



Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

Union Station
1400 W. Markham St., Suite 306
Little Rock, AR 72201
(501) 371-9678
www.aradvocates.org

Non-profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 2942
Little Rock, AR

Advocacy Matters



Summer 2024

IN THIS ISSUE:
Fiscal & Special Sessions
Download our Voters' Guide
Staff Spotlight: Jennifer Ferguson

Pump Up Your Advocacy



Have you ever wished you could have Arkansas Advocates Community Engagement Director Rebecca Zimmermann's Advocacy 101 training in an on-demand format? You're in luck! You can watch all 20 videos at youtube.com/aradvocates.

KIDS COUNT Data Book

Arkansas ranks 45th in child well-being, according to the 2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, a 50-state report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This year the Data Book looked at how kids are faring in post-pandemic America. The data show Arkansas leaders must do more to protect children and prepare them to learn, so they can flourish in adulthood.

Compared to before the pandemic, very little has improved in terms of outcomes for children in Arkansas, and some outcomes have gotten worse. The number of teenagers ages 16-19 that are neither in school nor working is worse (11% in 2022, up from 7% in 2019). Child and teen deaths in Arkansas increased 26% from 2019 to 2022. Arkansas now ranks 46th in child and teen deaths, with a rate of 44 per 100,000. Visit aradvocates.org/kids-count for an in-depth look.

Fiscal Session Review

In April Arkansas legislators convened for the 2024 Fiscal Session. The Governor signed a 2024-25 state budget of \$6.31 billion, a 1.76% increase over the current year, but not enough to keep up with inflation.

What we do not see in this budget:

- A renewed focus on Pre-K education
- Investment in child care to help ease the burden of care for working families
- Mental and behavioral health investments for children impacted by the pandemic
- Funding for increased maternal health care access at a time when more than half of our counties do not have labor and delivery units and many Arkansas counties have limited or no options for women to receive prenatal care

Find out more about what happened during the fiscal session on our website.

www.aradvocates.org

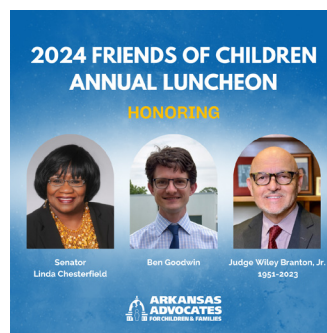
SAVE THE DATE

Visit aradvocates.org/events

Friends of Children Annual Luncheon

October 22 in Little Rock. Sponsorships are available!

Help us honor Senator Linda Chesterfield and Ben Goodwin for their work improving the lives of Arkansas's children. We will also pay a special tribute to Judge Wiley Branton, Jr. (1951-2023).



Roby Brock of Talk Business & Politics will serve as emcee for the event. All proceeds from the event – sponsorships, ticket sales and donations – benefit the work we do at Arkansas Advocates.

2025 Soup Sunday Events!

Northwest Arkansas: February 2 in Rogers

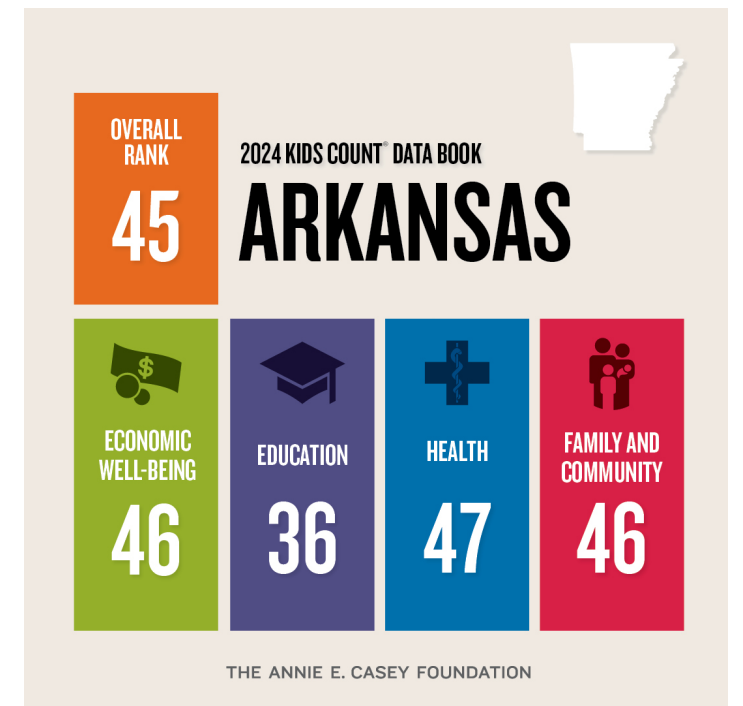
Central Arkansas: March 2 in North Little Rock

Come see why Arkansas Times readers have voted Soup Sunday Best Charity Event once again!



Be Social

- facebook.com/aradvocates
- twitter.com/aacf
- [@aradvocates](https://instagram.com/aradvocates)



Arkansas Advocates Issue Areas

Arkansas Advocates focuses on key issue areas to help improve child well-being in Arkansas.

