



Office of  
**Mary Jo Spino**  
Clerk of the County Legislature

# Jackson County Missouri

## JOURNAL

### County Legislature

*DaRon McGee (4th) Chairman,  
Donna Peyton (2nd AL) Vice Chairman,  
Jalen Anderson (1st AL), Megan L. Marshall (3rd AL),  
Manuel Abarca IV (1st), Venessa Huskey (2nd),  
Charlie Franklin (3rd), Jeanie Lauer (5th)  
Sean E. Smith (6th)*

Jackson County Courthouse  
415 E. 12th Street, 2nd floor  
Kansas City, Missouri 64106  
(816)881-3242

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**Wednesday, May 14, 2025**

**10:00 AM**

**Fifteenth Regular Meeting**

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**K.C. Legislative Assembly Area, Kansas City, Missouri**

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DaRon McGee, Chairman, called the meeting of the Jackson County Legislature to order.

**1 ROLL CALL**

Present 8 - DaRon McGee, Donna Peyton, Jalen Anderson, Megan L. Marshall, Manuel Abarca IV, Venessa Huskey, Charlie Franklin and Sean E. Smith

Absent 1 - Jeanie Lauer

**2 THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Recited.

**3 APPROVAL OF THE JOURNAL OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

A motion was made by Jalen Anderson, seconded by Donna Peyton, to approve the journal of the previous meeting held on May 12, 2025. The motion passed by a voice vote.

**4 HEARINGS**

Melesa Johnson, Prosecuting Attorney, was present to speak about the impact of the current situation on the Jackson County Prosecutor's office. She thanked the County Legislature and the County Executive for their work on the budget in trying to reach a resolution.

Ms. Johnson said the most obvious impact is on COMBAT. She said we are heading into the summer months where violence is historically higher. While the Prosecutor's office will continue to handle business in the courtroom, the real opportunity area is the preventative work done daily by agencies funded by COMBAT. Many of these agencies are taking out loans, laying people off and limiting the number of people that they serve. COMBAT had a plan this upcoming summer to work with Family Court to identify 20 of the most prolific juvenile offenders and create a summer internship program specifically designed for them to include cognitive

behavioral therapy and mentorship. This program was to be funded with the remainder of funds not used after making the awards to agencies but unfortunately, this opportunity was missed.

Also impacted are transcripts, experts and trial strategies in the Prosecutor's office. They need to be very conservative with transcripts offered both around depositions and regarding post-conviction motions received by her office. Not having transcripts and being unable to retain and consult with experts on the front end, has a real impact on the case outcomes, trial strategies and cases they are able to charge. Save KC (Stand Against Violence Kansas City) the latest initiative to address violent crimes and gun violence continues to do their work. Her office presented an ordinance to the County Legislature to try to enter into a consulting contract with Mike Mansur who continues to run the messaging component for Save KC. Mr. Mansur has not been paid, he has been volunteering his time since January 2025. Save KC is working and making a difference. It is unfortunate we are unable to give resources to those people who are keeping this initiative afloat.

Her office is unable to send attorneys to valuable training courses, locally or across the country because they are being conservative with their legal expenses. There is a huge trial set regarding the death of Drexel Mack and Officer Cody Allen, a death penalty case. They would like to send their trial team to the Capital Death Penalty training hosted by the American Prosecutor's Association in Washington, D.C.

The Prosecutor's office is unable to have in-person criminal mediations. This is a disadvantage and disservice to the victims because part of the reason for mediations is to facilitate an opportunity for the victim and the defendant to have a restorative conversation, and the judge leads those individuals to a plea agreement with which everyone can be comfortable. Not being able to mediate in person is less effective. In-person mediation is a tool they have had great success utilizing. In-person depositions are also not able to be done as often as they would like. Investigators who help find witnesses and key people to obtain convictions, have a vehicle that needs repair. The vehicle cannot be serviced because there is not a contract in place. She said this encompasses some of the issues they continue to experience, and they are multiplying. She is extremely concerned as we approach the summer months.

