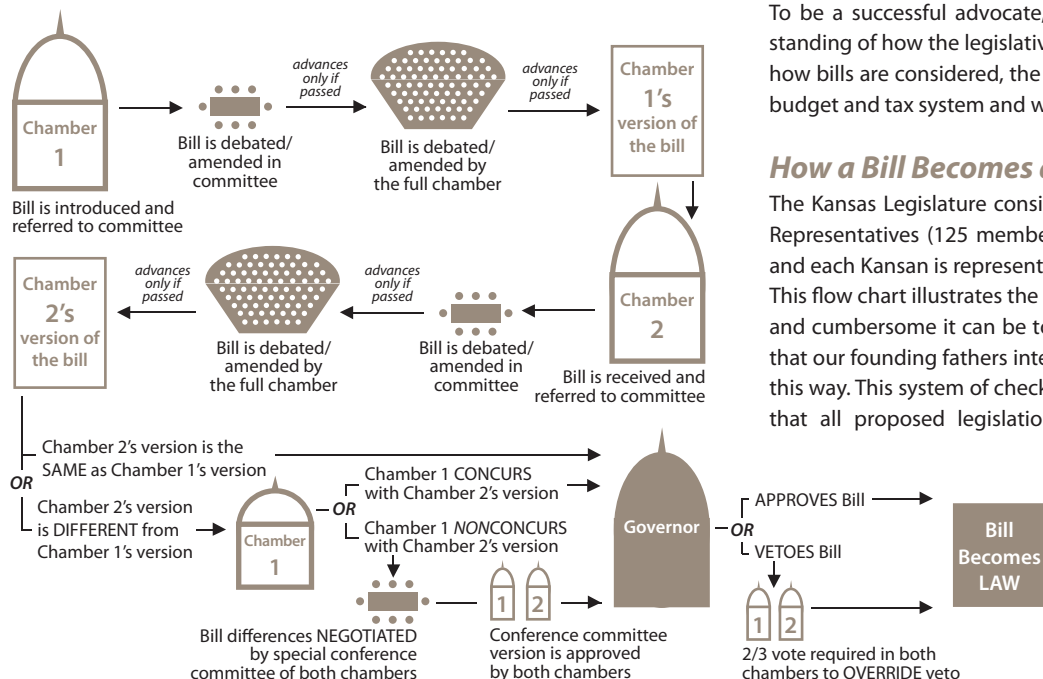
When 13-month-old Lexie was left unattended by her child care provider, a tragically fatal accident occurred; one that was completely preventable had basic child care supervision standards been in place.

When Lexie’s parents, Kim and Bryan learned that Kansas ranked 47th in the country for child care standards and in the past three years, nearly 30 children had died in child care, they began advocating for policy change. They joined forces with Alecia and Steve, parents of 18-month-old Ava who also died tragically in a child care facility, and with Kansas Action for Children.

*The parents turned their pain into resolve and began to organize, raise awareness and fight for the 135,000 kids still in Kansas child care.* Understanding that the process was neither swift nor easy, they were consistent with their message, persistent in their efforts and unwavering in their mission to spare other parents the same loss.

At 2:30 a.m. on May 11, 2010, the parents’ long fight came to an end when the Legislature passed Lexie’s Law providing comprehensive child care and inspection standards.

## THE KANSAS LEGISLATIVE PROCESS



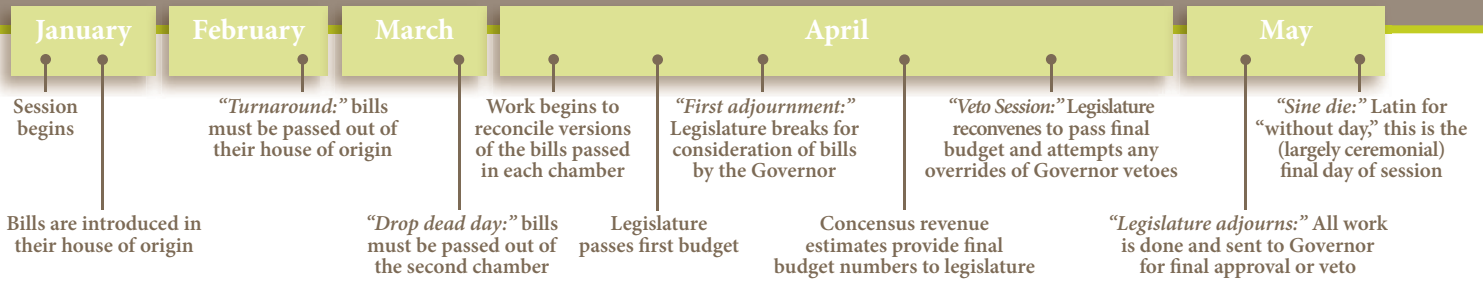
To be a successful advocate, you first must gain a basic understanding of how the legislative process works in Kansas, including how bills are considered, the annual timeline, the structure of the budget and tax system and who the key players are.

