



Kansas Statewide
Homeless Coalition

2024 Survey for Kansas Public Leaders and Candidates

Name

Wendy Damman-Bednar

Office:

Kansas House of Representatives

Party

Democrat

District

58

Home City

Topeka

Ballot City

Topeka

Policy and Strategy:

Kansas Housing Resource Corporation's 2021 Housing Needs Assessment found that "A shortage of quality, affordable housing is an undeniable barrier to economic growth and development in any community, and particularly in rural communities in Kansas." How likely are you to support increasing funding for affordable housing development?

Very Likely

Comments:

I am originally from a rural community, but I have also lived in many urban/suburban places as well. So, I have seen firsthand the similarities, differences and challenges the unhoused face in each of these environments. I will be a staunch advocate for increased funding and resources to help abate the crisis no matter where it is. I believe we need to provide for better local control to allow each community the opportunity to explore innovative ways to best help serve the communities they are in. There is no one size fits all when it comes to tackling the deeply complex issue facing those who are unhoused.

Inadequate access to mental health and substance use treatment programs contributes to homelessness in Kansas. How likely are you to vote to expand mental health and substance abuse treatment programs?

Very Likely

Comments:

Mental health care and substance abuse issues in our state are abysmal. There is no other way to say this. We have the research and statistics to show that these two factors alone contribute greatly to the rise in our unhoused population, but in Kansas it seems we lack the will to much about it. Republicans will spend

a million dollars to make a faith based moral judgement about someone in crisis, rather than admit that mental health and substance abuse issues are not a moral failing of an individual. Instead of showcasing their faith through acts of humanity, they would rather demonize someone who is struggling. Everyone struggles with something and in a country where your ability to get help is largely based on your ability to pay rather than your need for services is a major barrier in this state to gaining traction on this front. I plan to push for legislation that would help us being to take on this fight and win.

How likely are you to be in favor of limiting annual rental increases?

Very Likely

Comments:

I am in favor of measures that will help us tackle the housing issue we are currently experiencing. Rent is too darn high; I hear it everywhere I turn. Kansas City ranked 7th out of 50 in the largest metro cities for year over year median rent increases. Rent rose approx. 10% this year over last and that is simply not sustainable. Especially when you factor in wage stagnation and things such as the fact that we have the second highest food tax in the nation. How are we to attract, or retain the talent we need to make Kansas competitive?

Kansas has no statewide plan that comprehensively addresses homelessness. How likely are you to support the implementation of a statewide affordable housing plan to address homelessness?

Very Likely

Comments:

I cannot tell you how stunned I was to find that you are correct, we do not in fact have a comprehensive state plan to address our homeless crisis. The first step in attacking any problem is to create a plan to execute. The fact that we do not says more than I can about the intent of the majority in office to fix the problem.

How likely are you to advocate to allow for more affordable housing developments in urban and suburban areas?

Very Likely

Comments:

If we don't have housing, we will not have growth. We need a shift in priorities in the statehouse to address housing for the majority of Kansans. Considering labor follows capitol it would only make sense to increase affordable housing in the areas where workers work.

How likely are you to be in favor of establishing a state-funded rental assistance program to stabilize low-income renters and support property owners?

Very Likely

Comments:

I would have to see how the legislation was crafted, but it only makes sense to try to keep people in the houses they are currently in. It's better for communities, it's better for families, it's better for the Kansas economy. Property owners also have a stake in stripping out the market of potential renters, so with the right program I think there could be common ground for both parties involved.

How likely are you to support legislation or programs to provide legal assistance to tenants facing eviction?

Very Likely

Comments:

While I am no expert in the eviction process, I have seen the process favor property owners over renter's time and time again. Any time low-income people have to deal with the legal system they find themselves behind the eight ball. I found the lack of educational resources available to those facing eviction on the how's/why's of the process was nominal and confusing at best. If I were to be facing the eviction process, I would find legal assistance a great tool in my tool belt.

