

# 2018 VOTERS' GUIDE

Taking action on  
the issues that  
impact our children



March 2018



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## Dates to Remember

**Candidate Filing Deadline:** March 1, 2018  
**Early Voting for Primaries Begins:** May 7, 2018  
**Primary Election:** May 22, 2018  
**Early Voting for General Elections:**  
Oct. 22-Nov. 5, 2018  
**General Election:** Nov. 6, 2018

Early voting begins for the general election  
between the hours of  
8 a.m. and 6 p.m., Monday-Friday, and  
10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. Early voting ends  
at 5 p.m. on the Monday prior to the election.



# STAND UP FOR KIDS

This November, Arkansas voters will elect candidates to important public offices, including seats in the U.S. Congress and the Arkansas General Assembly. The winners of these elections will be in a unique position to make public policy that will impact the future well-being and success of Arkansas's children and families.

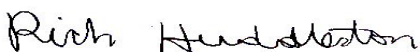
Making children our top priority during this year's election should be a no-brainer. According to the 2017 *Kids Count Data Book* released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Arkansas ranks 45th in overall child well-being. One in four Arkansas children lives in poverty, which we know can hinder a child's development and ability to succeed. The public policy decisions our new elected officials make will influence many important issues, including health care, hunger, early childhood development, education, and family economic security. The elections will also help shape future state budget and tax policies. These will determine how much funding is available for services that benefit many of Arkansas's most vulnerable children.

The 2018 Arkansas elections are more important than ever given the hyper-partisan, chaotic political environment that currently permeates Washington, D.C. Federal programs critical to the well-being of children and families have either been under attack or, in some cases, largely ignored. The U.S. Congress recently dealt a major blow to the future funding base for many of these programs with its passage of the tax bill and a budget resolution that promises major cuts over the next decade. These decisions will pose major fiscal challenges for states like Arkansas, which must figure out how to respond to federal policy changes impacting children and families.

It's time to make children Arkansas's top priority. Children can't vote, they don't make campaign contributions, and they don't host political fundraisers for candidates or political parties. Yet our children will be the ones most affected by our votes and by the decisions made by elected officials. As advocates for kids, it's up to us to make sure their voices are heard. It's up to us to make sure voters and candidates are informed of the issues important to their well-being. And it's up to us to make sure these issues are addressed after the elections are over.

We offer the "2018 Voters' Guide" in this spirit. We hope voters and candidates across the political spectrum will read this guide and be informed of the issues important to our children.

Sincerely,



Rich Huddleston, AACF Executive Director

# EDUCATION

**High-Quality Early Childhood Education:** Children who receive high-quality early childhood education are better prepared for K-12. Unfortunately, the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) pre-K program has been underfunded for almost 10 years, and other early childhood education programs lack the capacity to fill the gap for Arkansas families.

**Strong K-12 Public Schools:** Since the *Lake View* Supreme Court decision on educational adequacy, achievement gaps remain far from closed. There are significant disparities across districts in teacher quality, recruitment, and retention; school facilities; and other elements of adequacy and equity.

**High Standards and Accountability:** Thirty-five percent of districts and schools have been granted a total of almost 3,000 waivers from school quality standards. Momentum is also building to shift public education tax dollars to private schools, which are not accountable to the public.

**Opportunity to Learn:** Sixty-one percent of Arkansas public school students qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches. We must protect critical funding and support for these students, as well as English language learners and students with special needs.

