



**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 2026

IN THIS ISSUE:
2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book
#arleg Fiscal and Special Sessions
Staff Spotlight: Shyy Brown

Arkansas's Kids Count!

For the first time, states received a comprehensive score (from 0 to 1,000) in the *2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book* by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in addition to overall rankings. The scores track 16 indicators in four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community factors. The new scoring system shows whether policies and public investment are actually improving children's lives, not just how states compare to each other. Arkansas received a score of 427, below the national average score of 547, with the lowest score in the Education domain.

Arkansas Advocates is closely monitoring the state government's ongoing efforts to eliminate state income

2026 KIDS COUNT® DATA BOOK		
ARKANSAS		
	OVERALL SCORE 427 WORSE	OVERALL RANK 43
ECONOMIC WELL-BEING	536 BETTER	33
EDUCATION	318 WORSE	40
HEALTH	382 WORSE	48
FAMILY & COMMUNITY	472 BETTER	45

NOTE: RANKINGS SHOW HOW STATES COMPARE. SCORES RANGE FROM 0 (WORST) TO 1000 (BEST) AND REFLECT CHILD WELL-BEING RELATIVE TO A 2016 BASELINE. CHANGES OVER TIME INDICATE PROGRESS OR DECLINE. SCORES ARE NOT PERCENTILES OR A FRESH LINE. HIGHER SCORES INDICATE BETTER OUTCOMES.

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

taxes. This year's *Data Book* clearly shows the need for state-level investments in basic needs programs like public education and access to affordable health insurance, among others. With reduced state revenue due to continuous income tax cuts, Arkansas risks losing even more ground on critical child well-being indicators.

UPCOMING EVENTS

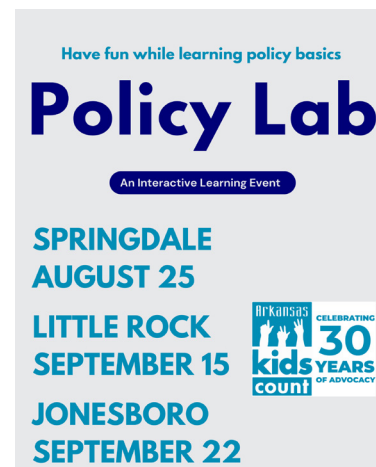
Policy 101 Series and Policy Labs

The Arkansas Kids Count Coalition is celebrating 30 years of advocacy for our state's children. The Coalition is hosting a monthly webinar series, Policy 101, designed to help advocates, community members, and partners better understand how policy works in Arkansas — and how to engage with it effectively.

Register for all our events at aradvocates.org/events



The Coalition is also hosting three in-person Policy Labs, interactive trainings where participants will learn key aspects of critical public policies through round-table discussions, quizzes and opportunities to connect with other advocates.



Friends of Children Annual Luncheon

October 7 in Little Rock. Save the date; details soon!

Putting Arkansas's Children First

Note: the following is a summary of the opinion-editorial piece by AACF Executive Director Keesa Smith-Brantley, originally published in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette on June 8, 2026.

Not long ago, Arkansas was a leader in children's health insurance and early childhood education. We were one of the first states to adopt what would become the Children's Health Insurance Program. Thanks to this effort, which created ARKids First, Arkansas experienced the largest decrease in the rate of uninsured children in the entire nation. Arkansas also prioritized the Arkansas Better Chance pre-k program and became a national leader in providing education to 3- and 4-year-olds.

Flash forward to today, the state of Arkansas is far behind in both categories, ranking 40th in education and 48th in health.

These indicators contribute to our state ranking of 43rd overall in the Annie E. Casey Foundation *2026 KIDS COUNT Databook*. This data is released annually and is crucial in analyzing trends to see where we have made progress and where we have fallen behind.

The idea behind the *Data Book* is simple: We count what we care about. If we're not counting it, it's not our priority. Children and their well-being must be both national and state priorities.

The indicators aren't reason to despair; they're reasons to buckle down and reset our priorities as a state. We can do this. As the late Congressman Barney Frank said, "Government is simply the name we give to the things we choose to do together."

Arkansas, let's choose to put children first.

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 2026 Board of Directors

Ryan Davis, President
Brooke Montgomery, PhD, Vice President
Gene Lu, MD, Treasurer
Stacey Sturmer, JD, Secretary
Preston Clegg, At-Large Member
Gayatri Richardson, At-Large Member
Nathan Coulter, JD
Xochitl Delgado Solorzano
Sarah Draine
Nikki Edge, PhD
Hershey Garner, JD, MD
Tamara P. Glover, PhD
Mervin Jebaraj
Sharon Lanier, PhD
Eric McDaniel
Richard Moss, PhD
Sheldon Riklon, MD
Cathy Cole Seilhan
Kevin Shalin

Shyy Brown

Finance and Administrative Director

This summer, we are honored to feature Shyy Brown and all that she contributes to Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. Shyy brings a diverse work background to the table, having worked as an Office Secretary at the Jacksonville North Pulaski School District, District Manager at Bloom Management Inc., Account Specialist at Goldstone Financial Group, and even has experience in corporate billing from USAbLe Life.



At Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families Shyy is responsible for overseeing the organization's administrative functions, financial operations, and overall wellbeing of the organization. Her hard work makes our mission to ensure all children and families have the resources and opportunities to lead healthy, productive lives, and to serve as a voice for children at the Arkansas State Capitol and in Washington, D.C, possible.

Advocating in an Election Year

- Download the AACF Voters' Guide: aradvocates.org/2026-voters-guide/
- Make sure your voter registration is up to date!
- Want to host a speaker from AACF? Please contact us at conect@aradvocates.org

DATES TO REMEMBER

General Election

- Oct. 5: Deadline to apply to register to vote in General Election
- Oct. 19: Early voting begins
- Nov. 3: General Election Day

WHAT'S ON THE BALLOT

Arkansas Elections in 2026

- U.S. Senate
- U.S. House
- Governor
- State Senate
- State House
- State Supreme Court
- School Boards
- State Ballot Measures

sos.arkansas.gov/elections/for-voters

2026 General Assembly

The 2026 Fiscal Session and First Extraordinary Session of the Arkansas General Assembly

In even-numbered years, the state legislature convenes to review a narrow set of legislation regarding government budgeting decisions. This year, the General Assembly had to make a major decision on funding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Because of 2025 federal legislation (H.R.1 also known as the One, Big Beautiful Bill Act), states must increase the amount they pay for SNAP administrative costs.

This year alone, Arkansas must pay \$18 million more to run the program. Arkansas Advocates and partners, including the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, advocated for the state to allocate the \$18 million to ensure that benefits won't be cut and the program's quality won't be diminished.

Unfortunately, the state did not make this investment but plans instead to look for cost savings within the program. We are worried about the loss of critical hunger relief programs for Arkansans.

This year, Governor Sanders also called a special session of the legislature to vote on another round of income tax cuts. The income tax makes up over half of the state's revenue and allows the government to fund critical programs that serve everyone from babies to the elderly.

Over the past decade, \$2 billion annually has been cut from the state budget through income tax cuts, limiting our ability to make critical investments for our communities. Sadly, the legislature once again voted to cut the state income tax, costing almost \$200 million more dollars in state revenue every year.



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 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

Be Social

facebook.com/aradvocates
linkedin.com/company/aradvocates
@aradvocates

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.