



**Highlights from the 2023-2024 Kansas Legislature Legislative Effectiveness Scores**

Craig Volden and Alan E. Wiseman, Co-Directors, Center for Effective Lawmaking

Paige Higginson-Rollins, Program Director for State Legislatures, Center for Effective Lawmaking

Caroline Clements, Program Specialist for State Legislatures, Center for Effective Lawmaking

4/30/2026

**Executive Summary**

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) is pleased to announce the release of the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) for the recently completed 2023-2024 Kansas Legislature legislative session. This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We identify the top-10 most effective legislators in the majority party in both chambers, the top-10 most effective minority-party lawmakers in the House of Representatives, and the top-5 most effective minority-party lawmakers in the Senate. Many lawmakers continued their patterns of highly effective lawmaking from the previous legislative session.
- We identify those lawmakers with the longest streaks of being in our prestigious “Above Expectations” category, as well as first-term lawmakers in this category.
- We find that, consistent with our published research findings, there is an overall lawmaking benefit from being in the majority party. This is not a new phenomenon in Kansas. Across the 2023–2024 legislative term, majority-party Republicans consistently outperformed minority-party Democrats in State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) and bill outcomes. These differences highlight the institutional advantages of majority-party association.
- Across both chambers, serving as a committee chair is related to greater lawmaking effectiveness. Seven of the ten most effective majority-party lawmakers in both the House and Senate were committee chairs during the 2023-2024 Kansas legislative session.
- In addition, our findings indicate that effective lawmakers in one legislative session are likely to remain effective lawmakers across sessions, as several legislators appear among the top-10 and top-5 most effective lawmakers list in both the 2023-2024 and 2021-2022 legislative sessions.

## **Introduction and Methodology**

The State Legislative Effectiveness Scores discussed here are based on the combination of fifteen metrics capturing the bills that each member of each state legislature sponsors, how far their bills move through the lawmaking process, and how substantial their policy proposals are. The scores are normalized to an average value of 1.0 in both the House of Representatives and the State Senate in each legislative session. More on our [methodology](#) and [scores](#) can be found at our website.

For each member of the House of Representatives and State Senate, we also identify a Benchmark Score, based on the average lawmaking effectiveness of legislators who share that legislator's majority- or minority-party status, level of seniority, and chair position on a committee. Controlling for these considerations is important in order to describe legislators on a more level playing field. For example, in the 2023-2024 Kansas House of Representatives, minority-party lawmakers had an average SLES of 0.48 compared to 1.23 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average SLES of 2.01. In the State Senate, those averages were 0.68 in the minority party, 1.14 in the majority party, and 1.37 among committee chairs.

We then label each lawmaker as "Above Expectations" for those outperforming their benchmark scores by 50% or more, "Below Expectations" for those below 50% of their benchmark, and "Meeting Expectations" for all other legislators.

Finally, within each party, we rank each member according to their SLES. This ranking is used to generate the lists of top performers highlighted in the tables below. Given the substantial lawmaking benefit that follows from being in the majority party, ranking the entire Kansas Legislature together would be inappropriate, but these comparisons within each party are quite informative.

## **Bill Sponsorship in Kansas**

The data on bill sponsorship in Kansas (and the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores that follow from bill sponsorship) is somewhat different from what is obtained for other states. Prior to 2024, legislators in Kansas were not required to sponsor the bills that they sought to advance through the legislature. As a result, most bills that were introduced into the Kansas legislature were committee-sponsored or "anonymously introduced" rather than being individually sponsored or co-sponsored by state legislators (as we observe in most state legislatures).

In 2024, the Kansas House of Representatives updated its House Rules to include a new provision requiring individual legislators to publicly sponsor the bills that they introduce. Prior to 2024, however, relatively fewer bills were individually sponsored (compared to what we might see in other states), which influenced how many bills are available for the calculation of a legislator's SLES.

As a point of reference, the rule that was adopted reads as follows:

"Every House bill or resolution intended to be introduced shall be delivered to the chief clerk. The delivery shall be by a legislator who is a sponsor of the legislation or by a legislator who is the chairperson or vice chairperson of a legislative committee that has authorized the introduction, or

by a legislative staff person or another member of the House authorized by such legislator. Such bill or resolution shall contain the name of the legislator or the committee that is the sponsor of the legislation and the name of the person, state or local agency, organization or entity, if any, that requested the bill for introduction by the legislator or committee. In lieu of introduction as provided by this rule, introduction may be as provided by law for prefiled bills and resolutions." (Kansas House Rules: 701)

The Kansas Senate did not adopt the same provision; and though Senate rules allow for individual sponsors for Senate-initiated bills, it does not require them. Hence (unsurprisingly), fewer bills are individually sponsored in the Kansas Senate than in the Kansas House, which likewise influences how many bills are available for the calculation of Kansas senators' State Legislative Effectiveness Scores.