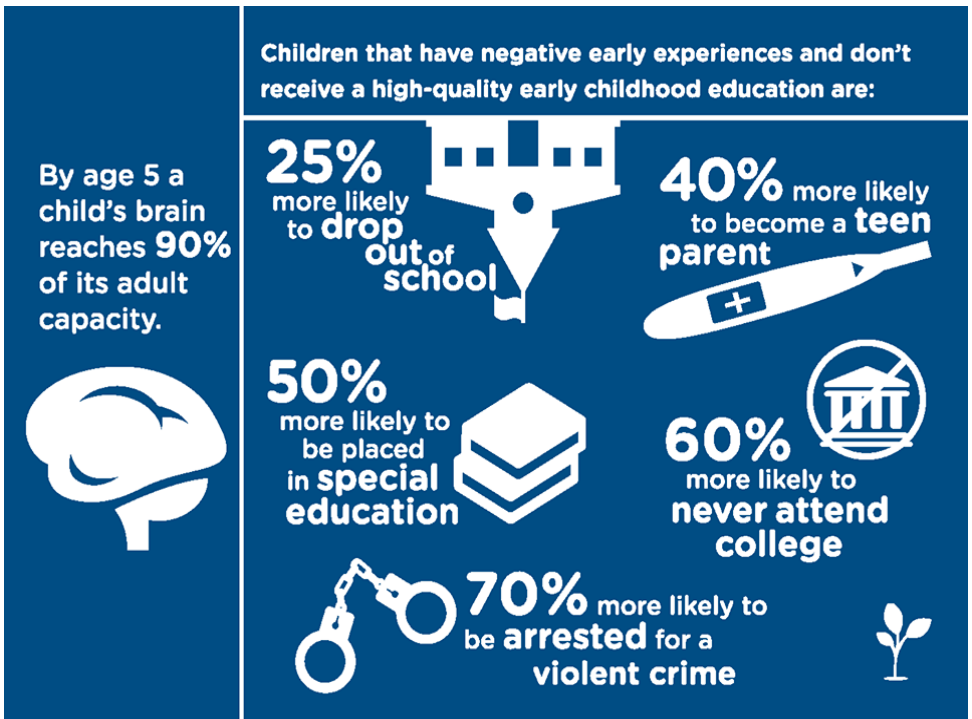
**Effective and Equitable School Discipline:** Children of color face discriminatory discipline practices, including a higher rate of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for the same offenses as their white peers. Positive school discipline alternatives can keep more kids in school and on track to graduate.



# What to Ask Candidates:

1. Where do you stand on increased funding for pre-K and other early childhood education programs?
2. How would you ensure that our early childhood educators are able to meet the needs of children and families in Arkansas?
3. What is your position on allowing public tax dollars to fund private schools?
4. What would you do to ensure equitable educational opportunities for low-income students, English language learners, and students with special needs?
5. How should we end the use of discriminatory discipline practices in our schools?

Source: Courtesy of the Helen Walton Early Childhood Initiatives Center, [www.ecicnwa.org](http://www.ecicnwa.org)





# AFTERSCHOOL & SUMMER PROGRAMS

**Learning Environments After 3 PM:** Our youth face many obstacles that can potentially derail their journey to a healthy, rewarding, and productive life. Thankfully, afterschool and summer programs in Arkansas and across the nation provide safe and caring environments that inspire learning and give essential supports and skills children need to succeed in school and life. Afterschool and summer programs are vital because they support academic and emotional development while keeping kids safe. Studies show these beneficial programs boost student engagement and academic success. They also provide parents with peace of mind and help them keep their jobs.



## **Paving the Way for Brighter Futures:**

Every dollar invested in quality afterschool and summer programs saves Arkansas taxpayers \$3 from costs associated with juvenile crime and detention. Afterschool and summer programs, which serve over

65,000 Arkansas K-12 students annually, are directly linked to improved school performance, workforce readiness, and future earning potential. An overwhelming majority of parents and state legislators support funding for afterschool and summer learning. However, many initiatives throughout the state remain unfunded. This leaves 190,000 children waiting for an available program.

## Arkansas parents strongly support afterschool programs:

**84%** support public funding for afterschool.

**79%** say afterschool helps them keep their jobs.

**63%** say afterschool excites kids about learning.

**74%** say afterschool reduces the likelihood that kids will engage in risky behavior.

## What to Ask Candidates:

1. Do you agree with most parents that public funds should be used to support quality afterschool and summer programs?
2. How will you work to engage your local school and community-based partners to create more access to quality afterschool and summer programs in your area?
3. How can we use existing dollars at the federal, state, and local levels to create greater access to quality afterschool and summer programs?

