



El Centro's 2018 Advocacy Priorities

El Centro remains committed to pursuing advocacy and policy changes that support the organization's direct service work and meets the needs of clients. While the agency may not have the capacity to always take the lead on these policy issues, El Centro's Board of Directors recognizes that, on some issues, the organization's engagement could play an important supporting role. In approaching advocacy, El Centro will leverage its strongest assets: its grassroots base of clients and allies, its issue expertise, and its reputation and relationships. In some cases, this work will be defensive, as El Centro works with allies to prevent negative policy developments. In other cases, El Centro and its partners will begin to lay the groundwork for advancing policy agendas that, over time, can substantially strengthen the programmatic work the agency does with individuals and families.

A Policy Agenda for a Healthy Community

1. Protect our democracy and encourage individual, youth and family civic engagement

Kansans who turn 18 and others who try to register to vote face obstacles unimaginable than just a decade ago: requirements to obtain original birth certificates, costs associated with securing photo identification, complicated rules enacted by the Secretary of State to try to get around court rulings challenging his undemocratic systems. Too many of these young would-be voters give up in frustration or conclude that their participation in government is unwelcome. El Centro believes that our communities are strongest when all citizens have a stake and participate. The legislature should restore transparent, fair, and effective voting laws. We support the Free State Elections Act, which would lift the burdensome birth certificate requirement—putting 18-year-olds on equal footing with other voters—and allow for same-day registration. Our democracy is worth defending.

2. Make our education system a strong ladder to fair opportunity

In the United States, most people believe that a good education is key to opportunities—to climb the economic ladder, achieve financial security, and participate fully in the best our communities have to offer. El Centro invests in quality early childhood education as a building block of educational attainment. We support policies that extend equitable educational opportunities to all children, including fair school funding formulas, proven investments to close achievement gaps, and affordable access to higher education for all Kansas high school graduates. We call on Congress to extend permanent status to immigrant students whose futures depend on it. Our nation needs policies that allow parents to mean it when they tell our children that studying hard and succeeding in school will give them a real chance at the American Dream.

3. Equip law enforcement and local government with tools for effective community engagement

Local governments across the United States issue identification cards so that community members can prove their identity and their address, even if they do not have state-issued ID. These local policies facilitate access to city and county services, including local courts, mail retrieval, and financial transactions. They also give law enforcement the best-possible tools with which to work effectively and efficiently with all residents. Municipal ID policies represent government at its best—at the local level, close to the problem, working pragmatically to solve problems, bridge gaps, and get business done. We encourage local communities in Wyandotte and Johnson counties to create their own municipal ID systems.

4. Expansion of Medicaid Eligibility

Although the uninsured rate in Kansas is at an all-time low of 10.5 percent, advocates note that there are 50,000 *uninsured* Kansas residents who would be eligible for Medicaid if the state were to expand coverage, and a total of 150,000 who would be newly eligible for Medicaid under expansion. El Centro provides health navigation services to assist individuals in accessing needed health care. This work is often frustrating, as El Centro staff encounter considerable gaps in the health care system that complicate health promotion and disease management efforts. We believe that expanding eligibility for Medicaid/KanCare, would reduce the extent of unmet need in the health care system and, therefore, improve the health status of low-income Kansans and otherwise disadvantaged clients. We recognize, still, an ongoing need for safety net health care providers, knitted together to provide access to medical homes for all, and believe that Medicaid expansion would complement their critical role.