DaRon McGee asked her to elaborate on the impact of transcripts and

depositions. Melesa Johnson said sometimes it is necessary to order transcripts to be used in trial for impeachment purposes to assess the credibility of witnesses. If her office cannot order the transcripts, which could be expensive, they cannot use them at trial. In addition, if they cannot pay experts or have them on retainer, they do not have the support to evaluate the different legal paths that they can pursue.

Mr. McGee asked about the impact on victims. Melesa Johnson said since her staff is unable to adequately advocate for victims through the prosecutorial process, it continues to disadvantage them. Many want quick resolutions and want to move on with their lives, but without these resources it just prolongs the slow justice that already exists. Without in-person criminal mediations, victims continue to feel like bystanders in the criminal justice system instead of active participants.

DaRon McGee asked about the residual effect on the jail. Melesa Johnson said the detention center is currently over capacity and they may not be able to feed the inmates or get detainees the resources they need, which poses great concern. She said there are 860+ beds and the facility is currently overcrowded because the Jackson County Detention Center is not allowed to turn anyone away.

Mr. McGee asked about the need for witness advocates. Ms. Johnson said Crime Strategies Unit data indicates that over the past three years the Prosecutor's office has had to decline prosecuting over 200 cases due to the lack of witness cooperation. Her office has amazing victims' advocates, but they do not have the same level of support for witnesses who are crucial to helping obtain convictions. They need staff to deploy resources and keep witnesses stable so they feel comfortable going into a courtroom to testify so that the Prosecutor's office can deliver justice to the residents of Jackson County.

Donna Peyton, County Legislator, thanked the Prosecuting Attorney for coming and sharing this vital information. She asked for an explanation of how the absence of a budget impacts the work of her office in cooperation with the County Counselor's office/staff. Melesa Johnson said there are many litigation issues that need to be handled in court. The Prosecutor's office uses the County Counselor's office often. It is important that the County Counselor's office be well resourced and staffed to support the work of her office.

Jalen Anderson, County Legislator, thanked Ms. Johnson for her presentation. He said the legislation for a grant management software system to streamline the COMBAT payment process at a cost of \$100,000.00 and a community organizer position for COMBAT at a cost of \$75,000.00 have not been passed due to no budget. He asked the Prosecuting Attorney to talk about the need to modernize COMBAT by adding crucial staff and getting a software program to provide a paper trail to protect taxpayer dollars. Ms. Johnson said it is her desire to make COMBAT function like a well-oiled philanthropic organization as intended. Currently, COMBAT is backlogged with payments because they only use Excel, which is counterproductive. Acquiring the grants management system will enable them to expedite payments, send automatic reminders about reports due from agencies and have a more consistent channel of communication. The software will improve customer service to agencies. She said her office was trying to fund the community organizer position for COMBAT out of the fund balance for 2024. Since the COMBAT tax will be on the ballot soon, it is time to reinvigorate COMBAT's presence in neighborhoods and in communities by having a community organizer that can assemble resource fairs in some of the crime hot spots using COMBAT funded agencies, who can work directly with neighborhood associations, the City of Kansas City, AIM for Peace and even Blue Summit. Dedicated staff is necessary so the community can see and feel how COMBAT is making their community safer, which will make it easier to pass the COMBAT tax.

Jalen Anderson asked the Prosecuting Attorney to explain the challenge of the huge amounts of money received by the Prosecutor's office from grants. Ms. Johnson said the main federal grants used are being sunset. With no budget, COMBAT is unable to accept grants through legislation so there is no reason to apply. The biggest effect of federal cuts is on the community violence intervention ecosystem. This will have a gross effect on the community which makes it more important to get COMBAT dollars disbursed to organizations due to the resource gaps posed by the federal government.

Sean E. Smith, County Legislator, said the Prosecuting Attorney mentioned a vehicle out of service. He asked if the County Executive has issued any guidance on what can and cannot be spent under the current budget parameters. Caleb Clifford, Chief of Staff, said yes, they have provided guidance, and the administration has also been in communication with the Prosecutor's office. He said vehicles are being

repaired by other county departments. The Prosecuting Attorney's office has decided due to the ongoing budget discussion that they will not seek emergency authorization for purchases. He said they may need a separate contract which would require legislative approval. Mr. Clifford said court transcripts are being ordered by other departments as an operating expense. Melesa Johnson said it is her understanding that they could only do absolutely essential spending which did not include repairing the vehicle or ordering transcripts. She agreed with Mr. Clifford that there is a level of discretion. She said her Chief Director of Operations, Gina Robinson, has communicated with the County Counselor's office and the second floor for guidance on absolutely essential spending.

With regards to guidance from the County Counselor's office, Mr. Smith asked when the guidance was issued, if it was in writing, was there any extrapolation and what statutory authority is it based on. Whitney Miller, Chief Deputy County Counselor, said her office has issued repeated assurances to directors and other elected officials that the County Counselor's office believes an emergency purchase memo should be used for something essential. She said operations and maintenance can be done out of the budget.

Sean E. Smith said he is trying to understand why some COMBAT agencies have received disbursements and others have not. Mr. Smith's position is that the Jackson County Code states money should only be spent on salaries in the absence of a budget. The Administration's position is that money can be spent on operations and maintenance, which he feels is what has elongated not having a budget.

Bryan Covinsky, County Counselor, said his office has been responding on a case-by-case basis regarding operation and maintenance spending. He said his department has been purchasing transcripts using 2024 budget line items.

Discussion regarding disbursing unappropriated funds.

Sean E. Smith asked if outside agencies could be considered operations and maintenance since they are a regular expense and essential. He said only being able to spend money on salaries with no budget is a strong incentive for cooperation. However, the broader interpretation, which ignores the County Code, states money can be spent for operations and

maintenance. This interpretation is causing the budget issue to linger and also allows a broad range of interpretation on expenditures which concerns him.

Megan L. Marshall, County Legislator, asked about contracts not able to go into effect mentioned by the Prosecutor. She asked the County Counselor if entering into contracts is a part of emergency authorization or is it something that can be entered into through an emergency authorization as other departments have been doing. Bryan Covinsky said he believes they need to sit down with the Prosecutor's office to figure out their concerns with contracts and determine if it is operations and maintenance. Mr. Covinsky stated that operations and maintenance is a function mentioned in state statute and the County Code must follow state statute. He said he is confident in the opinion his office provided in January 2025 on this matter. He believes this position has been supported on social media and legally it is strongly supported.

Megan L. Marshall asked if when the County enters into contracts, does it mean funds are distributed at that point. Caleb Clifford answered no, it is subject to appropriation.

Ms. Marshall asked what has prevented the Prosecutor's office from entering into contracts. Melesa Johnson talked about her reluctance to use the emergency authorization option due to the volume of contracts to be executed. Her preference is to use the more streamlined approach of having a budget. They have received guidance that because there is no budget, county operations have been halted. Megan L. Marshall asked who told her it was not allowed. Ms. Johnson responded, the County Counselor's office.

Manuel Abarca IV, County Legislator, asked why the County Executive vetoed the entire budget rather than exercising a line item veto. Caleb Clifford said there are multiple answers. The County Counselor's office is an essential body for many departments and elected officials throughout the County and they represent us in very serious issues. He said to answer Mr. Smith's question, the County Counselor's office is essential in our work in determining what is the lawful path. As the official legal opinion of the County, they need to be staffed and they need to have funds for contracts. If the County Executive would have done a line item veto it would not have allowed for that to be protected because line item vetoes only take away additional funds they don't take away reductions in

funding. Because of those limitations and the dramatic cuts made to multiple departments, including the Department of Corrections, it was impossible for operations to continue so the County Executive was left with no other option as he said in his veto statement. He said the County Executive has approved every emergency purchase that has been declared by the legal department.

