
Most of us call Kansas home because this is a great place to raise a child. Children are our greatest asset and most important investment. And they are worth every dollar.

Unfortunately, when we talk about children and families in the Kansas State Capitol, some struggle to see the face on the statistics. They don’t connect state budget decisions with real people and real consequences. When I think about our work at Kansas Action for Children (KAC) this year, our effort to shine a light on the people—to personalize the policy—was the thread weaving our 2016 priorities together.

That’s why this legislative session was such an important one for KAC—and for Kansas. After eight rounds of budget cuts in four years, it’s time for policymakers to see the long-term damage some of their choices have on their own families, their own neighbors, and their own communities.

The 2016 session certainly presented a few disappointments, but KAC also accomplished crucial victories, thanks to key legislative champions and committed advocates. Overall, we believe we achieved the best possible outcome for Kansas children and families, given the difficult political and fiscal climate.

In closing, you may have heard that this was my last session as President and CEO. I leave the reigns of KAC in the qualified, capable hands of Annie McKay, the current Executive Director of the Kansas Center for Economic Growth. While my time at KAC may be over, the fight to protect our state’s youngest and most vulnerable citizens will continue. With yet another budget crisis expected in 2017, more dark times loom on the horizon. Please continue to stay engaged. Your advocacy will ensure that the sun will shine again in Kansas.

Thank you for your friendship and support these last 19 years. I hope our paths will cross again.

Warm regards,
Shannon Cotsoradis
Kansas Action for Children President and CEO

2016 SPOTLIGHT:
A MESSAGE FROM SHANNON COTSORADIS

KAC’S 2016 POLICY PRIORITIES

- **PROTECT EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS**
  KAC works steadfastly to push back on efforts to dismantle the state’s premier infrastructure for early childhood education.

- **ESTABLISH DENTAL THERAPY**
  KAC remains committed to addressing Kansas’ dental care shortage by working to establish dental therapy.

- **RESTORE ACCESS TO THE KANSAS SAFETY NET**
  KAC continues to advocate for policies to prevent further erosion of vital programs that help Kansas’ most economically fragile families.

- **PRESEVE THE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)**
  The EITC is one of the last remaining tax credits to help low-income families. It should be preserved as policymakers consider ways to make the Kansas tax code more fair and structurally balanced.

- **OPEN ACCESS TO KANSAS GOVERNMENT**
  KAC’s advocacy depends on timely, reliable access to public information. We support initiatives to increase government transparency and expand access to the legislative process.
PROPOSAL #1: ELIMINATE THE CIF
When Governor Brownback introduced his budget in January, he called for the total elimination of the CIF, moving those dollars to the state general fund and moving the Kansas Children’s Cabinet to the Kansas State Department of Education. At the time, his administration claimed this was an effort to improve coordination among K-12 and early childhood entities. Because this would have dismantled a highly successful system of checks and balances under the Children’s Cabinet, the idea received swift and significant push back from early childhood advocates. The Legislature rejected this proposal.

PROPOSAL #2: SENATE BILL 463
As soon as the Legislature stated to keep the CIF intact in the state budget, a new bill surfaced to eliminate it. Similarly to Governor Brownback’s original recommendation, Senate Bill 463 called for the elimination of the CIF and the transfer of its funding source (tobacco MSA funds) to the state general fund. The CIF exists specifically to preserve a stable funding structure for early childhood programs in future years. Selling aside MSA funds in the CIF ensures they are used for their intended purpose, making all early childhood programs extremely vulnerable to budget cuts, competing with other investments during a dire fiscal crisis. For this and other reasons, Senate Bill 463 failed to gain traction.

