2020
FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE ISSUES
for the Greater Kansas City Region
MARC
MID-AMERICA REGIONAL COUNCIL
Each year, the Mid-America Regional Council — the nonprofit association of local governments and metropolitan planning organization for the bistate Kansas City region — works with committees and community partners to identify federal policy, legislative and funding issues of importance to the Greater Kansas City area. The following pages include our key priorities and issue-specific recommendations for 2020.
BACKGROUND
Each year, the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) Board of Directors adopts a federal policy agenda, reflecting issues of importance to the Kansas City region. The issues come forward from committees, member local governments and community partners. The following provides 2020 priority and other issues.

PRIORITIES

• **Role of Local Governments in Metropolitan Areas**
  The federal government has transitioned funding for a number of programs from direct grants to local communities to block grants to the states. States often do not recognize the importance role of urban, suburban and rural communities within large metropolitan areas, both in terms of their unique needs and in terms of the size of their population and their economic contribution to the state and the nation. **Congress should design federal programs to consider the unique needs of local governments in metropolitan areas, and local leaders should have a meaningful voice in decisions about federal investments and program implementation. Congress should consider direct allocations of federal funds to local communities within metropolitan areas or require states to pass through appropriate amounts based on specific criteria such as size or economic base of local communities.**

• Reauthorization of the federal transportation law (Fixing America’s Surface Transportation -FAST Act) and maintain transportation funding for the nation’s surface transportation system.
  The current federal transportation law was passed by Congress in 2015, and it will expire in 2020. Significant and stable federal infrastructure investment is essential to the Kansas City region’s unique transportation and logistics systems. **Federal policy should provide adequate and predictable funding for surface transportation programs to allow effective planning and project delivery for state and local governments. The reauthorization should consider the following principles.**
  - Increase the level of federal resources in the Highway Trust Fund and include new revenue sources beyond the current federal gas tax of 18.4 cents. Increased and indexed federal fuel taxes can accomplish this in the near-term, while a long-term solution – such as a mile-based user fee – is identified and implemented.
  - Implement a multi-year bill to provide stability and predictability to states and local governments and build on the current law’s performance-based approach to transportation decisions.
  - Recognize the economic value and allocate resources for the nation’s metropolitan areas and emphasize the role of local governments in decisions on funding allocations.
  - Maintain progress for non-highway modes of transportation – ensuring a balanced system.
  - Encourage public-private partnerships and new bond financing authority to support large-scale projects of regional and national significance.
• **Funding to support the Head Start and Early Head Start programs**

*The federal government should support increased funding for Head Start and Early Head Start to allow more eligible children to be served and enter school ready to succeed.*

In the Kansas City region, nearly 4,000 children benefit from Head Start and Early Head Start services each year. Congress recently passed increased funding for Head Start and Early Head Start as part of the December omnibus spending bill. Head Start has proven results. Children who participate are school ready, less likely to need special education, and more likely to graduate high school and go on to college. Recent research affirmed the program’s success at disrupting generational poverty, among other significant long- and short-term outcomes. However, despite serving over a million low-income children nationwide, fewer than half of eligible children are able to benefit from Head Start and less than eight percent participate in Early Head Start.

• **Funding to support access to quality child care programs**

*Full funding of the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is needed to support states to revise their child care systems to assist children and families to access high-quality care.*

The federal government provides each state with block grant funds to assist low-income working families with assistance for their child care costs to enable parents to work. The need for these resources is greater than the funds available, and in most cases, states both limit the income eligibility so that many low-income families do not qualify and the amount of subsidy for eligible families to pay for quality child care. Additional funds are needed to serve more families at higher reimbursement rates.