The Kansas Senate Rules of Introduction are as follows:

"Rule 30. Endorsement on Bills, etc. Before any bill, resolution or petition, addressed to the Senate, shall be received or read, the title of the bill or resolution or a brief statement of the contents of the petition shall be typed on the jacket, with the name of the Senator or committee introducing it." (Kansas Senate Rules: 30)

"Rule 31. Introduction of Bills and Concurrent Resolutions. Every bill and concurrent resolution shall be introduced by a Senator, by a committee, on the report of a committee, by message from the House of Representatives, or by proper pre-filing as provided by law. For the purpose of introduction, every bill and concurrent resolution shall be placed in the possession of the secretary and the reading clerk shall read the title, except citations of statutes amended or repealed. The reading clerk shall also read the name of the sponsor of the bill or resolution if it has a single sponsor. If the bill or resolution has two sponsors the reading clerk shall read the names of both sponsors, but if the bill or resolution has more than two sponsors the reading clerk shall read the name of the first sponsor together with the words 'and others.'" (Kansas Senate Rules: 31)

In light of these differences in bill sponsorship rules across chambers (and in comparison, to other states), we only analyze the bill sponsorship and lawmaking effectiveness of Kansas House and Senate members from the 2019-2020 sessions until the 2023-2024 sessions, and the proportion of introduced bills (for which we are able to identify the sponsor) that are used to calculate State Legislative Effectiveness Scores in Kansas is lower in comparison to what we obtain in other states ranging from a low of 41.9% of introduced bills in the 2021-2022 sessions to a high of 71.2% of introduced bills in the 2023-2024 sessions. Hence, while our State Legislative Effectiveness Scores for Kansas accurately capture how successful an individual member of the House or Senate is at advancing their sponsored bills through the legislative process from introduction until possibly becoming law, we recognize that they are not able to account for legislative activities that are happening behind the scenes in Kansas, as legislators advocate for bills that they have not publicly sponsored.

## Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Kansas House of Representatives

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives. Seven of the top ten were committee chairs.

### Top Ten List—House Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	<b>Paul Waggoner (District 104)</b>	6.45	None
2.	<b>John Eplee (District 63)</b>	6.16	None
3.	<b>Adam Thomas (District 26)</b>	4.64	Chair
4.	<b>Pat Proctor (District 41)</b>	3.88	Chair
5.	<b>Kyle Hoffman (District 116)</b>	3.83	None
6.	<b>Troy Waymaster (District 109)</b>	3.66	Chair
7.	<b>Brenda Landwehr (District 105)</b>	3.24	Chair
8.	<b>Barbara Wasinger (District 111)</b>	2.93	Chair
9.	<b>Ken Rahjes (District 110)</b>	2.90	Chair
10.	<b>Susan Humphries (District 99)</b>	2.67	Chair

At the top of the list is Representative Paul Waggoner from District 104 (Reno County) with a score of 6.45. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, he sponsored 38 bills, 22 of which received action in committee, 5 of which received action beyond committee, 4 of which passed the House, and 1 of which became law. Rep. Waggoner joined the House in 2019. He holds a B.S. in business from the University of Kansas and a master's degree in history from Trinity International University. Before joining the House, he served as a precinct committeeman of Medora Township in Reno County, Kansas. He previously owned and managed Waggoner Inc., a cushioning and upholstery business based in Hutchinson.

Two Republican Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. John Eplee (District 63) and Rep. Troy Waymaster (District 109).

## Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Kansas House of Representatives

The following table identifies the top ten highest scorers in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives among minority-party Democrats.

### Top Ten List—House Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	<b>Susan Ruiz (District 23)</b>	3.56	4
2.	<b>Dennis Highberger (District 46)</b>	1.99	3
3.	<b>Vic Miller (District 58)</b>	1.90	2
4.	<b>Rui Xu (District 25)</b>	1.34	3
5.	<b>Lindsay Vaughn (District 22)</b>	1.15	2
6.	<b>Jo Ella Hoye (District 17)</b>	0.99	2
7.	<b>Lynn Melton (District 36)</b>	0.93	1
8.	<b>Henry Helgerson (District 83)</b>	0.91	4
9.	<b>Christina Haswood (District 10)</b>	0.76	2
10.	<b>Brandon Woodward (District 108)</b>	0.68	3

Topping our list is Representative Susan Ruiz of District 23 (Johnson County) with a State Legislative Effectiveness Score of 3.56. She introduced 10 bills in the 2023-2024 legislative session; 5 received action in committee, 4 received action beyond committee and passed the House, and 3 became law.