*Sources: America After 3 p.m. report, Arkansas Profile, Afterschool Alliance, 2014  
Afterschool Supports Students' Success, Afterschool Alliance, 2016*

### Students' engagement in school decreases as they go through school.



**76%**  
Of elementary  
schoolers  
engaged  
in school



**61%**  
Of middle  
schoolers  
engaged  
in school



**44%**  
Of high  
schoolers  
engaged  
in school

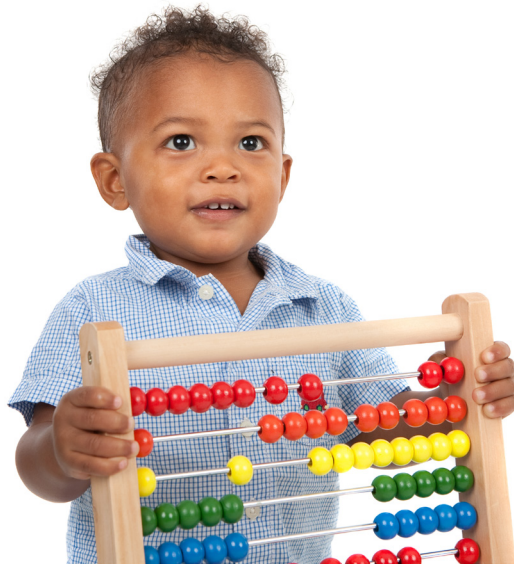
Research shows that kids in afterschool programs go to school more, see improvements in their behavior, and increase their likelihood of moving on to the next grade level and graduating.

# TAX & BUDGET

## Investments That Matter:

Every single issue in this guide connects to taxes. They are the lifeblood of programs that help kids grow up successful and strong. A good tax plan is balanced, and doesn't rely too much on any one type of tax. We wouldn't want to only collect taxes on fuel, for instance.

A good tax system is also transparent. We should know where our collective funds are coming from and where they are going. It should also be adequate, meaning that we have enough to fund the public investments that we all care about. And finally, it should be based on a family's ability to pay. It comes down to this: the budget is a moral document. Where we choose to spend money reflects our priorities. If we truly care about the needs of our children and families, we need a budget that funds the programs they depend on.



**A Tax System That Works for All:** At the state and national levels, taxes are changing to benefit the very wealthy over working families. That means low-income people are paying relatively more, and it will be harder to invest in making our communities great