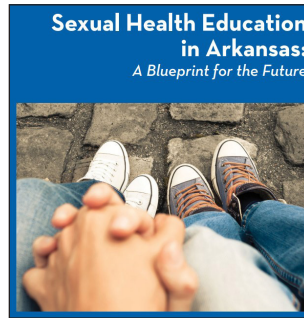
- Child welfare
- Economic security
- Early childhood and K-12 education
- Health care
- Hunger
- Immigrant children and families
- Juvenile justice
- Racial equity
- Tax and budget

LATEST PUBLICATION

Improving Outcomes by Lowering Teen Birth Rate

Increasing opportunity for young people in Arkansas means tackling the state's teen birth rate, which has been far too high for far too long.

After a year of research, Arkansas Advocates, alongside a group of partners, released "Sexual Health Education in Arkansas: A Blueprint for the Future." We found that a hodgepodge of local policies and inequitable education will not be enough to adequately address our high rates of teen births and child sexual abuse. aradvocates.org/publications



Arkansas Advocates 2024 Board of Directors

- Xochitl Delgado Solorzano, President
- Nikki Edge, PhD, Vice President
- Gene Lu, MD, Treasurer
- Stacey Sturner, JD, Secretary
- Shannon Collier-Tenison, PhD, At-Large Member
- Brooke Montgomery, PhD, At-Large Member
- Gayatri Agnew
- Hershey Garner, JD, MD
- Tamara P. Glover, PhD
- Rejena S. Grotjohn, JD
- Susan Sullivan Miller, MD
- Rev. Natasha Murray-Norman
- Martie North
- Sheldon Riklon, MD
- Chad Rodgers, MD
- William Schwab, PhD
- Aaron Strong, MD
- Pastor Dwight Townsend
- Danyelle Walker, JD

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Jennifer Ferguson

Deputy Director

Jennifer Ferguson serves as Deputy Director for Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. Before returning to Arkansas Advocates in 2005, she served as Chief Financial and Operating Officer for the Arkansas Community Foundation. Jennifer is a native of Hope, Arkansas, and has a business and economics degree from Hendrix College and a law degree from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.



She currently serves on the Little Rock Commission on Children, Youth & Families. She has served on the boards of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, the Arkansas Hunger Coalition, and Tree Streets.

Jennifer is an ardent supporter of public schools and believes in the importance of public education for all our kids. She received the 2023 LRSD Parent Involvement Award and the President's Volunteer Service Award for volunteering over 250 hours in the 2023-24 school year.

June Special Session on Tax Cuts

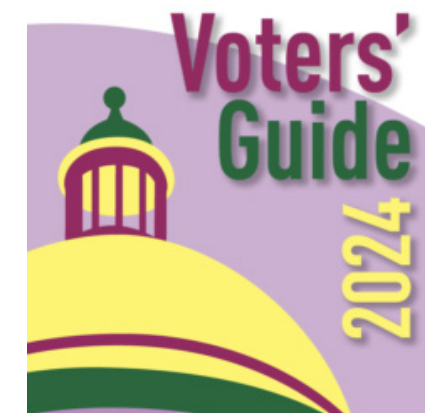
The Arkansas General Assembly convened in a special session in June to consider the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission budget, another round of tax cuts, and their stances on proposed citizen-initiated ballot measures. At Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, our focus was on the tax cut debate and its impact on the children of our state.

The Governor signed two tax cut laws that will cost our state budget at least \$450 million every year, according to our partners at the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. Once again, Arkansas Advocates and our partners were at the Capitol and in our communities advocating against another round of income tax cuts.

We opposed the tax cuts because they increase the lopsidedness of our tax system and because they take away funding that could be going toward critical programs.

We are thankful for everyone who advocated during the special session against the tax cut proposals. We appreciate the letters to the editor, emails and calls to legislators, and sharing information online. Though the tax cuts passed, the adverse impact of the cuts would not have received the attention it did without our supporters' advocacy.

AACF Voters' Guide



As advocates, it's up to us to make sure voters and candidates are aware of the issues that matter most. Election years are an excellent time to call attention to the ways we can make Arkansas a

better state to be and raise a child. By asking candidates their thoughts on issues, you can prompt thoughtful dialogue. Using our Voters' Guide, you can be a voice for Arkansas's kids. aradvocates.org/publications

Find the Data You Need

The KIDS COUNT Data Center is an interactive database with many indicators about children and their families. It's especially helpful for identifying community needs, planning programs and applying for grants.

Access profiles for all Arkansas counties; order data by rankings, maps, or trend graphs by topic; and download

Donate to Support Advocacy

Visit www.aradvocates.org/donate

Text ADVOCATES to 44834

Donate through a Donor Advised Fund

Help us plan for the future by including a bequest to Arkansas Advocates in your estate plans

Fran Carter Esther Schroeder
501-454-5014 501-258-6836

DID YOU KNOW?

Although most gifts to Arkansas Advocates come in the form of cash and check, there are other ways to give. You can make a donation of stock or transfer from your IRA with beneficial tax implications. For more information, contact Fran or Esther or your financial advisor.

raw data. The Data Center includes more than 100 measures of child well-being. Go to the Arkansas page of the KIDS COUNT Data Center by visiting datacenter.aecf.org/data?location=AR#AR