

There’s no question:

Kansas children do best when their parents have good jobs that pay living wages. They do best when they have access to high-quality child care and are able to see a doctor when they get sick.

But what happens when those jobs are scarce? What happens when families fall on hard times? What happens when a poverty emergency spreads?

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and the latest economic turbulence, 103,000 children in the state lived at the poverty line or below. That means roughly \$21,000 a year for a family of three people. More than 40,000 children in the state live in deep poverty, in which a family of three makes less than \$11,000 a year.

We deserve to know: What are candidates running this fall going to do about it?

At Kansas Action for Children, we’re focused on seeing children and families meet their basic needs. But that means officials must focus on the following three areas:

- ▶ **Quality early education**
- ▶ **Healthy children and adults**
- ▶ **Family economic supports**

That’s why we created this voter guide.

One subject at a time, we will show how Kansas kids stand to gain if officials make choices that prioritize kids’ needs. We will show why each is critical to ending poverty once and for all.

Most importantly, we will suggest questions you can ask candidates this summer and fall to see where they stand. Listen to what they tell you in response. Are they committed to strengthening our state in the face of hardship?

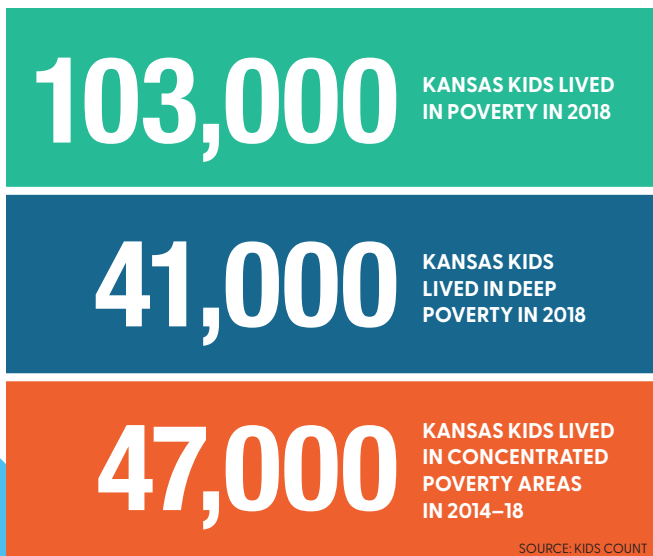
Why us?

Kansas Action for Children has 40 years of experience with kids’ issues. KAC is a committed, independent voice for Kansas children and a passionate advocate for those in the crucial birth-to-8 developmental window. We’ve traveled the state talking to residents, advocates, and officials – and we want you to join that conversation.

Everyone agrees that each child should have quality health care, education, and family supports. This election season, it’s time to seize the moment.

Together, we can solve the poverty emergency. But it will take all of us, collaborating as a state, investing in our youngest residents. We need to hold those who want to lead us to account.

This voter guide is a beginning. **Read, learn, and act.**



Current 2020 Kansas Poverty Guidelines Based on Federal Poverty Guidelines

Family size	Annual pre-tax income
1 ★	\$12,760
2 ★★	\$17,240
3 ★★★	\$21,720
4 ★★★★	\$26,200
5 ★★★★★	\$30,680
6 ★★★★★★	\$35,160
7 ★★★★★★★	\$39,640
8 ★★★★★★★★	\$44,120

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

Kansas kids need all of us to speak up for them. But we have to be willing to cast ballots and make sure our elected officials know what matters most: Investing in our kids.

Champions for children can be found in every political party, in every profession, and in every community in Kansas. Children's issues transcend partisan politics – and there are numerous, nonpartisan ways to improve kids' lives. We are asking you to be a champion for kids and share that passion with those who want to serve as an elected official.

In this guide, we've identified some of the key issues you can raise with your candidates. The challenges children face are immense, and if we are going to reduce the number of children living in poverty, we need more people who will do something about it.

Kansas Action for Children is nonprofit and nonpartisan, because the needs of our state's smallest residents transcend party lines and ideologies. As a 501(c)(3) organization, KAC does not support or endorse any candidate for public office, and the information and questions contained in this publication are meant for educational purposes only. We encourage voters to learn about candidates through the many reliable sources available, including candidate websites, public appearances, and news articles.

Other organizations referring to this voter guide with your members and audiences should keep in mind your IRS status as well and consult with legal counsel before engaging in voter and candidate education activities.

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High-quality early education is formal and informal learning delivered by qualified and fairly compensated professionals in home, center, and school settings. Children’s critical early years are not the time to take shortcuts, but the cost of child care can consume 20 percent or more of a family’s annual income. This isn’t sustainable.

Families can’t do it alone.