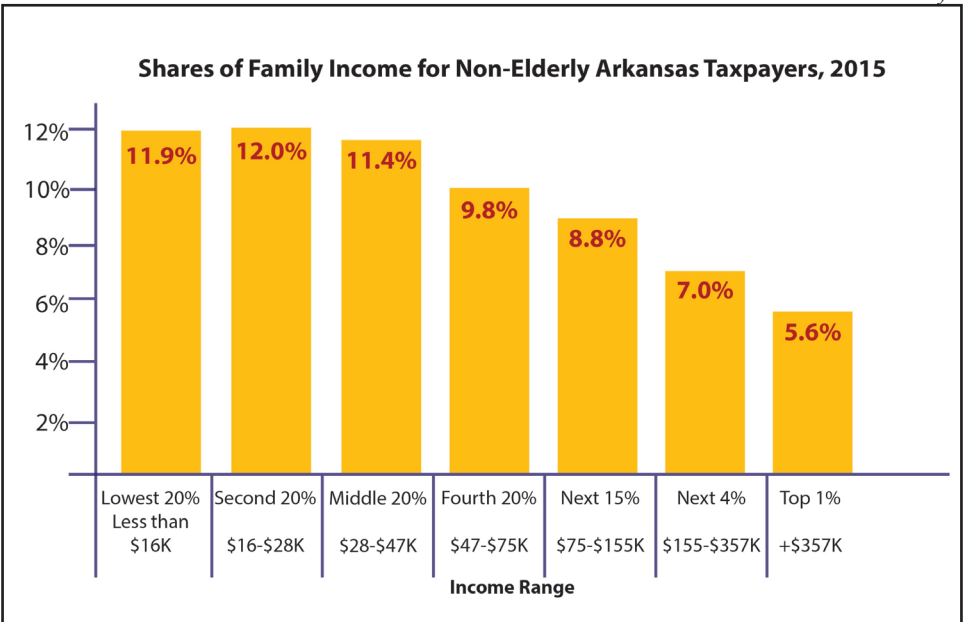


places to live. Low-income Arkansans already pay about twice the rate in state and local taxes compared to the top 1 percent of earners. Upper-income tax cuts could make this imbalance worse and shrink the state budget. A weak state budget threatens the well-being of kids who depend on things like an adequately funded state foster care system, summer reading programs, pre-K, and a functional public education system.

## What to Ask Candidates:

- 1. How much will this tax change cost (or save) a middle-income family? (What about low-income and upper-income earners?)
- 2. If there is a tax cut, how will we make up for lost revenue? Will there be hiring freezes, layoffs, or budget cuts?
- 3. Which programs will be reduced or lost because of this tax cut?
- 4. How will you make sure that tax changes benefit regular Arkansans and not just wealthy taxpayers?
- 5. Instead of cutting taxes to benefit a few, how could we use this money to pay for new programs that benefit many?

Source: Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy



# FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY

**Protecting Programs Kids Depend on:** Because many Arkansas jobs pay wages that are too low, many full-time working families in the state still live in poverty. About a quarter of the kids in Arkansas grow up in poverty, and thus rely on social safety net programs, such as SNAP (formerly “Food Stamps”) to meet basic needs. Protecting these types of programs means protecting the futures and aspirations of all kids in Arkansas, from the Delta to the Ozarks.

**Helping Working Families Keep More of What They Earn:** But we can do more than just protect programs that help our kids succeed. We can demand more on their behalf. A state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) would allow low-income working families to keep more of what they earn and move up the income ladder. An EITC is proven to have long-term benefits for the financial security of parents. It also benefits children’s health, educational outcomes, and even future career options and the economy. The EITC is a straightforward way to help low-income families who would not benefit from a change to their income tax rate because they pay most of their taxes in other ways (such as sales tax).