• **Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act**

*Congress needs to complete work on reauthorization of the Older Americans Act in 2020.* The Mid-America Regional Council serves as the Area Agency on Aging for the region’s five Missouri counties, serving about 8,300 older adults annually with home-delivered meals, transportation services, congregate meals, in-home care and information and referral services. Similar services are provided by county Area Agencies on Aging in Kansas. The funding for these services comes through the Older Americans Act (OAA), which expired on September 30, 2019. The Act was originally passed in 1965 to help vulnerable older adults in urban, suburban and rural places receive support to remain independent and healthy. The region’s older adult population is expected to more than double over the next 20 years to more than 372,000 persons. The OAA funding is an important resource to serve many of these residents.
OTHER POLICY ISSUES

Local Government Finances and Operations

- **2020 Census**
Over the past year, the U.S. Census bureau has advanced plans to implement a new method of data privacy protection for the 2020 Decennial Census. This new method, known as “Differential Privacy,” adds some amount of statistical “noise” to raw census results before releasing them. While intended to ensure that the Census Bureau complies with Title 13 prohibitions on releasing identifiable data, the use of Differential Privacy is likely to have tremendous impacts on the accuracy of the data that is released.

The Census Bureau is motivated to adopt this new method of disclosure avoidance based upon internal experiments that combined publicly-released census tables with commercially available “big data” and estimated that 38% of records could be matched. However, after comparing to actual census responses, half of those matches were “false positives” which could be determined only by using confidential census data. Nevertheless, the Bureau is continuing to move forward with the proposed use of Differential Privacy for the 2020 Decennial Census, with plans to use it for the American Community Survey in 2025. There is concern among technical experts that introducing the adjustments to the 2020 Census data could result in undermining confidence in the Census as a reliable data source and negatively impact the allocation of federal resources to areas with need. *The Congressional delegation is urged to monitor the Census Bureau’s plans to adjust the 2020 Census data and limit such actions.*

- **Tax exemption for municipal bonds**
*Oppose attempts to eliminate or limit the tax exemption for municipal bonds.* Affordable financing is the single greatest tool that cities and counties have available to fund critical infrastructure needs.

- **Small cell wireless deployment**
*Congress should support local governments in their efforts to protect the public right-of-way and oppose attempts to limit local control of public rights-of-way and assets for small cell wireless technology deployment.* In September 2018, the Federal Communications Commission issued sweeping regulations for 5G wireless infrastructure deployment, curtailing the authority of local governments with time constraints on the review and approval of small cells on public infrastructure and fees that local governments may charge to process applications. Actions by state legislatures have further restricted the ability of local governments to manage the public right-of-way.

- **Protect internet sales tax**
*Support local governments’ ability to collect internet sales taxes.* In April 2019, the US Commerce Department reported that the total market share of “non-store” or online retail sales in the US was higher than general merchandise sales at stores for the first time in history. As more retail activity occurs through internet sales, state and local government sales tax revenues have declined. In addition, when sales tax is not charged on internet sales, storefront retailers in local communities are put at an economic disadvantage to compete. Equity is an
important consideration in collecting sales taxes more uniformly, whether through in store or online sales. *Congress should support internet sales tax policy.*

**Transportation**
- **Transportation Funding for Special Projects**
  *The Kansas City area Congressional delegation is asked to support special projects that are regionally significant and are consistent with the region’s long-range transportation plan.*
  Local governments, state departments of transportation, transit agencies and others rely on the MARC decision-making process to make recommendations to the two states on federal funds available to the Kansas City region. Special projects include major interstate, major roadway and bridge improvements and public transit systems. These large-scale projects cannot advance through regular funding processes and require special appropriations.