### How a Bill Becomes a Law

The Kansas Legislature consists of two chambers – the House of Representatives (125 members) and the Senate (40 members) – and each Kansan is represented by one member in each chamber. This flow chart illustrates the legislative process and how complex and cumbersome it can be to pass a law. It is important to know that our founding fathers intentionally designed our system to be this way. This system of checks and balances is complex to ensure that all proposed legislation receives thorough consideration before being implemented.

For advocates, it is important to be patient and not get frustrated with the process. It is not unusual for a piece of legislation to take multiple years to pass.

# Kansas Legislative Session



## Timeline

Kansas has a “part-time” legislature, which means that our citizen-legislators spend 90 days working in Topeka, from January to early May, in what is called “Legislative Session.” By having a part-time legislature, lawmakers are able to continue to live, work and stay connected with their local communities and constituents. An example of a “full-time” legislature would be the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C., which works throughout the year.

A general timeline of what occurs during session can be found at the top of this page. However, for specific dates and deadlines, please visit the Kansas Legislature’s website at [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org).

Following the completion of the session, legislators return to their home communities and their “day jobs” until the following January. If it’s an election year (even numbered years), they will spend their off-session months preparing for the primary election in August followed by the general election in November. The entire Kansas House stands for election every two years, and the entire Kansas Senate stands for election every four years.

## Budgets & Taxes

The Kansas fiscal process is comprised of two components: budgets and taxes. The budget determines our state’s spending priorities and taxes generate funds to pay for them. While our personal finances and the U.S. Congress can rely on credit, the Kansas Legislature is barred from deficit spending. The state must generate enough revenue to pay for priorities such as public infrastructure, education, programs and services.

One of the first questions lawmakers often ask is, “how much does this cost?” Therefore, it is important to understand (prior to advocating for your cause) that financial resources are limited and what, if any, fiscal impact your legislation may have on the state budget. It is also important to understand that in economic down years, programs and services are more likely be cut rather than expanded.



## Key Players

Prior to advocating on any issue or legislation it is important to know who the key players are that can assist you in being more strategic with your resources and, ultimately, successful. First, you should know and build a relationship with your own elected officials. After you have reached out to your own lawmakers you should identify other key legislators that can be helpful, such as committee members who will be hearing the bill.

Each bill is assigned to a committee, so even though there are 165 members of the Kansas Legislature, each House committee has up to 24 members and each Senate committee has up to 12 members. The first step is to convince the committee that will hear the bill. Without the committee’s support, your legislation will not reach the full House or Senate to be voted upon. In other words, your local legislator may be supportive of your cause but if they are not assigned to the committee hearing your bill, their ability to assist you may be limited.

Each committee has a chair, vice chair and ranking minority party member. It is important to reach out to each of these lawmakers to build support for your legislation. To get a full list of committee assignments, visit the Kansas Legislature’s Web site at [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org).

# ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

Building relationships and effective communication are the keys to successful advocacy.

## Give and Take

The relationship between an elected official and a constituent is mutually beneficial, but requires flexibility on each side. While legislators can offer their support of a bill and influence their colleagues, advocates also bring something to the table that lawmakers need. In fact, advocates can provide things like information and data, stories of community impact, professional expertise, financial support to campaigns, hosting of a



fundraiser, providing public support in the way of yard signs, inviting a legislator to speak at a civic club or faith group, and most importantly... your vote! Cultivating a relationship and level of trust with your elected official(s) during their off-session months builds a good foundation for your efforts when they are in session and increases your ability to achieve results.

### **Communicating with Elected Officials**

When communicating with your legislators, keep two things in mind: any communication is better than nothing at all, and putting a personal face on an issue is advantageous. The schedule during the legislative session is incredibly hectic and ever-changing so be prepared and be flexible.

**Meeting.** If you would like to set up a personal meeting at the Statehouse, be understanding of their changing schedules once you arrive and respectful of your legislator's time. Also, don't forget to make a specific ask: "Will you vote for House Bill 1000?" instead of "Will you support kids this year?" The more specific you get, the easier it is to hold lawmakers accountable. Also, be flexible. For example, while it may not be ideal, you may have to conduct your meeting while your lawmaker walks from one meeting to another. Remember, a quick meeting is better than no meeting at all.

**Correspondence.** A personal phone call or letter holds more weight than an email, but again, if time only allows for an email that is still better than no communication at all. Regardless of what type of correspondence you choose (sometimes maybe all three!) remember to keep your comments short, simple and to the point.

When communicating with your elected officials regarding a specific cause or bill, it's effective to include these four elements in a concise and personal manner: brief background about the issue (including the bill number if available) supporting data, story of personal or community impact, and a specific request (see example at right). It's also important to include your full name and address so they know how to reach you and whether or not you are a constituent from their district.