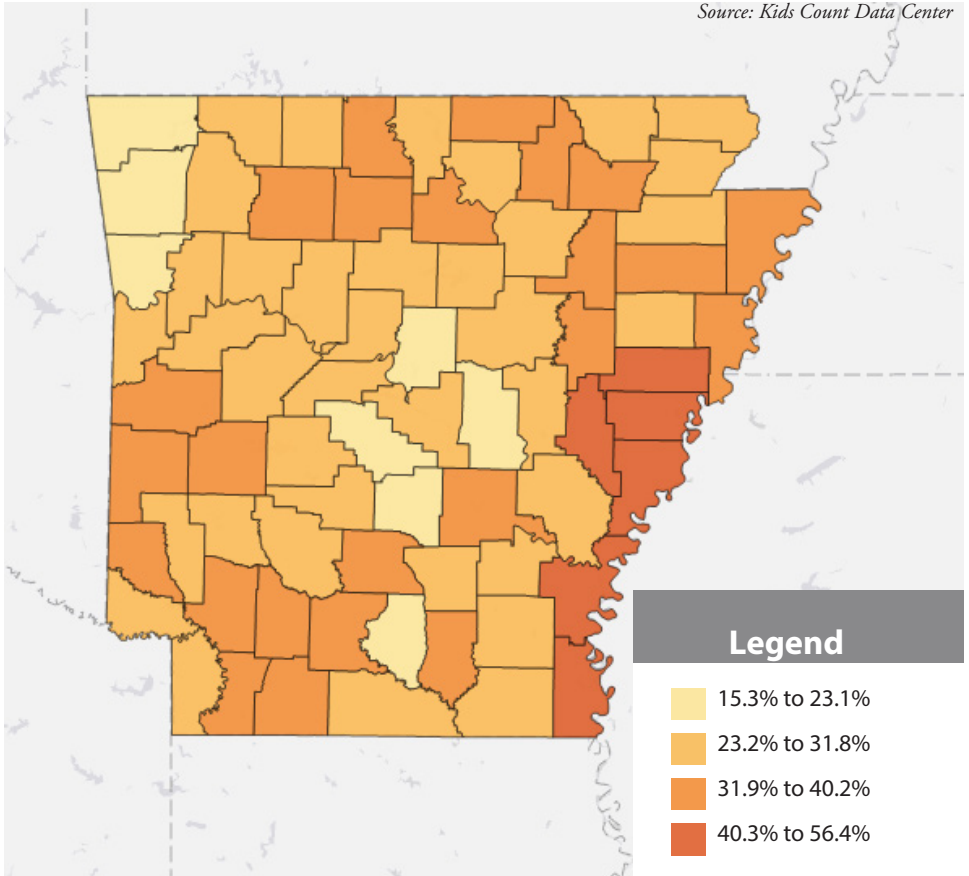


# What to Ask Candidates:

1. Do you endorse a state EITC to help working families? Why or why not?
2. How will you help remove the financial barriers that prevent low-wage workers in Arkansas from getting ahead?
3. There are many families in Arkansas who work full time but still cannot make ends meet. What kinds of policies would you like to see to help these types of families?
4. How will you protect social safety net programs that help low-income kids in Arkansas meet their basic needs?

## Arkansas Child Poverty Rates, by County, 2015

Source: Kids Count Data Center



# HEALTH CARE & MEDICAID EXPANSION

**Coverage for All Children:** Today, 96 percent of children in Arkansas have health coverage, largely due to the ARKids First program. ARKids is funded by Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). It ensures over half of children in the state have a reliable source of coverage. It also provides a coverage option for children that their families can afford.

**Arkansas Works:** Up to 300,000 adults have access to affordable health coverage because of the state's Medicaid expansion program, Arkansas Works. This program uses Medicaid funds to enroll eligible adults in a private insurance plan at little or no cost to them. This has made Arkansas a national leader at reducing the rate of uninsured adults. It has also helped hospitals and doctors who were treating patients that were unable to pay for care.

**Access to Health Care:** In addition to coverage, it is important that families can get the high-quality health care treatment they need. There



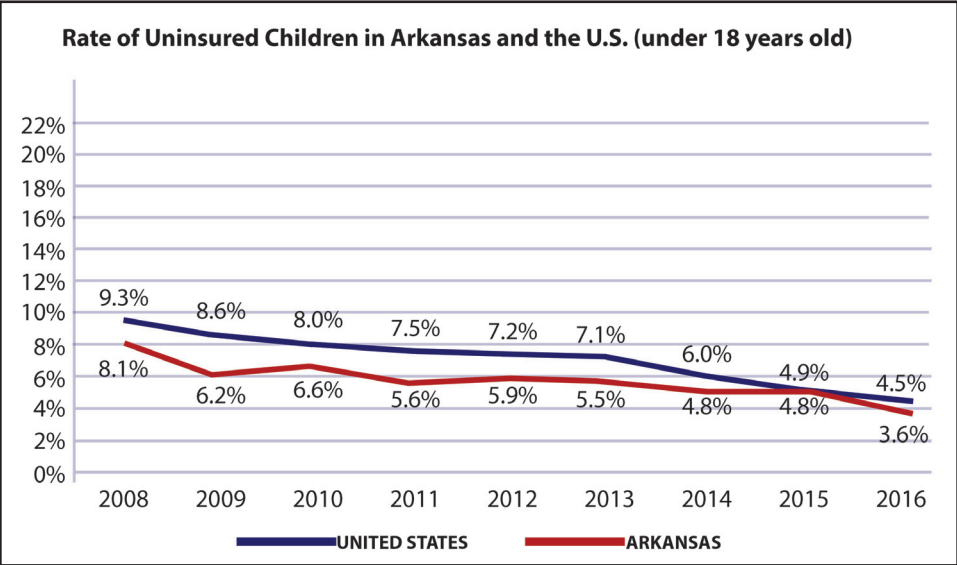
are different ways that the health care system can be changed to improve access (like help with transportation and care coordination). But there are also changes that can make it more difficult (like restricting needed care). By putting the right policies in place, we can improve access to care for all Arkansans.