Rep. Ruiz assumed office in 2019. She is a first-generation college graduate and holds a bachelor’s and master’s degree in social work from Our Lady of the Lake University. Rep. Ruiz has worked as a licensed clinical social worker for over 25 years, working mostly with adults who have severe mental illnesses. When elected, she and Rep. Brandon Woodward became the state’s first-ever LGBTQ+ state legislators.

Four Democratic Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. Dennis Highberger (District 46), Rep. Vic Miller (District 58), Rep. Henry Helgerson (District 83), and Rep. Brandon Woodward (District 108).

### Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Kansas State Senate

The following table identifies the ten highest scoring Republicans in the 2023-2024 State Senate. Seven of the top ten were committee chairs.

### Top Ten List—Senate Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	<b>Mike Thompson (District 10)</b>	4.31	Chair
2.	<b>Caryn Tyson (District 12)</b>	3.85	Chair
3.	<b>J.R. Claeys (District 24)</b>	2.91	None
4.	<b>Elaine Bowers (District 36)</b>	2.16	Chair

<b>5.</b>	<b>Renee Erickson (District 30)</b>	2.04	Chair
<b>6.</b>	<b>Chase Blasi (District 27)</b>	1.86	None
<b>7.</b>	<b>Mark Steffen (District 34)</b>	1.74	None
<b>8.</b>	<b>Kellie Warren (District 11)</b>	1.70	Chair
<b>9.</b>	<b>Carolyn McGinn (District 31)</b>	1.17	Chair
<b>10.</b>	<b>Virgil Peck (District 15)</b>	1.16	Chair

Among Republicans in the Senate, Senator Mike Thompson, District 10 (Johnson County), ranked first with a SLES score of 4.31. In the 2023-2024 session, he introduced 44 bills; 23 received action in committee, 10 received action beyond committee, 7 passed the Senate, and 3 became law.

Sen. Thompson assumed office in 2020. Before joining the House, he spent nearly 40 years in broadcasting, serving as the chief meteorologist for KCTV and WDAF-TV. He studied meteorology in the Navy and was assigned as an observer and forecaster aboard the USS Lexington. Outside his work in television, Sen. Thompson originated and produced a local children’s weather education program called “Weathering the Storm” and founded a nonprofit educational foundation called the Academy for Climate and Energy Analysis. Sen. Thompson holds 6 Emmy awards for his work across television.

Six legislators on the list were among the top-10 highest scoring Republicans in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Sen. Mike Thompson (District 10), Sen. Caryn Tyson (District 12), Sen. J.R. Claeys (District 24), Sen. Renee Erickson (District 30), Sen. Kellie Warren (District 11), and Sen. Carolyn McGinn (District 31).

### **Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Kansas State Senate**

The following table identifies the top five highest scorers in the 2023-2024 State Senate among minority-party Democrats.

#### **Top Five List—Senate Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>LES</u></b>	<b><u>Seniority</u></b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Cindy Holscher (District 8)</b>	2.29	2
<b>2.</b>	<b>Jeff Pittman (District 5)</b>	1.53	2
<b>3.</b>	<b>Oletha Faust-Goudeau (District 29)</b>	1.08	3
<b>4.</b>	<b>Ethan Corson (District 7)</b>	0.97	2
<b>5.</b>	<b>Pat Pettey (District 6)</b>	0.81	7

Senator Cindy Holscher from District 8 (Johnson County) had the highest SLES for Senate Democrats in the 2023-2024 legislative session with a score of 2.29. During the 2023-2024

legislative session, she introduced 31 bills, 5 of which received action in committee, 3 of which received action beyond committee and passed the Senate, and 2 of which became law.

Sen. Holscher was elected to the Senate in 2021. Prior to assuming office, she represented Kansas’ 16th District in the Kansas House of Representatives. She is a long-term supporter of public schools, and, in 2016, she walked from Shawnee to Topeka to raise awareness about the state of Kansas’s public schools. While in the House, she co-founded the Women’s Bipartisan Caucus. In the Senate, she serves as the Minority Whip, and she is currently running for Governor.

Four Democratic State Senators appear on both the top-5 list for the 2021-2022 and 2023-2024 legislative sessions: Sen. Cindy Holscher (District 8), Sen. Jeff Pittman (District 5), Sen. Oletha Faust-Goudeau (District 29), and Sen. Ethan Corson (District 7).

**Lawmakers with Long-Standing Patterns of “Above Expectations”**

Those who significantly exceed their benchmark score, which is calculated based on their seniority and status as a majority party member and/or committee chairperson, are identified as being in our “Above Expectations” category. The lists below identify the Representatives and Senators with the longest active streaks of exceeding expectations in consecutive sessions continuing through (and including) the 2023-2024 legislative session.

