

**Kansas Young Professionals Day**

**2024 Advocacy Agenda**

**Community Connections**

The Greater Topeka region faces challenges connecting our communities physically, socially, and mentally.

* *Entertainment Districts.* Entertainment Districts, or Common Consumption Areas, create a friendly and accommodating environment for younger crowds in designated areas to enjoy their time in the Capitol City. Forge applauds the passage of HB 2059 in the 2023 Legislative Session regarding Common Consumption in Kansas.
* *Kansas Flag.* Forge wasthe driving force behind the design and adoption of the new Topeka Flag in 2019 and there has been a wave of redesigning flags across Kansas and in multiple other states. Forge encourages the Kansas Legislature to create and adopt a process to modernize our state flag. A new flag can showcase Kansas as it is in the 21st century and increase the feeling of community throughout our state.

**Access & Affordability**

Topeka cannot continue to grow if it does not allow easy access to and affordability of critical needs and services for young professionals.

* *Livable Wages.* With progress unlikely at the federal level, Forge urges the Kansas Legislature and the City of Topeka to adopt a plan to implement livable wages. According to research from MIT, the 2023 livable wage for a single adult with no children in Shawnee County, KS is $15.10 per hour. SB 90 and HB 2368 both aim to amend the minimum wage in Kansas over the course of the next 4 years to a livable rate.
* *Childcare*.  Forge urges state and local leaders to explore solutions to the critical lack of available and equitable childcare.  This has become a roadblock to businesses and families trying to return to work.  Responses could include making existing childcare tax credits more accessible, exploring the benefits of universal pre-K education in Kansas, and standing ready to take advantage of available federal funding.
* *Housing*.  The quality, quantity, affordability, and equity of our housing stocks are not adequate to attract talented people to live and work in our communities.  Forge urges the State of Kansas and the City of Topeka to explore ways to help the residential real estate market regain its ability to produce housing in step with demand. This also includes the affordability of rental units in the area, which are essential to the development of our young professionals. Forge asks the City of Topeka and Shawnee County to end the size restrictions on residential construction so as to open the door to new developments such as “tiny homes” as well as opposing SCR 1611 in the Kansas Legislature that would cap property valuations and disproportionately burdening new and first-time home buyers.
* *Voting.* The ability of young people to be engaged in the decisions being made in our communities starts with easy access to voting resources. Forge urges the state to adopt less restrictive regulations on voter registrations and access to voting. Forge supports efforts to maintain nonpartisan elections in local races, including but not limited to school boards, city council, and mayor.

**Education & Wellness**

It is important to maintain a positive environment in our communities to learn and live well. Young professionals thrive in such an environment, and this attracts new talent to our area as well as further developing our existing talent.

* *Healthcare.* Forge supports the initiatives to recruit and retain additional healthcare professionals to the Topeka/Shawnee County area. There is a need to expand behavioral health resources as the youth population continues to grow as well as an existing need to provide those resources to underserved communities, including minorities and those facing homelessness. Lastly, Forge supports efforts to expand Medicaid in the State of Kansas.
* *Homelessness.* Forge supports the efforts of multiple community partners to investigate the homelessness crisis. Those facing homelessness are some of the most in need in our community with very little resources provided currently. Forge does not support the implementation and enforcement of anti-camping ordinances without the corresponding expansion of resources to those impacted. This could include the development of a low barrier shelter for the homeless population that includes access to behavioral health and work placement services.