PROPOSAL #3: SECURITIZATION
After the introduction of Senate Bill 463, the true intent of the Governor’s plan finally came to light. It was revealed that these repeated efforts to abolish or sidestep the CIF had nothing to do with coordination, efficiency, or transparency at all. Rather, they were attempts to quietly set the stage for Governor Brownback to sell the state’s MSA funds to investors for a lump sum of cash. This process is called securitization. If MSA funds are sold, it would forfeit future payments to the CIF and instead result in one immediate lump sum to the state general fund. Given the state’s fiscal woes, these funds would likely be depleted quickly and all future revenue for early childhood programs in Kansas would be lost.

PROPOSAL #4: OPTION #1
In April, after three efforts to dismantle the CIF were rejected by the Legislature, Kansas received yet another round of devastating budget news. When another nearly $300 million shortfall was projected over the next budget cycle, Governor Brownback presented three options for filling the gaping budget hole: MSA securitization/dismantling the CIF was his top choice.

WHAT NOW?
Yet again, the Legislature resoundingly rejected the Governor’s fourth attempt to dismantle Kansas’ premier system for early childhood education. After four years, eight rounds of budget cuts, and no end to the budget deficit in sight, it’s time to ask yourself:

What is Kansas worth to you?

It, like so many of your fellow Kansans, you believe that our children and our communities are worthy of protecting, then we will need your help in the coming year to preserve Kansas’ premier system for early learning, to restore the state safety net, and to ensure all Kansas children receive the best possible start in life—no matter what.

Under the skilled leadership of Shannon Coboradace, KAC garnered a reputation for excellence, efficiency, and unyielding dedication to Kansas children and families, but I know the best is still ahead. Here are a few 2016 successes I look forward to building upon:

SHINING A LIGHT ON KANSAS GOVERNMENT.
In January, KAC joined the “Open Kansas” initiative to advocate for increased transparency in Kansas government. Open Kansas made major strides, including closing a loophole that enabled elected officials to conduct state business on private e-mail accounts and requiring audio streaming of legislative hearings. KAC will continue to participate in Open Kansas.

PROTECTING “HOPE” FOR NEW MOMS.
Although state leaders continued their efforts to dismantle the Kansas safety net in 2016, KAC worked hard to limit the harmful impact on Kansas mothers and infants. The Kansas Legislature rejected efforts to eliminate maternity leave for new mothers who had already received 12 months of cash assistance, ensuring the mothers of our youngest, poorest, most vulnerable Kansans can participate in the cash assistance program.

BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR DENTAL THERAPY.
KAC’s ongoing effort to expand dental care access to low-income and rural Kansans gained more traction. We introduced legislation to align with newly approved standards adopted by the Commission for Dental Accreditation (CODA) and hosted our largest advocacy day yet with over 200 participants.

As we begin this new chapter, I feel extremely fortunate to join a robust network of partners and advocates. We know tough days lie ahead, making our cause more important than ever. I look forward to taking this journey with you and expanding our work to benefit the next generation of Kansans.

Ad astra per aspera,
Annie McKay
Incoming Kansas Action for Children President & CEO

THE CIF: A KANSAS LEGACY
In 1999, Kansas legislators made a commitment to our state’s future prosperity by establishing the CIF using monies garnered by the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement. Kansas was the only state in the nation to do so, recognizing both the cost avoidance and tremendous return on investment generated by early learning. It was part of a larger vision to provide early learning opportunities for generations of Kansans to come. Nearly two decades later, a statewide audit of state government elevated CIF as the gold standard for government accountability and efficiency, with some programs generating an $11 return for every $1 invested.

OPENING NEW DOORS:
A MESSAGE FROM ANNIE MCKAY
For the last three and a half years, I’ve worked as the Executive Director of the Kansas Center for Economic Growth, which means I’ve spent a lot of time talking about Kansas budget and tax policy. Kansas’ budget problems began in 2012, when the Governor set Kansas on a path to eliminate the state income tax. The decision has had serious consequences for all of Kansas’ most important investments — not just early childhood programs. After four years, eight rounds of budget cuts, and no end to the budget deficit in sight, it’s time to ask yourself: