

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families  
Arkansas Kids Count Coalition

# 2010 Arkansas Election

Questions for Candidates on  
Children's Issues



This year promises to be an important year for elections at the state and national level. Child advocates and citizens need to get children and families into the minds and platforms of candidates before Election Day. That will ensure kids get the attention they deserve and have a voice in the Arkansas Capitol when policies are made and budgets decided.

This questionnaire offers key questions for you to ask at candidate forums, individual meetings or other events where candidates will be offering their vision for office. Suggested questions are marked with a 'Q.' Contact information for AACF staff is included if you'd like more information on a particular topic.

Please help Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families and the Arkansas Kids Count Coalition learn from your experience. As you ask candidates the questions in this guide, please send us a summary: How did candidates answer questions? Do they need more information? Can AACF staff provide you with follow-up resources or information? We need information you gather and your candid feedback so we can better advocate for Arkansas children together. Send your thoughts to Elisabeth Wright Burak, AACF Director of Legislative Affairs, at 501-371-9678 Ext. 119 or [elisabeth.burak@aradvocates.org](mailto:elisabeth.burak@aradvocates.org).

Check in our website, [www.aradvocates.org](http://www.aradvocates.org), throughout the campaign for the latest news on children's issues and dates and locations of forums, town halls and debates.



**Primary Election: May 18, 2010**  
**Runoff (if necessary): June 8, 2010**  
**General Election: Nov 2, 2010**

You can learn more about local elections and candidates at the resources below, and to find out when forums will be held or how to contact your candidate.

- Arkansas Secretary of State's office <http://www.votenaturally.org/>
- County Clerk Offices: [http://www.sos.arkansas.gov/elections/elections\\_pdfs/county\\_clerks.pdf](http://www.sos.arkansas.gov/elections/elections_pdfs/county_clerks.pdf)
- Arkansas Democratic Party: <http://www.arkdems.org>
- Republican Party of Arkansas: <http://www.arkansasgop.org/>

## **Making an Impact on Child Poverty**

Child poverty has major consequences for our children, their families, future generations and the state economy. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to live in families who lack the resources to meet a child's basic needs, including access to quality health care, good prenatal care and preventative care. They don't have easy access to nutritious foods, safe housing and supportive home environments. Finally, they have a hard time getting the educational resources and opportunities they need to help prepare them for school.

Child poverty hurts the state economy. With a child poverty rate of 25 percent, the cost of child poverty in Arkansas is estimated at about \$6 billion annually.

**Q: What is the role of state government in reducing poverty, promoting economic opportunity and alleviating the impact of poverty?**

**Q: If you had to focus on only two or three strategies to fight child poverty, what would they be?**

For more information, contact:  
Pat Bodenhamer, State Budget and Tax Outreach Director  
at 501-371-9678 Ext. 108,  
[pbodenhamer@aradvocates.org](mailto:pbodenhamer@aradvocates.org)

## **Closing the Educational Achievement Gap**

There are many diverse and deep-rooted reasons for the gap in test scores and graduation rates between white students and African American and Latino students, as well as between middle class and low-income students. Closing the gap will not only improve the state's test scores and graduation rates, but also the state economy and long-term productivity. Closing the gap will give many students new opportunities to succeed in life. Early childhood education, after-school and summer programs and school-based health initiatives are proven strategies to close the gap.

## **After-school and summer programs**

Quality after-school and summer programs keep children safe, support working families and inspire children to learn. Too many Arkansas children and youth are not spending their out-of-school time engaged in healthy and productive learning opportunities that enhance their full development. More than 125,000 Arkansas children and youth are responsible for taking care of themselves after school. Almost two-thirds of Arkansas children live in households where all caregivers are in the workforce. Knowing that their children are in safe and well-supervised activities helps



working parents perform better on the job.

**Q: What role should the legislature play in expanding access to quality after-school and summer programs?**

**Q: How would you help encourage and develop these kinds of collaborations in your district?**

For more information, contact: Paul Kelly, AACF Senior Policy Analyst at 501-371-9678 Ext 102, [pkelly@aradvocates.org](mailto:pkelly@aradvocates.org)

### **Increasing Access to Early Childhood Education**

Arkansas is a national leader in providing quality preschool through the Arkansas Better Chance program, which was created in 1991 and serves children ages birth to 5 with a variety of risk factors.

Added in 2004-2005, Arkansas Better Chance for School Success (ABCSS) targets 3- and 4-year-olds who live in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (\$44,100 for a family of four) and who live in school districts that are in the school improvement status or in which at least 75 percent of children perform poorly on state benchmark exams in math and literacy.

Quality early learning and

education is a public investment with immediate and long-term benefits, according to solid, long-term research. Children from all backgrounds who attend quality preschool programs are more likely to succeed in school. Also, high-quality early learning experiences can help close the achievement gap between low-income and middle-income children. A 2007 study of Arkansas pre-k programs conservatively estimated that if Arkansas were to offer high-quality pre-k to all 3- and 4-year-olds on a voluntary basis, the state could see \$11.18 in savings for every dollar invested.

**Q: What role should the legislature play in expanding access to quality early childhood education programs?**

For more information, contact: Rich Huddleston, AACF Executive Director at 501-371-9678 Ext 114 or [rhuddleston@aradvocates.org](mailto:rhuddleston@aradvocates.org)

### **Creating and expanding school-based health initiatives**

When children don't feel well, it's difficult for them to learn and pay attention in class. Schools have an important role to play in the health of children—but they cannot and should not address student health alone.