How likely are you to support increasing funding for domestic violence shelters and services to prevent homelessness?

Very Likely

Comments:

Women and children have always borne the brunt when it comes to domestic violence. The two main reasons people stay in abusive relationships are the lack of healthy relationships being modeled in their lives and the lack of financial resources to leave. Until we can solve the issue of violence as a whole, we will always need to support resources that help people get out of the cycle of violence.

What funding sources will you prioritize or advocate for to support homelessness programs and services? (Check all that apply)

Federal grants and programs (e.g., HUD Continuum of Care, Emergency Solutions Grants)

State Government funding initiatives

Local government budgets and funding allocations

Private donations and philanthropic foundations

Corporate partnerships and sponsorships

Community fundraising events and campaigns

Social impact bonds and other innovative financing mechanisms

Public-private partnerships

Tax revenue initiatives (e.g., bonds, levies specifically for housing and homeless services)

Comments:

I welcome the feedback of stakeholders when it comes to funding sources. I am no expert on homelessness, so I would like to hear from those who have been on the front lines of this issue. My knee jerk response is to say I would advocate for all of these options, but my limited knowledge of which ones make a greater impact or are more beneficial is outside of my wheelhouse. I would take advice and counsel and give it the respectful time of consideration.

Housing Solutions

Kansas does not have enough shelter space; nearly two thousand Kansans sleep outside or in their cars in dangerous weather conditions. How important is it to increase funding and capacity for emergency shelters to meet immediate needs?

Very Important

Comments:

The fact that we do not have a comprehensive state plan for homelessness makes the question of, "Should we shelter human beings during times of a weather emergency?" even more ridiculous to me. We should absolutely increase the capacity for emergency shelters to meet the needs of our citizens. As we see our weather patterns starting to shift to being more unpredictable each season, we will continue to have an increased need.

How important is it to develop more transitional housing programs to bridge the gap between homelessness and permanent housing?

Very Important

How important is it to expand permanent supportive housing options with integrated services for long-term stability?

Very Important

Comments:

I would think it is vital to the recovery of a person with substance abuse, or mental health issues to have some sort of support system in those early days of recovery. It would certainly be more cost effective to have someone supported in their early days make a full recovery than have them reenter the system and need the resources from the beginning.

How important is it to implement a low barrier approach that prioritizes permanent housing with support services?

Neutral

Comments:

I do not know enough about what a low-barrier approach entails to answer this question.

How important is it to collaborate on the local level to ensure a coordinated response that addresses homelessness?

Very Important

Comments:

I have long heard about the need for local control, home rule, etc. The issue of how to mitigate homelessness in a community is as varied as the community itself. There is no one size fits all in this situation, so it is paramount that the local level has been coordinated with when we're talking about responding to homelessness. No plan is going to be successful if those at the local level have no voice at the table.

How important is it to use data-driven strategies to allocate resources based on current demand and long-term outcomes?

Very Important

How important is it to create a flexible funding source that allows communities to address local needs?

Very Important

Collaboration and Partnerships:

Will you establish regular communication channels with local nonprofits to address homelessness?

Yes

Comments:

I welcome any education on this issue.

Do you plan to participate in a workgroup or advisory council that addresses homelessness that includes representatives from key stakeholders throughout Kansas?

Yes

Comments:

I am open to this.

How important is it for state entities to collaborate on homelessness initiatives?

Very Important

Employment and Education:

How likely are you to be in favor of creating state incentives for businesses that hire individuals experiencing homelessness?

Very Likely

Will you support job training and vocational programs tailored to the needs of homeless individuals?

Yes

Do you support the creation of a statewide initiative to simplify the process of obtaining a state ID for homeless and low-income individuals?

Yes

Health and Well-being:

Do you advocate for Medicaid expansion to increase healthcare coverage for low-income individuals?

Yes

How critical is Medicaid expansion for increasing healthcare coverage for low-income individuals in your view?

Very Critical

Will you support the integration of healthcare services within shelters and housing programs?

Yes