



Arkansas Advocates
for Children and Families

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Advocacy Matters



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Arkansas's Kids Count!

Arkansas ranks 45th in child well-being, according to the *2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book*, a 50-state report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The data show Arkansas leaders must do more to invest in basic needs and community-enriching programs for Arkansas to become a top-tier state for kids.



The number of Arkansas's children in poverty decreased by 7,000 between 2019 and 2023. Despite this progress, 21% of the state's kids still live in poverty (more than one in five), and Arkansas remains well above the national average of 16%.

Arkansas Advocates encourages lawmakers and officials to use this detailed information to unite across party lines and respond with initiatives that invest in young people. Visit aradvocates.org/kids-count for an in-depth look and to join the Arkansas Kids Count Coalition.

SAVE THE DATE

Visit aradvocates.org/events

Friends of Children Annual Luncheon

October 21 in Little Rock. Sponsorships are available!

Help us honor Eric Gilmore and Dr. Sheldon Riklon for their work improving the lives of Arkansas's children.

Roby Brock of Talk Business & Politics will serve as emcee for the event.

A table for 10 is \$750 and sponsorships begin at \$1,000. Individual tickets are \$75 each. All proceeds from the event – sponsorships, ticket sales and donations – benefit the work we do at Arkansas Advocates.



2026 Soup Sunday Events!

Northwest Arkansas: February 1 in Rogers

Central Arkansas: March 1 in Little Rock

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



Arkansas is Underinvesting in Our Children

Arkansas has 144,000 children living in poverty; more than 3,000 low-birthweight babies born each year; 50,000 children without health insurance; 300 children dying annually; and nearly 2,500 teens giving birth. Alarming, 53,000 Arkansas children live in food-insecure households.

We also face historic funding cuts to critical programs. Budget cuts passed by Congress will gut essential services for low-income people and have a devastating impact on tens of thousands of Arkansas's children and families. Many costs will shift from the federal government to Arkansas. With our state budget already stretched thin, Arkansas lawmakers will be forced to choose between taking away benefits, reducing eligibility, raising taxes, or cutting funding for other state programs.

Even in this challenging environment, you can make a difference. As donors and advocates, we can shift the conversation from funding short-term initiatives toward long-term social change.

We urge state lawmakers to start planning. When we lose federal funding at the levels currently projected, and we don't have a plan to use our state's public dollars to address budget shortfalls, we could put an entire generation of children on a downward trajectory.

We urge you to join us in advocating for a brighter future. Speak out. Spend your philanthropic dollars to help Arkansas Advocates and other nonprofit partners work for long-term policy solutions. Arkansas cannot afford to leave our children behind.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

AACF Issue Areas

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

- Child welfare
- Democracy and voting rights
- Early childhood and K-12 education
- Economic security
- Food Security
- Health care
- Immigrant children and families
- Juvenile justice
- Racial equity
- Tax and budget

AACF 2025 Board of Directors

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Brooke Edwards

Communications Director

Brooke Edwards joined AACF as Communications Director in October 2018. Brooke's previous roles include serving as the Digital Marketing Manager at the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Executive Communications Manager at Heifer International, and Grant Writer at Southern Financial Partners. Brooke moved to Little Rock in elementary school and considers herself a native Arkansan. She has a degree in psychology from the University of Central Arkansas and a Master of Social Work from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.



Brooke's introduction to AACF was as a 4th grader attending her first Soup Sunday at the old Cajun's Wharf restaurant in Little Rock. She was an AACF social work intern in 2005/2006. But her career path led her into the nonprofit communications field, rather than public policy. More than 12 years after her internship, she was hired at AACF to lead the organization's communications efforts, coming full circle.

Ways to Advocate

- Download the AACF Advocacy Guide: aradvocates.org/advocacy-guide
- Make sure your voter registration is up to date!
- Follow up with your elected officials. They want to hear from you!
- Want to host a speaker from AACF? Please contact us at connect@aradvocates.org



Fort Smith Children's Policy Summit

2025 General Assembly

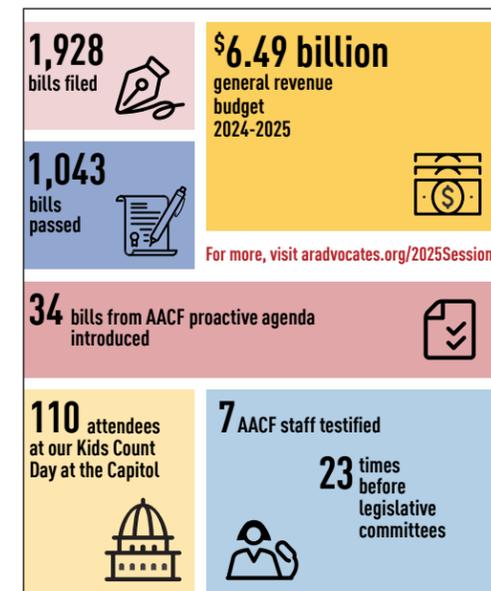
Post-Legislative Review

As soon as Arkansas's 95th General Assembly convened on January 13, Arkansas Advocates staff stayed busy. Whether we were speaking in support of bills like HB1915, which would have helped reduce hunger in our state while also allowing families to build self-sufficiency — or arguing against a multitude of bills aimed at making Arkansans' access to direct democracy more difficult — we came through on our commitment to being a voice for evidence-based solutions to improve the lives of Arkansas's children and families.

Many of these new laws will impact Arkansas's kids. From fast-tracked Medicaid coverage for certain pregnant women to universal free school breakfasts, our Kids at the Capitol 2025 Legislative Summary covers it all. Read about the good laws that passed, the missed

opportunities, and the harmful legislation that passed or was narrowly avoided.

We're thankful for the work of child advocates around the state, who kept the well-being of children at the forefront of many important debates.



Federal Advocacy

This summer, President Donald Trump signed legislation that will raise families' food and health care costs, increase poverty and hunger, strip health coverage from millions, and drive up deficits — in part to make permanent major tax cuts that mostly benefit very few.

While this outcome is disheartening, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families has been part of a nationwide push to inform our community about the harm the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" will do, and we are going to continue to share research and data that illustrate the impact of the bill on Arkansans.

For more than half a century, the federal government has been committed to cutting poverty, but this bill abandons our shared vision of creating a country in which everyone has a fair shot at opportunity.

This summer we held federal town halls in all four of Arkansas's Congressional districts. We met with Arkansas Senator John Boozman. We issued alerts that inspired more than 700 Arkansans to contact our Congressional delegation. We published a full-page letter opposing cuts to Medicaid and SNAP in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, signed by more than 160 Arkansas faith leaders.

Arkansas Advocates fights against federal budget cuts because of the negative impact they have on funding for programs for children and families in our state.

Visit aradvocates.org/federal-advocacy for more.

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 501-454-5014
Esther Schroeder 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.