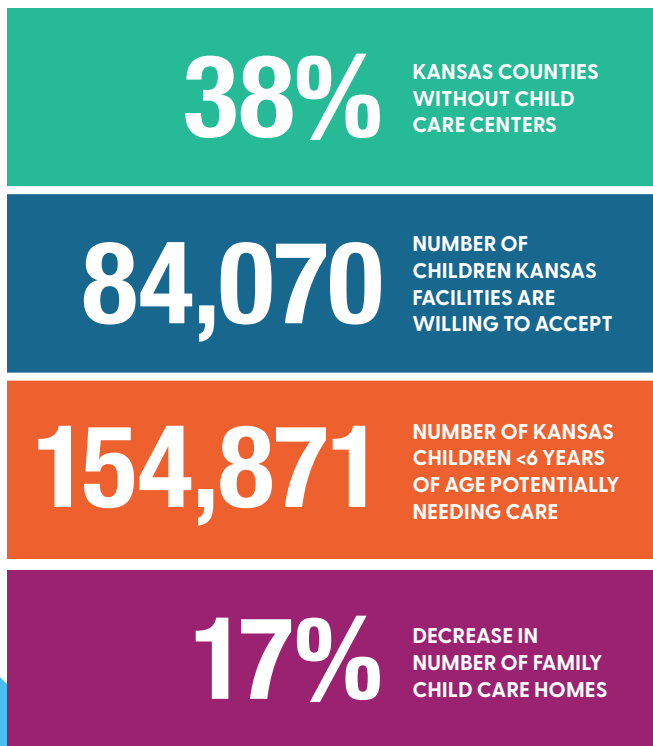
Today, most households require two incomes, meaning that someone outside of the nuclear family has to care for the children. For the sake of the family, that care needs to be affordable; for the sake of the child, that care needs to happen in an environment where they are safe, healthy, and learning. Recent research tells us that the first five years of a child’s life are the most critical for brain development. Learning starts at birth, not whenever someone starts school. High-quality child care is essential for setting a child on the path toward a lifetime of success.

FAST FACTS

- » **Kansas has an early education crisis. In many parts of the state, families lack access to child care; and where it is available, it is unaffordable to most. Meanwhile, early educators struggle to make ends meet.**
- » **The disparity between opportunities for those with and without access to high-quality child care – and the means to afford it – has lifelong implications for Kansas children and their parents.**
- » **In Kansas, a family of three making more than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$40,182 a year, would not qualify for child care assistance. However, the average annual cost of child care in the Topeka metro area is \$8,442, or roughly 20 percent of the annual income of that family – and that’s assuming a family only has one child in care.**
- » **The child care workforce is aging, and due to low wages it is difficult to recruit new people into the field. Yet the cost of child care is so high that providers are reluctant to pass along costs to the client families.**

State officials have abundant opportunities to pursue legislation and regulations for families to find, afford, and benefit from early education. Kansas must increase high-quality, early learning opportunities for children from birth to 5.

Nationally, single mothers of young children who received help paying for child care were **39 percent more likely to still be employed** after two years.



SOURCE: CHILD CARE AWARE OF KANSAS, 2019 CHILD CARE SUPPLY DEMAND REPORT

SOURCE: NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER

ASK THE CANDIDATE

- » Given that child care is unavailable or unaffordable for many Kansas families, how would you ensure that every working parent has access to high-quality child care?
- » Only half of all licensed child care facilities in Kansas accept DCF child care assistance, which many low-income families need. How would you incentivize more child care programs to enroll in the DCF program?
- » Research shows that high-quality child care is critical for healthy brain development and future opportunities. What would you do to increase the availability of such care for Kansas children?
- » Kansas receives money for child care from the federal government through the Child Care Development Block Grant, which is used to fund critical state programs. How would you maximize the impact of these funds?

Affordable health care is necessary for children and adults, and untreated illness costs money and lives. We should start with ensuring access to care for expectant moms to improve their health. It continues with making certain Kansas' littlest residents and their caregivers can see the doctor when needed and have nutritious food to eat.

Improving outcomes through generations.

Health is essential to communities' well-being, and early access to health care improves health outcomes. While most Kansas children are healthy, they need regular, dependable care to stay that way. Their parents and families need that same ability to visit the doctor, because uninsured and sick caregivers won't be able to give children the nurturing attention they need. But health is about more than an office visit. It's also about healthy food and training programs for new parents. Working in concert, these programs can uplift Kansans for decades to come.

5.1%

OF KANSAS CHILDREN ARE UNINSURED (2018)

132,000

KANSANS COULD ENROLL IN MEDICAID IF WE EXPAND, ACCORDING TO THE KANSAS HEALTH INSTITUTE, INCLUDING 39,000 CHILDREN.

18.3

OF KANSAS KIDS LIVE IN FOOD INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS (2017)

103,282

KANSAS KIDS PARTICIPATE MONTHLY, ON AVERAGE, IN THE SNAP FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (2016-18)

SOURCES: KIDS COUNT AND THE KANSAS HEALTH INSTITUTE

FAST FACTS

- » **Medicaid, or KanCare, is a federal-state partnership that provides insurance to kids and families with lower incomes. The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provides health insurance to children who don't qualify for those programs.**
- » **Unfortunately, since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, Kansas is one of the few states that haven't expanded their Medicaid programs to include all the adults who should be eligible under the federal law.**
- » **Food insecurity is when kids and their families don't always have enough to eat. Government-sponsored programs that help include SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), also known as food stamps; school meals; and other efforts to serve meals around the year or during the summer.**
- » **Kansas has added barriers to accessing food assistance. Families have to undergo burdensome work reporting requirements, child support enforcement rules, and background checks.**
- » **Home visiting programs support parents with visits from professionals equipped with strategies and tactics. Parents gain skills and competencies essential to supporting and improving their kids' health and development.**

Families need support during their child's first year of life and beyond. Healthy parents raise healthy children. If officials increase health care access, they will improve maternal physical and mental health, which will cultivate child development. The future of our state depends on the health of our youngest residents and their parents.

