Senator Linda Chesterfield
October 17, 2024
2019, 2021, & 2023 Act Summaries - Legislation Benefitting Children

2019 General Session

Childcare Facilities - Licensing and Registration
ACT 131 (HB1225) requires the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education of the Department of Human Services to create and make available on the department's website a form and graphical chart that concisely explains the minimum licensing requirements and licensing procedures for a licensed home and a licensed child care center; the registration requirements and registration procedures for a registered child care family home; the voluntary registry of day care family homes and the procedures for registering as a day care family home with the voluntary registry; the availability of federal and state funds, grants, programs, and other financial assistance; and the availability of federal or state tax benefits. The act also requires the division to submit a report detailing any rules that exceed the federal requirements concerning the licensing and registration of child care facilities to the House Committee on Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs and the Senate Committee on Children and Youth.

Voluntary Delivery of a Child
ACT 185 (SB168) makes the provisions of the Safe Haven Act applicable to a law enforcement agency and a fire department and specifies the criteria for a newborn safety device and the obligations of a medical provider, law enforcement agency, and fire department that voluntarily installs a newborn safety device. The act authorizes a medical provider, law enforcement agency, or fire department to take possession of certain infants without a court order if the parent of the child voluntarily delivers the child to a medical provider, law enforcement agency, or fire department without expressing an intent to return for the child or if the parent leaves the child in a newborn safety device that is voluntarily installed by a medical provider, law enforcement agency, or fire department.

Child Abduction Response Team
ACT 913 (HB1674) requires certain state agencies to collaborate in a multi-agency effort to rescue abducted or endangered children, implement one (1) or more statewide child abduction response teams, and allocate the respective resources of each agency to cases that involve missing or endangered children. The act also tasks the Department of Arkansas State Police with assembling the statewide child abduction response teams.

2021 General Session

Emergency Plans and Safe Schools Initiative Act
ACT 620 (HB1549) requires a public school to have a panic button alert system or other means of emergency communication with law enforcement if funding is available. The act requires a public school district or open-enrollment charter school to conduct a comprehensive school safety audit every three (3) years to assess the safety, security, accessibility, and emergency preparedness of district buildings and grounds in collaboration with local law enforcement, fire, and emergency management officials. The act also requires a public school district or open-enrollment charter school to conduct an annual lockdown drill for a possible threat on campus at each school in the public school district or open-enrollment charter school. The act creates the Arkansas Center for School Safety of the Criminal Justice Institute, which is tasked with assisting the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education in building the capacity of educators, leaders, and law enforcement professionals to meet the safety needs of children in public schools in this state. The act is identical to Act 648.

Temporary Guardian
ACT 701 (SB586) provides that a parent may appoint a temporary guardian for his or her minor child in the event of the death of the parent.

Remote Testimony by Child
ACT 1026 (SB612) allows a child witness, under certain circumstances, to testify remotely using video conference technology or other technology that would enable the child to testify comfortably.

2023 General Session

Family Treatment Specialty Courts
ACT 61 (HB1144) creates a family treatment specialty court within the Arkansas court system. The act specifies that the family treatment specialty court is an available disposition within a dependency-neglect proceeding that provides additional supervision for and treatment of families who are affected by substance use disorders or mental health disorders. The act provides eligibility requirements for participation in a family treatment specialty court program and creates a fund to support, benefit, and administer the family treatment specialty court program.

Foster Care Placement and Family Time - Juvenile's Preferences
ACT 168 (HB1153) allows a juvenile court to consider a juvenile's preferences as to his or her foster care placement and the exercise of supervised or unsupervised family time during a dependency-neglect proceeding if the juvenile is of a sufficient age and capacity to reason.

Literacy - Imagination Library of Arkansas Program
ACT 640 (SB416) creates the Imagination Library of Arkansas Program to promote the development of a comprehensive statewide initiative for encouraging preschool children to develop a love of reading and learning. The act creates the Imagination Library of Arkansas Program Fund to provide, through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, age-appropriate books to each registered child in each participating county. The act requires the state program fund to contribute available funds to meeting the match required of local programs participating in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. The act requires the Department of Education to partner with a nonprofit entity to administer the program.

Child Nutrition Programs - Elimination of Reduced-Price Breakfast or Lunch Copayment
ACT 656 (SB477) requires the Department of Education to provide federal funds disbursed for purposes of funding child nutrition programs to each public school that serves a school breakfast or a school lunch to cover the cost of eliminating reduced-price copayments and requires the department to use funds to provide a school breakfast or a school lunch if federal funds appropriated to the department for child nutrition programs are insufficient. The act also requires the department to provide an annual report.