Manuel Abarca IV asked for the status on the availability of the check registers for the County. Caleb Clifford said the Finance Department is working on providing the reports to the Legislature that were received prior to the County Administrator's departure in January.

Mr. Abarca said it is the 134th day Jackson County is operating without a budget. He asked the Prosecutor if modifying to the 2024 budget would allow COMBAT to execute contracts. She agreed the 2024 contracts are most pressing and if called to align with the 2024 levels to disburse the funds and execute contracts they are prepared to do that.

Charlie Franklin, County Legislator, said they have had negotiations with the Administration, and he has no reason to believe that they are not moving forward. He asked Mr. Clifford if the Legislature will receive anything today. Caleb Clifford said he does not believe anything will be available today; he agreed negotiations have been productive and they are moving in a positive direction. Mr. Franklin said the Legislature's goal is to pass something on Friday. Caleb Clifford said absolutely.

Melesa Johnson said their inability to deliver merit increases is causing strife among staff.

Donna Peyton said she understands the confusion and applauds the Prosecutor for sharing her interpretation. She is happy we are moving forward with more clarity.

Sean E. Smith asked what statute or county code of ordinances restricts merit increases being provided before a budget is passed. Bryan Covinsky said there is nothing specific, but merit increases are incorporated into the budget every year. Mr. Smith said merit increases are part of an aggregate salary budget, it's not a separate line item that needs to be authorized. Mr. Smith said he has heard consistently that the County Legislature is withholding merit increases. Do departments have legal authority to invoke merit increases while they await the budget?

Caleb Clifford said the County has multiple costs centers from which salaries are drawn, however, a merit increase cannot be paid out of a different budget for a different department. If some departments are allowed to provide merit increases, there will be equity and litigation issues. Merit increases also trigger multiple labor agreements that must also be funded.

Daron McGee thanked the Prosecuting Attorney for participating in the legislative meeting.

Megan L. Marshall asked the County Counselor if there is anything precluding the County Legislature from utilizing 2024 funding levels. Bryan Covinsky said the confusion is whether new COMBAT contracts can be considered as operations and maintenance.

**5 COMMUNICATIONS WITH AND REPORTS OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

Frank White, Jr., County Executive, was not present.

**6 PERFECTION OF PROPOSED ORDINANCES AND REPORTS OF COMMITTEE**

None.

**7 FINAL PASSAGE OF PROPOSED ORDINANCES**

Discussion regarding Ordinance #5909.

A motion was made by Megan L. Marshall, seconded by Jalen Anderson, to hold Ordinance #5909. The motion passed by a roll call vote:  
Yes: 7 - DaRon McGee, Donna Peyton, Jalen Anderson, Megan L. Marshall, Venessa Huskey, Charlie Franklin and Sean E. Smith  
Absent: 2 - Manuel Abarca IV and Jeanie Lauer

[5909](#)

AN ORDINANCE submitting to the qualified voters of Jackson County, Missouri, at the primary election to be held on August 5, 2025, a question to amend the Jackson County Charter, with an effective date.

(PERFECTED)

**8 RESOLUTIONS IN COMMITTEE**

None.

**9 CONSENT AGENDA**

None.



**10 INTRODUCTION OF PROPOSED ORDINANCES AND ASSIGNMENT TO COMMITTEE**

Chairman McGee said the County Legislature is awaiting a budget ordinance from the County Executive.

**11 INTRODUCTION OF PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS AND ASSIGNMENT TO COMMITTEE**

None.

**12 COUNTY EXECUTIVE ORDERS**

None.

**13 UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None.

**14 NEW BUSINESS**

None.

**15 ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made by Donna Peyton, seconded by Venessa Huskey, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed by a voice vote.

Meeting adjourned until Thursday, May 15, 2025 at 10:00 A.M. at the Jackson County Courthouse, 415 E. 12th Street, Kansas City, Missouri, 2nd Floor, Legislative Assembly Area.