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A horizontal band of watercolor paint in shades of blue, purple, pink, and red, with a white rectangular area in the center containing the title.

## **STEPS ALONG THE ROAD TO RECOVERY**

### **KANSAS ACTION FOR CHILDREN TAKES LEAD AS STATE RECOVERS**

A large, vibrant watercolor splash in shades of blue, green, yellow, and red, with a white rectangular area in the center containing the main headline.

# **THE FUTURE IS LOOKING BRIGHTER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN KANSAS.**

Why? This year, and this legislative session, the state took its first big steps down the road to recovery.

While the path is long and the challenges daunting, Gov. Laura Kelly and legislators made concrete progress for Kansas children and families. At Kansas Action for Children, we assisted lawmakers, activists, agency leaders, and the public with high-quality advocacy, research, and messaging.

With your help and support, we've done so for 40 years.

But this year, we went farther than ever before.

KAC set a bold agenda for the future of Kansas, one that elevated children and families, while ensuring a sound funding structure to support them for years to come. We focused on highlighting opportunities to remove barriers created by systemic racism facing communities of color. We reached out to audiences across the state, built unlikely champions, and positioned ourselves to create transformational change.

We took big steps.

And we couldn't have done it without you.



**STEP 1:  
ELEVATING  
EARLY  
EDUCATION**

High-quality early education is one of Kansas Action for Children’s signature priorities, but this year we went about our advocacy in a different way.

The state’s new governor, Laura Kelly, is a longtime supporter of our core issues, but she’s also from a different political party than leadership in the state Senate and House chambers. That means we worked directly with her staff and agency leaders, but we saw a need for broader education efforts.

That’s why we screened the documentary “No Small Matter,” which shows the opportunities and challenges facing early education in America. Our inaugural event March 18 brought together 150 lawmakers, children’s advocates, early childhood educators, and Gov. Kelly. We subsequently brought the film to Lawrence and Johnson County, and we have additional screenings planned across the state.

We continued our efforts at the statehouse as well. The Early Learning Caucus — a bipartisan, bicameral group of state legislators — hosted a series of educational forums throughout the session. The KAC-supported group shares the importance of investments in early learning with peers and advocates for kids and families.



**STEP 2:  
HALTING  
HARMFUL  
TAX POLICY**

A balanced, responsible tax system is critical to raising revenue that supports investments in children and families. KAC and our Kansas Center for Economic Growth project played critical roles in advocating for fiscal responsibility this session.

Senate Bill 22, a risky new tax experiment, emerged from the dust of last year’s session. The projected cost? A breathtaking half-billion dollars over three years. KAC and KCEG were prepared with data and research that the corporate-focused plan wasn’t in the best interest of Kansas.

With the state facing education funding requirements, a child welfare crisis, lagging supports for families, and increasing childhood poverty, we couldn’t afford this discredited, ideologically-driven tax plan. Reinvestment is crucial as Kansas continues down the road to recovery.

We worked with legislators, the governor’s office, and advocates just like you to soundly defeat SB 22 (and a last-minute reincarnation, HB 2033).



**ABOVE: KAC Communications Director Clay Wirestone explained the tax bill in a series of videos.**

**LEFT: Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly gave opening remarks at the “No Small Matter” screening in March.**



**STEP 3:  
MAKING  
IMPORTANT  
INVESTMENTS**

Although this year’s budget ended up being drawn into a Medicaid battle, it still reflects a raft of important, enduring investments. The governor and legislators from both parties collaborated on the plan. Topline results included:

- \$90 million extra to education, covering the cost of inflation and potentially resolving the state Supreme Court order to adequately fund public education.
- \$51 million-plus in total for the Children’s Initiatives Fund, with increases included.
- 42 additional caseworkers approved for the Department of Children and Families to address the growing needs of foster care administration.
- \$3 million added to Medicaid dental reimbursement rates in Fiscal Year 2020, which will help expand access to care.
- Matching funds to meet federal requirements for the Family First Prevention Services Act — allowing flexibility for the state to fund prevention services keeping families intact and kids out of foster care.
- Reducing reliance on transfers from the highway fund to the general fund.
- Increased support for the Department of Corrections to address staffing and safety issues.



