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KLPG Capitol Highlights

FROM PINEGAR, SMITH & ASSOCIATES, INC.
MARCH 22, 2024 | VOLUME XII | ISSUE ELEVEN
2024 LEGISLATURE WEEK ELEVEN

Governor Kelly announced that Chris Kennedy has been appointed to replace the retiring Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks Secretary Brad Loveless, who will remain on the job through April to ease Kennedy's transition into the post. The new secretary came to Kansas after 28 years with the Missouri Department of Conservation, where he honed an exceptional understanding of fish, wildlife, and outdoor recreation issues.

Governor Kelly has signed SB 195, authorizing the Executive Director of the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund to establish a nonprofit corporation to receive donations, gifts, and grants and engage in fundraising activities for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Every child aged 0-5 in Kansas is now eligible to participate in the program to receive one free, high-quality, age-appropriate book per month until their fifth birthday. 74,720 Kansas children are already enrolled in the program. Parents can enroll children in the Imagination Library of Kansas here: <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/imaginationlibrary/>

The House Committee on Education has recommended Sub. HB 2494 mandates all school districts to adopt cardiac emergency response plans based on the statewide standards developed by the Secretary of Health and Environment. It requires automated external defibrillators to be accessible in each school district building. All coaches, sponsors, assistants, and any other school district personnel designated essential to specific school activities would be required to have annual cardiopulmonary resuscitation and AED equipment training. The bill would also establish the School Cardiac Emergency Response Grant Program and create the School Cardiac Emergency Response Grant Fund. The bill would take effect on and after January 1, 2025.

The House Legislative Modernization Committee opened a discussion on HB 2842 led by Representative Blake Carpenter this week. The bill would be the first step in initiating a five-year overhaul and centralization of information technology security systems across all three branches of the Kansas government, similar to what is in place on the federal level. There is no way to currently calculate how much this plan will eventually cost to complete. Still, funding for the improvements would be integrated into the Legislature's budget process starting in fiscal year 2026 with an initial appropriation of \$65 million.

The House of Representatives budget has allocated \$14.6 million more than Governor Kelly's recommended \$25 million for the Kansas Aging and Disability Services Department. The funds would be earmarked to whittle down the Medicaid waiver waitlists, which currently hold over 7K people in need of physical, intellectual, or developmental disability services. Assistant Majority Leader Representative Les Mason acknowledged that helping 500 Kansans is just a jumping-off point to show their commitment to determining as quickly and aggressively as possible how to eliminate the waitlists.

The Senate Ways and Means Committee and Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee held an informational joint session hearing on Governor Kelly's bipartisan Medicaid expansion proposal on Wednesday, March 20th. The House Health and Human Services Committee held a hearing on the same issue later that same day. This was the first time in four years that the legislature has allowed public debate on Medicaid expansion. Dozens of advocates from many sectors across the state, including disability rights advocates, health care workers, Kansans without insurance, the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians, and the Kansas Sheriff Department, spoke to the committees, and 900+ written testimonies in support of expansion were submitted. However, despite the resounding support shown, the House committee hearing was brought to a halt the very next day with a partisan vote of 12-5, essentially killing any chance that the bill will move on during this year's legislative session.

The Senate Ways and Means Committee is considering SB 542, which would provide \$40 million in grants to build or improve homeless shelters across the state. Communities would be required to enforce state vagrancy laws and enact local ordinances to ban homeless encampments to be eligible for this financial assistance. They would also need to provide matching funds. The reasons that people become houseless are complex and varied, but the rapid rise in their number has caused a critical strain on local resources across the state. If approved, the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services would administer the program to help the nearly 3K Kansans who are experiencing homelessness.

Veterans gathered at the Kansas Statehouse on Monday, March 18th, to continue advocating for property tax cuts for disabled veterans. A bill that passed the House would have provided a property tax exemption for veterans based on their disability level. Still, a Senate committee stripped that benefit from the bill and substituted a sales tax exemption for veterans instead.

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This is a weekly legislative summary of Kansas government, and other statewide news, gathered and compiled independently from various media reports.

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