**State Representatives with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”  
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	<b>John Eplee (R-63)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	6.16	3 Legislative Sessions
2.	<b>Dennis Highberger (D-46)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	1.99	3 Legislative Sessions
3.	<b>Henry Helgerson (D-83)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	0.91	4 Legislative Sessions

Representative John Eplee (R) of District 63 (Doniphan County) had the longest streak of “Above Expectations” with 3 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 6.16 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, he introduced 24 bills: 16 received action in committee, 5 received action beyond committee and passed the House, and 3 became law. Rep. Eplee has consistently ranked among the top three most effective Republican lawmakers in the House since 2019.

Rep. Eplee joined the House in 2017. He received his M.D. from the University of Kansas Medical School and completed his residency at St. Joseph’s Medical Center Family Practice in Wichita. He is board-certified in family practice and a fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Before joining the House, he served on the Atchison Public Schools Board of Education for ten years.

**State Senator with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”  
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	<b>Caryn Tyson (R-12)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	3.85	6 Legislative Sessions

Senator Caryn Tyson (R) of District 12 (Allen County) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 3 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 3.85 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, she introduced 35 bills: 27 received action in committee, 13 received action beyond committee, 13 passed the Senate, and 1 became law.

Sen. Tyson began representing the 12th district in 2013; before redistricting, she represented Kansas’ 4th district. She is a fifth-generation Kansan and holds B.S. degrees in Mathematics and Computer Science from Kansas State University. She also holds a master’s degree in engineering management from the University of Kansas. Before joining the Senate, she worked in IT for 24 years and supported NASA's space shuttle program.

**High-Performing Freshmen**

One way to identify future legislative leaders is to identify freshmen Representatives and Senators who earned an “Above Expectations” rating in their first term. Freshman legislators’ initial scores are compared to benchmarks for newcomers—so when a freshman outperforms their cohort, it can reveal strong political acumen, the ability to navigate legislative procedures quickly, and skill in coalition-building or policy entrepreneurship. These traits often correlate with future leadership roles. Our research on the U.S. Congress suggests that legislators who perform well early on are more likely to be selected for committee chairs or leadership positions and to influence major legislation in subsequent terms. Hence, identifying high-performing freshmen can offer early signals of who might rise through the ranks.

**Freshmen Representatives “Above Expectations” (2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>
1.	<b>Robyn Essex (R-78)</b>	2.01
2.	<b>Tory Blew (R-112)</b>	1.87
3.	<b>Fred Gardner (R-9)</b>	1.37

<b>4.</b>	<b>Ron Bryce (R-11)</b>	1.37
<b>5.</b>	<b>Jason Goetz (R-119)</b>	1.31
<b>6.</b>	<b>Lynn Melton (D-36)</b>	0.93

The State Representative with the highest "Above Expectations" score during her freshman term was Republican Rep. Robyn Essex (Johnson County) with a score of 2.01. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, she introduced 5 bills, 3 of which received action in committee, 2 of which received action beyond committee and passed the House, and 1 of which became law.

In addition to the Kansas House, Rep. Essex represents Ward 1 on the Olathe City Council. While serving on the City Council, she has served on the Olathe Planning Commission and as Precinct Committeewoman. She holds a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Mid America Nazarene University. In the community, she is a youth mentor at College Church of the Nazarene, a member of Olathe Rotary, and a member of the Olathe Public Schools Citizen Academy.

### **Freshmen Senator “Above Expectations” (2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>SLES (2023-2024)</u></b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Chase Blasi (R-27)</b>	1.86

Senator Chase Blasi (R) of District 27 (Sedgwick County) was the freshman Senator with the highest "Above Expectations" score for the 2023-2024 legislative session, with a SLES of 1.86. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, Sen. Blasi introduced 20 bills, 12 received action in committee, 5 received action beyond committee and passed the Senate, and 2 became law.

After graduating from college, Sen. Blasi served as the legislative policy director for the Kansas Department of Revenue and as chief of staff for the former and current Senate President. In the community, Sen. Blasi is involved in the St. Mark Evangelist Catholic Church and is a 4th Degree Knight in the Knights of Columbus. He is also a board member of the Northwest YMCA, a mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters, and a member of the Sedgwick County Farm Bureau. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, he was the 6th-most effective Republican lawmaker in the Kansas Senate.

### **Conclusion**

The 2023-2024 Kansas Legislature legislative session demonstrated consistent patterns in legislative effectiveness, with experienced legislators, committee chairs, and majority-party members continuing to hold a distinct advantage in advancing their policy agendas. Across both chambers, many of the most effective lawmakers continued their high performance from previous sessions, indicating a durable capacity for lawmaking among key figures. These findings

underscore the importance of institutional positions and experiences in shaping legislative outcomes in Kansas.