ASK THE CANDIDATE

- » Both before and after birth, mothers and babies need high-quality health care and other types of supports to ensure a healthy start. How will you ensure that these services and supports are connected and easy to access, regardless of the mother's race / ethnicity or ZIP code?
- » Research indicates that when parents are insured and healthy, their children are more likely to access primary care. How will you ensure that children not only have health coverage but access care?
- » What are your thoughts on expanding Medicaid?
- » What is your opinion on the use of Medicaid funding to provide parenting and home visiting programs for new parents?
- » Do you have ideas for how more Kansans could access programs such as SNAP? Are there any laws or regulations you would change regarding accessing SNAP?

Proven programs help families on the edge.

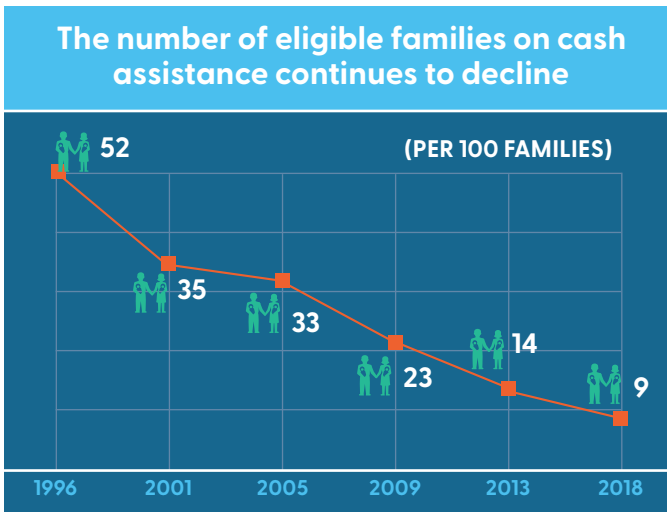
Programs such as the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credit and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) help keep Kansas children from experiencing poverty through cash assistance. Other programs such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as food stamps) and Medicaid provide crucial resources.

Despite their success, these programs are limited.

Families thrive when their basic needs are met. But in 2015, harmful legislation (the so-called HOPE Act) was signed into law that created obstacles for Kansas families accessing anti-poverty programs. The legislation shortened the amount of time a family is eligible for cash assistance and added extra requirements that are difficult for families to meet. Kansas has seen a continued decline of children and families accessing anti-poverty programs. These restrictions harm families’ economic stability, ability to plan for the future, and capacity to deal with unexpected events.

FAST FACTS

- » In 2018, nearly 150,000 Kansas kids (more than one in five) lived in families where no parent had regular, full-time employment.
- » The EITC will be important as Kansans recover from the current economic downturn. It can only be claimed by people who earn income through work and pay taxes, and it is proven to help families out of poverty.
- » The EITC helps more than 200,000 working Kansans – mostly those with children – make ends meet.
- » TANF is a program designed to alleviate hardship for families experiencing poverty. Only Kansas families with children who have very low incomes are eligible to participate in the TANF cash assistance program.
- » While these families need cash assistance, the benefit is small and not enough to cover basic needs. For a family of four, in a high-cost, high-population county, the maximum benefit is \$449 per month. Kansas has never increased the amount, including adjusting for inflation, since the program began in 1996.



CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES

Policymakers should work to remove barriers to these important programs, making them accessible so that eligible families can enroll without delay. We also need strong revenue streams to ensure the state can craft a budget that funds these needed programs, particularly during our current health and economic challenges.

LOW-INCOME FAMILIES DEPEND ON CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, SUCH AS TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF).

Monthly TANF assistance for families has not kept pace with inflation (family of four)

ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION	\$746
ACTUAL	\$449

ASK THE CANDIDATE

- » With about 103,000 kids living in poverty in Kansas – before the recent pandemic and its economic impacts – what role do you think the state can play to help families meet their basic needs?
- » Kansas has not increased its benefit for cash assistance since 1996. Would you support an increase in the benefit for families who are struggling to make ends meet?
- » Assistance programs such as public health insurance, food and cash assistance, and school lunch help meet the basic health care, nutrition, and housing needs for Kansas families. How would you address participation in these programs?
- » Due to historical legal and policy exclusions, Kansans of color continue to face barriers. In 2018, 15 percent of total Kansas children lived in poverty, but nearly one-in-three Black Kansas children and one-in-four Latinx children did. What would you do to close those gaps and help ensure every Kansas child can fulfill their potential?