- **Transportation Choices**
  Public transportation is an important component of a balanced transportation system. Transit investments, including expanding fixed guideway systems, are important to connect residents to jobs and vital services and to support tourism and economic development. *Federal policy should support public transportation as an essential element of comprehensive metropolitan transportation systems.*

- **Transportation Technologies**
  Emerging technologies, such as automated vehicles, hold the promise of saving lives and improving mobility, especially in automobile-oriented regions such as Kansas City. Federal policy will have a substantial influence on the effective deployment of these new systems. *Federal policies affecting new transportation technologies should be developed in a broad context that encourages innovation in local and metropolitan networks, maintains the integrity of local transportation systems and be compatible across state lines.*

**Environment**
- **Water Quality, Stormwater Management and Green Infrastructure**
  Federal support for water and wastewater system improvements is essential to the capacity of local communities to ensure water supply and water quality and to achieve the multiple benefits that accrue from effective water resource management. *The Congressional delegation is asked to support appropriations for EPA and USDA water and wastewater programs.*

- **Missouri River Management and Watershed Planning**
  Federal management of national waterways and investment in key flood control and ecosystem restoration projects are critical to the Kansas City region. *The Congressional delegation is asked to support funding and authorization requests for level and watershed planning and projects in the Kansas City area.*
Air Quality
The Kansas City region has maintained compliance with the federal ozone standards since 1992, even as the standard has changed to increase the protection of public health. Congress should continue to support federal air quality policies that support the Kansas City region’s efforts to ensure public health and community economic development.

Energy Conservation
The Kansas City region has benefitted from federal investments in energy conservation, helping low-income homeowners with improvements to lower monthly utility bills; installation of more efficient street lighting in small communities; and use of renewable energy through solar energy and alternative fuel vehicles. Continued federal support for energy conservation and renewable energy sources could enhance our region’s quality of life and lower costs for residents and businesses.

Health and Human Services

Health Care Access
Over 250,000 area residents, about 13 percent of the region’s population, do not have health insurance, which limits their access to health care. While the number of those uninsured residents has declined due to enrollment in coverage through the federal health insurance marketplace, many residents still lack insurance due to limited income. The expansion of Medicaid in Missouri and Kansas could substantially reduce the number of uninsured. The federal government should provide programs and resources to ensure access to affordable health care.

Mental Health Services
There is a growing need to address mental health challenges among children, youth and adults. The federal Community Mental Health Block Grant program is an important source of grants to state and local governments to prevent, diagnose and treat mental illness. Comprehensive parity between coverage of mental and physical health benefits in group and private health insurance plans, as well as federal and state insurance programs, could broaden affordable mental health services. Federal health policy should expand the availability of mental health services and establish parity in health coverage.

Emergency Medical Services
The Kansas City region is served by over 30 EMS agencies providing high-quality pre-hospital emergency care. As the cost of these services continues to increase, support from the federal government through adequate Medicare reimbursement rates is important. As our communities’ health care needs change, emergency medical services are well positioned to support residents with non-emergency care (community paramedicine) to reduce emergency transports and costly emergency room visits. Congress is asked to support adequate Medicare reimbursement rates for ambulance services and support community paramedicine programs.
• Self Sufficiency/Family Support
Federal income assistance programs are important in serving the most vulnerable in our communities. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides important source of family stability and health. In addition, for 40 years, the Earned Income Tax Credit has become of the nation’s most effective tools for lifting low-income workers and their families above the poverty line. **Federal policy should ensure support for programs that serve disadvantaged residents of our communities and enable them to provide for their families.**

- **Rate Payer Assistance for Water, Sewer and Stormwater Charges.**
Legislation has been introduced annually since 2016 to establish a federal assistance program for water, sewer and stormwater system ratepayers. The act’s premise is similar to that of the energy sector’s Low-Income Household Energy Assistance Program that there may be a role for the federal government to offer assistance to communities and low-income ratepayers in paying water and sewer rates. Such assistance would reflect the fact that federal mandates frequently drive water, wastewater and stormwater rate increases, and that many communities are challenged in charging the true cost of service and compliance because of the inability of lower-income ratepayers to pay increased rates. **Support legislation that assists low-income households cover their costs for water, sewer and stormwater fees.**