**Follow Up.** It is critical to follow up with your legislators after making a specific request. It increases their accountability and lets them know you are monitoring the issue. If the legislator did not support you after saying they would, send a message that you're disappointed in their lack of support, define the impact that their decision will have on your community and welcome further discussion. In some cases the bill may have changed significantly and a follow-up message allows for there to be clear communication on the issue and helps preserve the relationship you've established. If the legislator did support your issue and remained committed to the position they agreed to take, remember to say thank you, both personally and publicly!

*Dear Rep. Doe,*

*SB 447 is a bill that touches home for me and my family. We know parents in your district who have gone through the pain of losing a child because of the lack of oversight of child care facilities in Kansas. As you may know, 1 in 3 child care facilities are not currently inspected in our state, and the supervision requirements in our child care system are lacking. In fact, our state ranks 47th in the nation – as one of the worst – when it comes to child care oversight. You have an opportunity this year to keep more Kansas families from having to endure the tragic loss of a child. I ask for your support of SB 447.*

*Sincerely,  
Jane Johnson  
1234 Maple Street  
Wichita, KS 67202*

### **Communicating with Peers**

It's no secret that many voices are stronger than one, so increase your effectiveness by getting others to share your message. The social media platform (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) makes it simple to connect your network of peers to your issue and is the fastest way to disseminate information among them. Just as personal communication is the most effective with legislators, it is also critical when communicating your story with your friends, neighbors or your faith community/civic clubs. If your advocacy efforts advance to the stage of needing to mobilize even more people, then turn your attention to formal groups (e.g. Kansas Action for Children, Parents as Teachers or coalitions) and make sure your message is focused and coordinated.

### **Communicating with the Media**

Your local newspaper, television and radio stations can be a useful and far-reaching medium to share your message through letters to the editor, editorials, nightly news coverage and morning shows. In the case of newspapers, choosing an unlikely messenger to pen a letter to the editor will carry significantly more weight and have a greater, broader impact. Readers expect that a working parent would be in support of afterschool programs, but having the local sheriff support the issue because of its impact on crime reduction or a local business owner support it because of its positive impact on workforce development are far more effective. Additionally, meet with the editor/editorial staff to discuss whether they'd consider an editorial in support of your issue.

# RESOURCES

## Lobbying Limitations

Nonprofit organizations have a unique and essential role to play in the policy process. Advocacy allows organizations to serve their constituencies and promote their causes by educating the public and policymakers, conducting research, litigating, organizing, lobbying and more. All nonprofits can engage in advocacy, although the scope and extent of their lobbying activities vary according to the tax exempt status of the organization. For example, 501(c)(3) organizations can engage in a limited amount of lobbying, while 501(c)(4) organizations can engage in an unlimited amount of lobbying. For individuals lobbying on their own accord (not on behalf of an employer), there are no federal restrictions.

The Alliance for Justice provides numerous resources online and by phone regarding lobbying limitations and lobbying in general. For more information, contact:

**Alliance for Justice** | [www.afj.org](http://www.afj.org), click on For Nonprofits & Foundations | **866NPLOBBY** (866-675-6229) | [advocacy@afj.org](mailto:advocacy@afj.org)

For specific information on what is required at the state level, please contact:

**Kansas Governmental Ethics Commission** | [www.kansas.gov/ethics](http://www.kansas.gov/ethics) | **785-296-4219**

## Voter Registration

*“People who don’t vote have no line of credit with people who are elected and thus pose no threat to those who act against our interests.” – Marian Wright Edelman, Founder of the Children’s Defense Fund*

Kansas elections are conducted by the counties with oversight by the Secretary of State’s office. Through the Secretary of State’s Web site, you can register to vote in Kansas, change your name or your address on your registration, affiliate with a political party, or change your party affiliation (a valid Kansas driver’s license or state-issued ID is required). The deadline to register to vote is the 15th day before any election.

**Online voter registration form** | [www.kssos.org](http://www.kssos.org), click on Elections & Legislative, then click on Registration & Voting

## Data

Which is more compelling? Predatory lending is growing rapidly in Kansas, or there are more payday loan stores than McDonald’s restaurants in Kansas. Similarly, many children are growing up in poverty, or 1 in 3 Kansas children lives at or near poverty. Statistics support our messages and add credibility, as well as help us identify and evaluate changes over time.

Following are some helpful resources for accessing Kansas-specific data and information:

**Kansas KIDS COUNT Data Center** | [www.kac.org/datacenter](http://www.kac.org/datacenter)

**KU Institute for Policy & Social Research** | <http://www.ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/ksah/vital>

**Kansas Department of Education** | [www.ksde.org](http://www.ksde.org), click on Data, Media and Reports

**Extension Offices** | <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/Map.aspx>

**State Library of Kansas** | <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/KSL>

**American Community Survey** | [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)

**Fact Finder** | <http://factfinder.census.gov>

## Stay Informed

**KanFocus** (Formerly Vote Tracker) | [www.votetracker.com](http://www.votetracker.com) (subscription based)

**Kansas Legislature** | [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org)

**Kansas Action for Children** | [www.kac.org/signup](http://www.kac.org/signup)

