WE CAN DO BETTER FOR KANSAS KIDS

2014 LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP
A HARD STORY TO TELL

As we look back on the 2014 legislative session, it’s difficult not to be disappointed. Though there were small wins for Kansas kids—such as the governor’s veto of a $5 million transfer of funds for children’s programs to the Kansas Bioscience Authority—policymakers missed opportunities to make Kansas a better place to grow up and to raise a family; opportunities like funding all-day kindergarten across the state, improving access to oral health care and removing access restrictions to data that could save children’s lives.

It was one of the shortest legislative sessions in history, and policymakers failed to prioritize important issues that affect Kansas kids. In some cases, there was no dialog at all. That makes our work at Kansas Action for Children even more critical as we look for new ways to be a voice for Kansas kids. It’s a challenge—but it’s one we won’t give up on.

—Shannon Cotsoradis, President and CEO
MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

This year, lawmakers were given the chance to enact policies that would improve health and education outcomes for Kansas kids, but they failed to take action on too many of them. Senate Bill 259 and House Bill 2767 would have given researchers and public health officials access to data from the State Child Death Review Board so they could study the reasons so many Kansas kids die before their first birthday and, more importantly, develop strategies to prevent child death. Though the legislation passed in the House unanimously, the Senate never voted on it, which means we missed the chance to reduce preventable child death in Kansas. Similarly, bills to fund all-day kindergarten and approve mid-level dental providers called Registered Dental Practitioners were left on the table.
POLITICS OVER POLICY

With an election on the horizon, lawmakers this year often put politics ahead of good policy. This was the case when it came to the Children’s Initiatives Fund (CIF), which supports high-quality early learning programs like Parents as Teachers and Early Head Start. Legislators voted to transfer $5 million from the CIF to the Kansas Bioscience Authority, citing the KBA’s need for increased funding to create jobs. But early education programs in Kansas, many of which have received flat funding for more than five years, give children the tools they need to succeed in school and later in the workforce. Gov. Brownback—facing pressure from educators, parents and advocates—vetoed the transfer of funds. It was a small first step toward restoring long-term stability for children’s programs.
A VOICE IN THE VOID

Traditionally, KAC has worked to shape public policy that improves children’s lives. But this year, when so many vulnerable Kansans felt left out of the legislative process, we shined a light on issues like poverty, childhood hunger and the need for government transparency. For example, when it became apparent that policymakers and the public were largely unaware that administrative changes had led to fewer families accessing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), KAC launched an educational campaign to demonstrate how TANF benefits our poorest children. And when details regarding the tobacco settlement that funds early childhood programs in Kansas were kept from the public, KAC filed suit to gain access to the documents. In this challenging political environment, KAC speaks out when others can’t.
HELP US TURN THE PAGE

Although some outcomes from this legislative session were disappointing, there’s good news when it comes to other aspects of our work.

» New champions speaking out in favor of mid-level dental providers

» The successful launch of Raise Kansas, a coalition of women fighting childhood hunger

» Meaningful conversation on early literacy policy

KAC will work all year long to make Kansas the best place to live, work and raise a family.