# What to Ask Candidates:

- 1. How will you protect health coverage for children?
- 2. What is your position on providing affordable coverage to adults who are low-income earners?
- 3. What is your position on adding more restrictions — such as work requirements or enrollment freezes — to programs like Medicaid?
- 4. How will you ensure that all children and families in Arkansas have access to high-quality health care?

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates





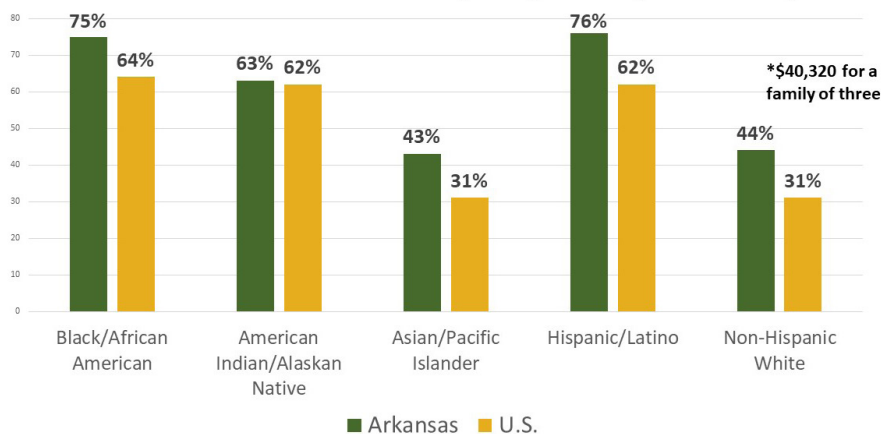
# RACE EQUITY & INCLUSION

**Inequity Entrenched in Current Policies:** Arkansas has made important advancements in improving the lives of children statewide. However, racial and ethnic gaps persist in children's achievement levels. This is no accident. Our nation's long history of inequality, based in laws that closed the doors of opportunity to many children, helped create the deep differences we see today.

As a result, white, non-Hispanic children tend to fare better in all categories of child well-being. This ranges from poverty rates to grade-level reading scores. Black and Hispanic children are almost twice as likely to live in lower-income families as their white peers. Huge gaps remain in reading levels, which are key indicators of children's later success. The same goes for high-school and college graduation rates.

These achievement gaps are made worse by immigration policies that keep young people and their parents in the “shadows” of our economy, driving down wages for families in all ethnic and racial groups. We need all children in Arkansas to reach their full potential if we are to reach ours as a state.

**Percent of Children Living Below  
200 Percent of Poverty\* By Race/Ethnicity**



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation 2017 Race for Results

**Shifting to Policies of Equity:** Policy changes can help close the gaps. Examples of solutions include high-quality early education (pre-K), afterschool programs, preventive health care, targeted tax relief for lower-income families, and other investments that are proven to create long-term gains in helping all kids live up to their full potential.

## What to Ask Candidates:

1. Black and Hispanic children are far less likely to be reading at grade-level compared to their white, non-Hispanic peers in elementary school. How can Arkansas address this disparity?
2. Undocumented Arkansas high school graduates must pay out-of-state tuition at state colleges and universities, even if they have work permits under the federal DACA policy. Eighteen states, including neighboring Texas, allow similar graduates to pay in-state tuition. How can Arkansas act to remain competitive with these states, which have higher percentages of residents with college degrees?
3. How would you approach changing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, which protects young immigrants from deportation and allows them to work lawfully in the United States?