**Education and Workforce Development**

- **Early Learning**
*Increase funding for the Child Care and Development Block Act for FY19 and FY20, and funding for Head Start and Early Head Start so that more eligible children and families may benefit from full-day programming. Support increased funding for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Parts B and C grants for infants and families and preschool grants.*

- **Higher Education/Post-Secondary Attainment**
School districts are transforming their educational systems to help students gain the skills they need to earn post-secondary certification and enter career pathways. School districts and colleges have created partnerships to provide dual credit to high school students. However, the cost of college credit continues to be a barrier for low-income students. Changes to the Pell grant policy could enable more high school students to earn an associate degree, a technical certification or progress toward a four-year degree while still in high school. **Congress should support changes to the Pell grant program to support educational goals for high school students to secure post-secondary certifications or degrees.**

- **Workforce Development**
Kansas City area employment has continued to expand since the recession, yet many area residents lack the education, skills and experience necessary to fill available jobs. Businesses struggle to invest and grow when the available workforce does not meet their needs. The federal government supports important education and workforce development programs, including Workforce Investment Boards, which enable communities to help disadvantaged residents gain the skills they need to meet employer needs. In addition, the Kansas City region like most metropolitan areas faces a shortage of workers with technical skills in key technology and scientific occupations. The H1-B visa programs help to address this labor shortage problem.
Area colleges and universities have the capacity to educate international students and enabling those students to stay in the region after graduation would allow young talented professionals to help grow the metro area’s workforce and meet employer needs. **Federal workforce policy should support regional workforce development strategies and enable businesses to hire highly skilled foreign workers.**

**Emergency Services and Public Safety**

- **Homeland Security**
  Congress has reduced funding for state and local homeland security programs, and as a result, many urban areas, including the Kansas City area, has lost much of its grant funding. The Kansas City region continues to face risks from terrorist threats. The Kansas City region has established an effective homeland security program, and the loss of Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) program funding has resulted in a loss in the region’s ability to prevent and respond to acts of terrorism and other man-made and natural disasters. **Congress should provide funding to major metropolitan areas such as Kansas City to allow the region to respond to evolving threats, to maintain a coordinated operational structure for effective preparedness and response, and to foster strong, public safety communication networks.**

- **Implementation of Sec. 1232 of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018**
  Federal support is critical to address both man-made and natural hazards, as well as public health emergencies, and create a nation of safe, prepared and resilient communities. Section 1232 of the DRRA requires FEMA to give greater consideration to severe local impact or recent multiple disasters when making recommendations on a major disaster declaration. In 2019, the state of Missouri experienced multiple disasters (flooding and tornadoes). SEMA denied the state’s request for a Presidential disaster declaration to cover certain assistance for a number of counties including Platte County for April and July 2019 events. MARC supports the action of the Missouri side Congressional delegation, which sent a joint letter to FEMA asking for implementation of the 2018 Act’s Section 1232.

- **Next Generation 911 Act of 2019 (S. 1479 and H.R. 2760)**
  These bills would further deploy Next Generation 911 systems across the nation by providing up to $12 billion in grant funding to the states to modernize 911 equipment. **Support the legislation to fund Next Generation 911 technology systems to improve emergency response capacities.**

**Housing and Neighborhoods**

- **Affordable Housing**
  The federal government has had a longstanding role in helping local communities meet the housing needs of low-income persons and families. The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, Historic Preservation Tax Credit, public housing and housing vouchers have enabled millions of low-income households to secure safe and adequate housing. Emergency Shelter and Continuum of Care grants enable local agencies to serve homeless veterans, other individuals and families. **Congress is urged to continue to appropriate funds for housing for low-income persons and families.**
Community Revitalization
The Community Development Block Grant and HOME programs provide important leverage for public and private investments to support low-and-moderate income persons and families and revitalize distressed communities. The Economic Development Administration and EPA’s Brownfields program support economic revitalization and business growth. Congress should support federal partnerships and programs like the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Economic Development Administration (EDA), which are important to local initiatives to revitalize communities.
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