

The Key Players: What Power do they Wield?

As child advocates, we have the collective power to influence the decisions made by lawmakers for children and youth in our state; but we can only advance a children's agenda if we know who those lawmakers are, their roles and responsibilities, and the power they hold within the political process.

Knowing who will be making important decisions at a specific point in the process can help you effectively target your advocacy efforts. In general, it is very important to gain the support of elected officials in leadership positions, because ultimately they hold the power to block or advance your issue.

The following is an outline of the key roles, responsibilities, and powers of leaders in the executive and legislative branches of government.

The Executive Branch

Governor: The Governor is the formal leader of the executive branch of government. S/he is elected to a four-year term and can serve a maximum of two terms in office. The Governor's major power in the legislative process is the **budget** and the **veto**. Every January the Governor proposes a comprehensive state budget for the next fiscal year which is then revised by the state legislature through the appropriations process. The Governor also the power to veto legislation passed by the legislative branch.

The Governor also wields power over the implementation of laws passed by the legislature since s/he **appoints the directors of the various state departments and members of state commissions** that oversee all of the state's public programs and services.

While most legislative proposals and actions are carried out by the legislative branch, the Governor does at times wield his or her influence to push forward bold new initiatives or major reform measures. **The Governor's support for an issue often trickles down to the legislative branch**, especially if they are from the same political party. The Governor may also **convene a panel** of lawmakers, administrators, and community members to investigate a specific issue that may produce recommendations for legislative action.

Missouri: <http://governor.mo.gov/> **Kansas:** <http://www.governor.ks.gov/>

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Lieutenant Governor: In Missouri, the Lieutenant Governor (LG) is the only statewide elected official that is part of both the Executive and Legislative branches. The Missouri LG is also the President of the Missouri Senate. The LG rarely presides over the Senate but s/he may **cast the deciding vote in the case of a tie**. In Missouri, the LG is elected separately from the Governor, may be from a different political party, and has no term limits for the position.

In Kansas, the Lieutenant Governor has served solely in the Executive Branch since 1972 when the office's position as President of the Senate was retracted through a constitutional amendment. The Kansas LG is elected on the same ticket as the Governor. In both KS & MO, the **LG fulfills the remainder of a Governor's term if the office is vacated** because of death, impeachment, or resignation.

Missouri: <http://www.ltgov.mo.gov/index.htm>

Kansas: <http://www.governor.ks.gov/LtGov/default.htm>

State Departments: State departments governing everything from agriculture and transportation to health and higher education are all part of the executive branch under the Governor's office. Departments are often empowered by the state legislature to draft their own rules when administering programs authorized by statute. Sometimes a problem does not need to be taken to the legislature for consideration because it can be solved through administrative regulatory changes instead.

State departments submit budget proposals to the Governor annually at the beginning of the budget cycle and closely follow the budget as it progresses through the state legislature. Department officials are often called upon by the legislature to estimate fiscal notes for bills and to testify at committee hearings for informational purposes. Though state department staff are subject to the will of the Governor, many of them can be powerful advocates behind the scenes for your issues. Department staff can also be excellent sources of information when trying to identify the scope of a problem and potential policy solutions.

List of MO State Departments: <http://www.govspot.com/state/mo.htm>

List of KS State Departments: <http://www.statelocalgov.net/state-ks.htm#Executive%20Branch>

The Legislative Branch

House Speaker/Senate President (KS) Pro-Tem (MO):

These are the presiding officers, respectfully, of the State House of Representatives and State Senate. They are elected or reelected at the beginning of each legislative session by a majority of their chamber and they have immense power in the state legislature. **Their responsibilities include establishing standing and special committees, appointing chairs and members of committees, and assigning bills to committees.** In Kansas, The Committee on Organization, Calendar, and Rules appoints members of the standing committees while the President only handles appointments to special committees and conference committees. Once a bill is approved in committee, the Speaker or President determines which bills will advance to the House or Senate calendar.

In Missouri, the Senate President is constitutionally the Lieutenant Governor, and not one of the 34 elected Senators. The responsibilities and powers listed above fall to the MO Senate President Pro-Tem and the Lieutenant Governor can only preside over debate and vote to break a tie.

House Speaker Pro-Tem/Vice President (KS):

Basically the “second in command” in the State House and Senate. These elected officers preside over their chamber in the absence of the Speaker or President, which is usually quite often. **The person presiding over the entire chamber has the power to choose which members will be called on to speak or to offer amendments.** It is not only beneficial, but necessary, for advocates to have the support of these leaders if you want your issues to be debated before the entire legislative body.

House & Senate Majority Floor Leaders:

These elected leaders determine which bills will be debated on any given day and they control the flow of floor debate. In the Missouri House, the floor leader can motion for debate to be cut off and force a vote, subject to approval by a 2/3 vote. **The policy priorities of the majority floor leaders usually come up for debate and have a greater chance of advancing in their respective chambers.** However, once a priority bill of the Majority Floor Leader makes it to the second chamber, it can be used as a bargaining chip between the House & Senate in order to pressure the other chamber to advance other lawmakers’ priorities.

Committee Chairs:

Committee Chairs have immense control over bills that are referred to their committees. **They prioritize which bills will be heard and voted upon and they can dramatically change the content of a bill by offering amendments in committee.** Committees are actually only allowed to advance a limited number of bills to go back to the chamber for full debate, even though they may hear testimony on dozens or hundreds of bills each session. Committee Chairs can either be great allies to advocates or become insurmountable blockades in the legislative process.

2008 MO House Committees: <http://www.house.mo.gov/content.aspx?info=/bills081/commit/commlst.htm>

2008 MO Senate Committees: <http://www.senate.mo.gov/o8info/com-info.htm>

2008 KS Committees: <http://www.kslegislature.org/legsrv-committees/index.do>

Legislative Staff/Secretaries:

Legislative staff and secretaries are valuable sources of information and are often gate-keepers to communicating with the actual House and Senate members. While their responsibilities at a minimum include answering calls, scheduling appointments, and opening mail, they also have an immense knowledge of the inner workings of the state capital. If they work for a legislator who also chairs a committee, then the staff also handle a great deal of committee work. Legislative staff can be very helpful to advocates and are key to building a good relationship with a Representative or Senator's office.