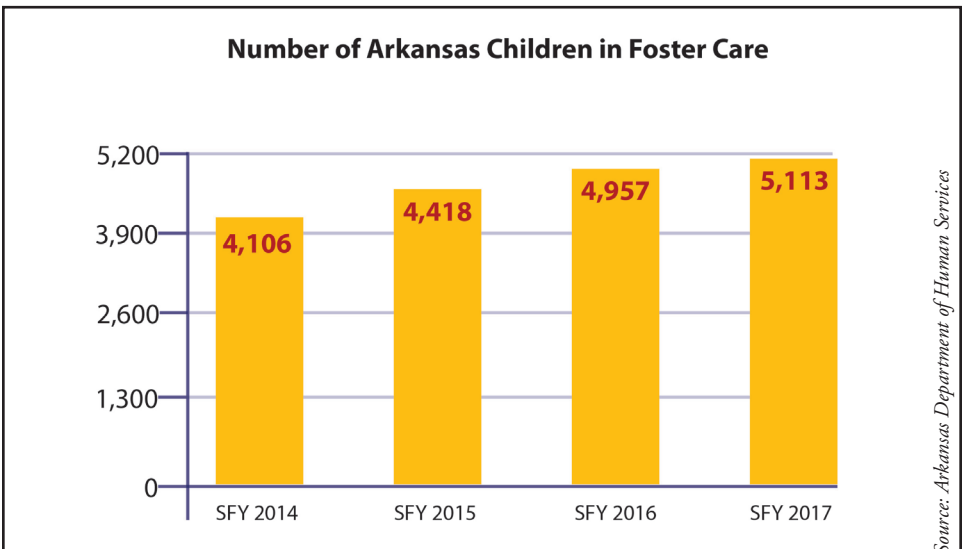
# CHILD WELFARE

**Reducing the Number of Kids in Foster Care:** The number of children in the foster care system has decreased from an all-time high of 5,200, but the number remains high (over 5,000 children). The majority of these were cases of neglect by parents. We know we can address these issues through preventive services and programs.

The average caseload per caseworker has declined to 25 cases at the end of September 2017. But it still exceeds the national standard of 15 cases per worker. And staff retention is difficult. The Division of Children and Family Services did receive a much-needed budget increase of \$26.7 million during the 2017 legislative session. Still, resources remain thin given the number of children they serve.

## What to Ask Candidates:

1. What are your thoughts on the role that the state government can play in making sure that children are in safe and nurturing homes?
2. How do you plan to address the shortage of resources to serve children in the child welfare system?



# JUVENILE JUSTICE

**Juvenile Lockup v. Community-Based Alternatives:** Most of the Arkansas youth held in locked facilities are low or moderate risk for posing physical harm to others. Locking kids up is expensive for taxpayers and puts the physical safety of juvenile offenders at risk. Plus, it increases the chance that children will reoffend in the future and later enter the corrections/prison system as adults.

Community-based programs for juveniles are more affordable and effective at ensuring public safety. They also result in better outcomes for children, including a reduction in the rate of juveniles who reoffend.

Increasing access to community-based services would eventually reduce the need for locked facilities and jail beds. However, juvenile judges must first have access to community-based programs in their areas. Judges must also ensure that every offender undergoes a risk assessment and an assessment of their need for services as they enter the juvenile justice system. This will help direct low- and moderate-risk offenders into more effective community-based programs.

## What to Ask Candidates:

1. How do you propose the state address the need for community-based alternatives for juvenile offenders?
2. How would you ensure that community-based programs for juveniles are effective and evidence-based?
3. What would you do to ensure that every child receives a risk assessment on the front end as they enter the justice system?
4. How would you make sure that the state prioritizes community-based alternatives instead of new jail beds for juveniles?
5. Should the state privatize juvenile services or manage the system itself?

# MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

## How to Talk to Your Legislator or Candidate:

- 1** Make an appointment.
- 2** Do your homework.
- 3** Make your case, clearly and concisely.
- 4** Know the bill number, if there is one.
- 5** Leave them with something — a one-pager, a pamphlet, etc.
- 6** Follow up and say “Thank you.”
- 7** Keep in touch!



Connect with legislators and candidates during in-person meetings; on social media; during community forums; by email; and on the phone.



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You can also find out where to vote and which election districts you can cast votes in.



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