Through the Arkansas Coordinated School Health



initiative, many schools are partnering with community health clinics, dental units and other organizations to make sure children get the health screenings, treatment and support they need to be healthy and productive students.

Coordinated school health includes health education, physical education, health services, nutritional services, counseling and psychological services, a healthy school environment, healthy school staff and involvement from parents and the community. In 2010, the state education and health departments will release money for several schools to start school-based wellness centers, so that children will be able to access services on campus.

**Q: What role should the legislature play in expanding school-based wellness centers and the coordinated school health initiative?**

**Q: How can lawmakers encourage partnerships among schools, parents, medical providers, community-based organizations and other stakeholders to address student health?**

For more information, contact: Elisabeth Wright Burak at 501-371-9678 Ext. 119, [elisabeth.burak@aradvocates.org](mailto:elisabeth.burak@aradvocates.org)

## **Moving Families To Self-Sufficiency and Out of Poverty**

Family finances and economic issues are critical to the overall well-being of children and their families. Many families work but earn incomes too low to meet expenses such as housing, food, child care and utilities. A quarter of Arkansas children live in poverty. Families who live in poverty can have unstable homes and home lives that can lead to neglect and abuse.

The federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was enacted in 1975 to provide tax relief to low- and moderate-income workers so that they could better provide for their families. It has since been expanded with strong bipartisan support in the Reagan, Bush, Clinton and Obama administrations. Research has proven the EITC to be one of the most effective anti-poverty programs in our nation. Without it, there would be nearly 25 percent more children in poverty.

There are many Arkansas families who are eligible, but aren't aware of the refund.

**Q: What should the legislature do to help eligible working families receive their EITC refund?**

For more information contact: Kim Reeve, Senior Policy Analyst at 501-371-9678 Ext. 105, [kreeve@aradvocates.org](mailto:kreeve@aradvocates.org)



## **Giving all children and families access to quality health care**

Every child needs health insurance. When children have health insurance, they're more likely to get regular check-ups, they do better in school, and they get the services necessary to make sure they grow up into healthy adults. Their parents have peace of mind knowing that they will be protected financially if an accident or injury occurs. In Arkansas, ARKids First has improved the physical and financial health of thousands of kids and families. But 65,000 Arkansas children still have no health insurance— enough to fill 1,000 school buses.

**Q: What should the legislature do to ensure every Arkansas child has access to affordable health insurance?**

## **Connecting all children with a “medical home”**

Every child should be able to access health care when they need it. Health insurance gets children better access to health care, but doesn't guarantee a doctor will be available for regular check-ups or even urgent care visits. Thousands of children on ARKids First do not have a regular source of care, or “medical home” with a primary care physician (PCP).

**Q: How can the legislature ensure more medical providers are available to treat**

## **children covered by ARKids First?**

For more information, contact: Elisabeth Wright Burak, AACF Director of Health Policy at 501-371-9678 Ext. 119, [elisabeth.burak@aradvocates.org](mailto:elisabeth.burak@aradvocates.org)

## **Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap**

Addiction to drugs or alcohol is a life-or-death issue that should be treated like any medical problem. More than 180,000 Arkansans are addicted to alcohol or drugs and thousands of them are seeking treatment right now, but can't get it because the system is overloaded, their insurance doesn't cover it or they can't afford it.

In 2005, state spending on substance abuse-related costs was more than \$800 million, mostly in the corrections and juvenile justice systems. Thousands of Arkansas lives are lost, families are destroyed, and children left without care because of untreated drug and alcohol addiction.

**Q: What role can the legislature play in expanding access to quality drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services?**

**Q: How can the legislature help make substance abuse services available and affordable to those who need it?**

For more information, contact:



Paul Kelly, AACF Senior Policy Analyst at 501-371-9678 Ext 102, pkelly@aradvocates.org

371-9678 Ext. 104, jferguson@aradvocates.org

## Decreasing the Rate of Child Abuse and Neglect

The child welfare system is seeing more and more children as its budget shrinks. In State Fiscal Year 2009, there were 6,701 confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect in Arkansas involving 9,721 children. The number of children in the Arkansas child welfare system increases each year (10 percent from 2008 to 2009), but the system has too few resources to get the job done.

Millions of dollars are spent each year on placement services for the most vulnerable children, but far less is spent on efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect or to intervene early. Child abuse and neglect contribute to numerous other social problems and concerns beyond the safety of the child, including school achievement, mental illness, substance abuse, and juvenile delinquency.

**Q: What role should the legislature play in reducing child abuse and neglect and making improvements in the child welfare system to assure that children get quality services?**

For more information, contact: Jennifer Ferguson, AACF Deputy Director at 501-

## Reforming the Juvenile Justice System

The Division of Youth Services (DYS) has developed a five-year comprehensive strategic plan that will revolutionize the juvenile justice system in Arkansas. This plan includes redirecting resources from incarceration and punishment to prevention and treatment. This will make the system more effective, less costly and lead to greater public safety for the citizens of the state.

**Q: How can legislators help promote the juvenile justice system reform efforts now being considered?**

The most effective approach to meet the needs of trouble youth and ensure safe communities is to keep youth in their communities where there is family involvement, access to ongoing services and less disruption in the child and family structure.

**Q: How can the legislature expand community-based services to keep children out of institutions?**

For more information, contact: Paul Kelly, AACF Senior Policy Analyst at 501-371-9678 Ext 102, pkelly@aradvocates.org



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The Arkansas Kids Count Coalition is a project of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. It works to promote, protect and unify the interests of the children and families of Arkansas.

The mission of AACF is to ensure that all children and their families have the resources and opportunities they need to lead health and productive lives and to realize their full potential.



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