**STEP 4:  
CULTIVATING  
CAPITOL  
CONVERSATIONS**

Kansas Action for Children was present throughout the session for a multitude of other issues:

We advocated in House and Senate tax committees for the restoration of a refundable food sales tax credit program. By the end of the session, it was a frequent subject in tax-related conversations.

KAC President and CEO Annie McKay testified both about the history and goals of the organization, as well as in favor of a bill that would create savings accounts for every Kansas child starting at birth. This policy would help remove obstacles to wealth accumulation faced by families of color and give families an important savings tool.

Annie also worked with the chairman of the House Rural Revitalization Committee to coordinate an entire hearing on the needs of Kansas kids in rural areas, testifying that child care assistance and Medicaid expansion are opportunities to address dwindling rural population and structural barriers faced by communities of color.

A bill was passed and signed by the governor that will increase transparency and review of economic incentives — allowing lawmakers the data required to evaluate if programs are making a difference as intended.



**STEP 5:  
ADVOCATING  
AGENCY  
TRANSFORMATION**

The legislative session might be finished, but governing continues 365 days a year. Much of the work is accomplished through state executive branch agencies. Gov. Kelly’s analysis of those agencies showed they had far bigger needs than anticipated — in staffing, contracts, and policies, to name a few.

KAC has worked as a trusted thought partner and consultant over these months, talking to agencies and collaborating on new initiatives.

Kansas is working under a new plan to allocate additional federal dollars from the Child Care and Development Block Grant, helping to increase the number of families using the child care assistance program to access and afford child care.

With appointments to both the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Governor Kelly’s newly established Education Council, our president and CEO is working out-of-session with others to focus efforts on improving the early childhood system in our state and craft a new vision for Kansas kids.



**ABOVE: KAC hosted a meeting of the Education Council’s subcommittee on early education.**

**LEFT: KAC President and CEO Annie McKay testified before the House Rural Revitalization Committee.**



**STEPS TO COME**

As busy as this year has been, and as active as Kansas Action for Children has stayed, much remains to be done. We look forward to advocating for these issues now and into next session.

**HEALTH CARE:** Medicaid expansion has been increasing in general popularity and voter support for years — and Gov. Kelly supports the policy. However, legislative leadership held the line this session and blocked efforts to pass a bill covering 150,000 Kansans.

We know the plan will return in 2020, and KAC will continue to collaborate with organizations across the state to advance this important change.

**TAXES:** While this session’s bad plan may be dead, Gov. Kelly has called for a wide-ranging examination of the state’s tax code. That means more discussion on the state’s tax structure and more opportunities to talk about how we support needed investments. Sports wagering had some discussion, but no action was taken to move the bill forward.

**FAMILY SUPPORTS:** KAC has highlighted early education and health needs. But we’re also focused on programs — such as Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and paid family leave — that lift families out of poverty and provide crucial economic security.

Unfortunately, current law excludes many children and parents from receiving the resources they need. That has to change, and we will work to do so.



**STEPPING UP**

No matter the session or the governor, KAC is devoted to our core mission — the one you have supported from the very beginning. We can see the path ahead.

Every single Kansas child — from birth to elementary school — should have access to high-quality early education, nurturing places and spaces, and routine health care. These investments in the early years create a rock-solid foundation for growth and development that lasts a lifetime. KAC also recognizes that we can’t achieve our vision of making Kansas the best place to raise and be a child without tackling the legacies of unfairness created by systemic racism.

The state’s families, schools, and businesses depend on all of us to put kids first and travel along this road to recovery.

**WITH YOUR HELP, WE CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN. TOGETHER.**