



## El Centro's 2020 Legislative

### Agenda

At El Centro we believe all individuals, regardless of language, place of birth or documentation status, deserve to be fully accepted and integrated into the communities they live, work and pursue their dreams in. El Centro remains committed to pursuing policy changes that support the organization's direct service work and meet the needs of clients. While the agency may not always have the capacity to take the lead, El Centro's Board of Directors recognizes that, on some issues, the organization's engagement plays an important supporting role. In approaching advocacy, El Centro will leverage its strongest assets: its grassroots base of clients and allies, its issue expertise, and its reputation and relationships. In some cases, this work will be defensive, as El Centro works to prevent negative policy developments at all levels of government and within our service area. In other moments, El Centro and its partners will begin to lay the groundwork for advancing policy agendas that, over time, can substantially strengthen the agency's programmatic work with individuals and families.

### A Policy Agenda for a Healthy Community

**Priority One: Provide opportunities for immigrant residents to integrate successfully into Wyandotte and Johnson County communities.**

Objective: Support efforts to establish Safe and Welcoming ordinances in Wyandotte and Johnson County municipalities.

Our local Safe and Welcoming Ordinance has two components: a Municipal ID, and a policy limiting local law enforcement cooperation with immigration enforcement. Residents' ability to safely access services and function as a welcomed, valued member of a community not only makes an individual safer but improves the overall safety of the our community. Relationships between government officials and immigrant residents work better when officials can verify the identity of every individual and no individual fears being mistaken for someone else.

Vulnerable populations who lack a government-issued photo ID card face major difficulties opening a bank account, cashing a check, registering children for school, or getting a prescription filled. They can feel at risk when interacting with police, leading to fewer individuals reporting crimes or cooperating as witnesses. Without an ID, senior citizens, immigrants, homeless individuals, re-entering citizens, foster youth, and others cannot show where they live or fully be a part of the community.

In communities around the country<sup>1</sup>, governments have pursued these aims by establishing a municipal identification programs. Municipal IDs are provided by the local government, for a fee, usually after verifying identity with documents from a country of origin and/or affidavits from respected institutions. Wyandotte County and Johnson Counties should pass an ordinance establishing its own municipal identification and stipulating the criteria for its receipt.

**Objective: Preserve Kansas' long-standing commitment to postsecondary educational opportunities for Kansas high school graduates**

Kansas passed an instate tuition policy in 2004 and, for the past 15 years, all students who attended high school here for at least 3 years and graduated from high school in the state have been able to enroll in Kansas colleges, universities, and technical schools as instate students. Thousands of Kansas young people have received postsecondary degrees as a result, and many have subsequently become U.S. citizens. This is a policy supported by higher educational institutions, K-12 schools, and faith and community leaders around the state. It should remain Kansas law.

### **Priority Two: Improve affordable housing within Johnson County**

**Objective: Support United Community Service's work to develop a county wide housing study to implement affordable housing options.**

Too many Johnson Countians are burdened by mortgages and rent that exceed 30% of their gross income. According to United Community Services data, about 75% of residents making between \$20,000 and \$34,999 spend more than 30% of their pay on housing. Thus, a growing number of workers can't find affordable housing in the state's wealthiest county.

Because of the limited affordable housing options, and rising rents, modest-paying workers in offices, public safety and even public schools cannot afford to live in the county. United Community Services teamed up with the county and several cities to conduct a housing study. Johnson County should raise awareness and move the needle on affordable housing options for low to moderate income residents.

### **Priority Three: Promote policies that advance the health and well-being of all Kansans**

**Objective: To Support KanCare expansion efforts to ensure that Kansans have access to affordable health care coverage.**

Today, Kansans who fall into the coverage gap—earning too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to purchase coverage in the marketplace—rely primarily on costly and sporadic emergency room care. This increases the likelihood of early detection of serious health problems. It also creates an unnecessary bottleneck at the most intensive treatment option. In Kansas, we have a budget-neutral<sup>2</sup> chance to provide affordable health care coverage to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.policylink.org/blog/municipal-id-cards>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.expandkancare.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/State-and-Local-Budgets-Jan-2019.docx.pdf>

more than 150,000. This is a deal we can't afford to pass up. According to a recent policy brief released by the Migration Policy Institute in November 2019 the expansion of Medicaid could improve insurance coverage for 9,000 Latinos and 6,000 Latino immigrants in our communities.

**Objective: Protect families access to benefits and pathways to citizenship.**

The “public charge” test has been part of federal immigration law for decades. It is designed to identify people who may depend on government benefits as their main source of support. If the test determines that someone is likely to become a “public charge,” the government can deny admission to the United States or refuse an application for lawful permanent resident status (a “green card”). This year, the Federal Government proposed changes to the public charge policy. Proposed rules have attempted to restrict access to programs that provide work and family supports includes Supplemental Security Income (SSI), cash assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, and state or local cash assistance programs for income maintenance, often called “general assistance” like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The changes to the policy for immigrants applying for status within the U.S. were scheduled to take effect on October 15, 2019, under a final rule issued by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). However, since October 11, five federal courts have issued preliminary injunctions that stop the DHS public charge rule from going into effect. Immigrants can continue to receive the key health care, nutrition, and housing programs that help them and their families thrive. We oppose using the rulemaking process to restrict access to benefits that help working families and promote health. El Centro will continue to fight against the many attacks on immigrants and their families, educating and assisting with immigration, know your rights and the citizenship processes.

#### **Priority Four: Protect our democracy and encourage vibrant civic engagement**

**Objective: Increase voter registration and turnout rates by making Kansas' election laws a model of fairness, transparency, and participation.**

Kansans who try to register to vote face obstacles unimaginable than just a decade ago: requirements to obtain original birth certificates, costs associated with securing photo identification, complicated rules enacted by the former Secretary of State to try to get around court rulings challenging his undemocratic systems. Too many of these would-be voters give up in frustration or conclude that their participation in government is unwelcome. El Centro believes that our communities are strongest when all citizens participate. The legislature should restore transparent, fair, and effective voting laws. We support proposals to lift the burdensome birth certificate requirement and allow for same-day registration. Our democracy is worth defending.

**Objective: Provide Sufficient Funding to Promote & Conduct the 2020 Census.**

The census determines how nearly \$700 billion in federal funding is allocated to states as well as apportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. Business, nonprofits and government rely on census data in planning and investment decisions. For Kansas, approximately \$4.5 billion in federal funds based on census data supports programs such as roads, transportation, housing, food and nutritional assistance, education and Head Start.

There are approximately 350,000 Latinos residing in Kansas. Latinos are an undercounted population in the census. In this climate of fear and anxiety to provide any information to our Federal Government, we must educate and work to get an accurate count for Latinos and all Kansans. Undercounted populations negatively affect programs and representation. El Centro is represented on the local, regional and state Complete Count Committees and will actively educate and assist residents to complete the census to ensure an accurate count.