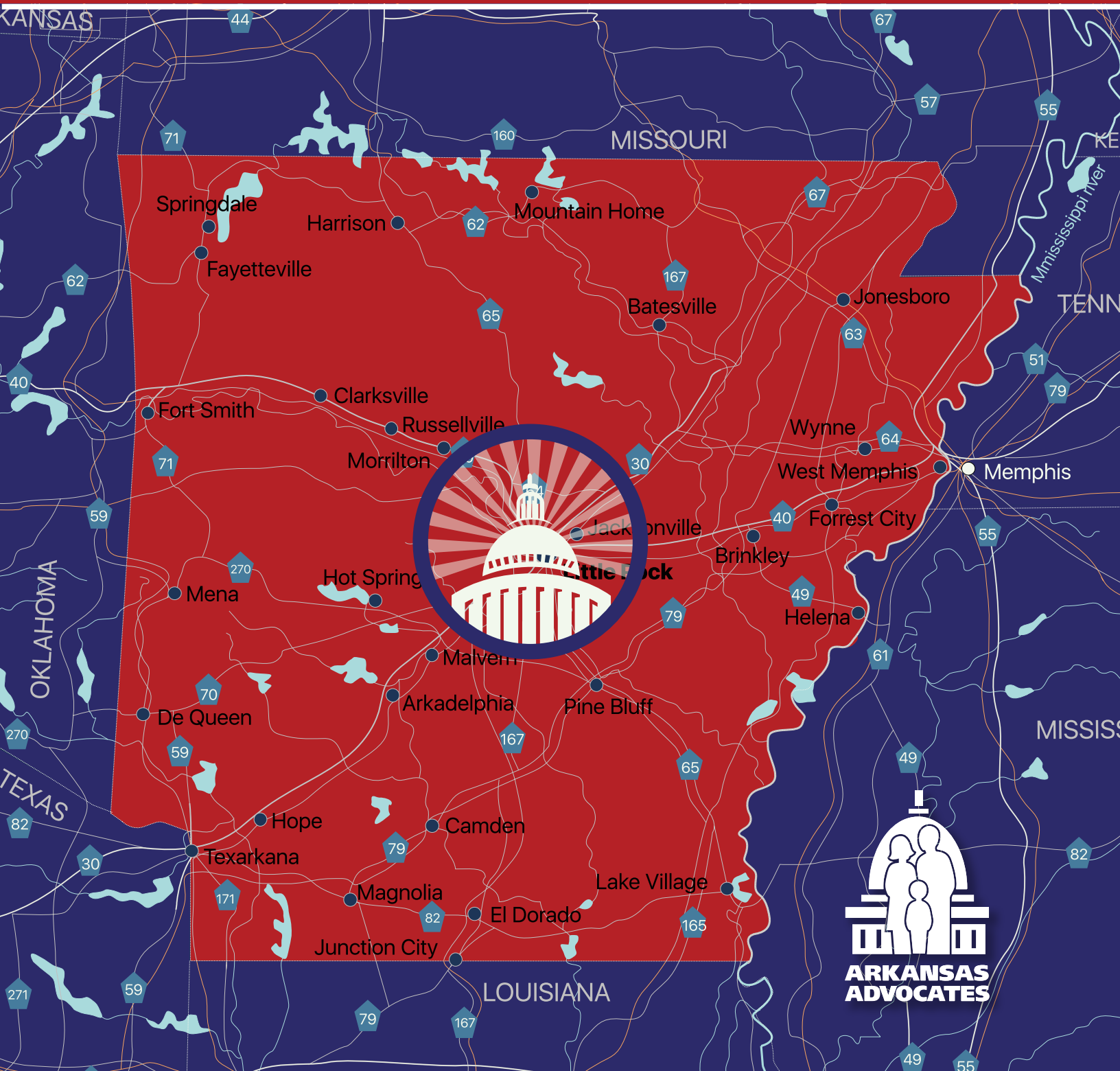


KIDS AT THE CAPITOL 2025



LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

Kids at the Capitol: 2025 Legislative Summary

Arkansas's 95th General Assembly convened on Monday, January 13, with snow on the Capitol grounds. During her State of the State address to Arkansas representatives and senators, Governor Sarah Sanders outlined her legislative priorities to kick off the session; some of her priorities included improving food security for children and reforming the state's higher education system.

Arkansas Advocates staff stayed busy once committee hearings began, with seven of our staff testifying before committees 23 times. 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.

In February, we hosted the Arkansas Kids Count Coalition's 2025 Kids Count Day at the Capitol. We had 110 attendees, including children ranging from preschool-age to teens. Attendees participated in a rally in the rotunda, went to committee meetings, and had lunch with legislators. To top it off, several attendees were special guests as the Arkansas House of Representatives passed HR2016, recognizing February 10, 2025, as Kids Count Day at the Capitol and the Arkansas Kids Count Coalition for its advocacy on behalf of the children of Arkansas.

A high note of the session was the passage of the Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies Act, which includes fast-tracking Medicaid coverage for pregnant women to help them get prenatal care more quickly (presumptive eligibility). Arkansas Advocates supported bills calling for presumptive eligibility in 2021 and 2023, so we were especially happy to see this policy change included. The governor also signed a bill on our legislative agenda to provide free school breakfast to any public school student who requests one. We're thankful for our partners at Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, whose No Kid Hungry campaign has been working for years to advance better policies to reduce child hunger.

We were disappointed, however, that two bills that have been on our legislative agenda for years failed to pass. One, to end harmful fees and fines levied on children in the juvenile justice system, passed the Senate but died in House committee. The other, which offered an innovative approach to extending Medicaid coverage for certain groups of postpartum women from 60 days to 12 months, passed the House but failed to get out of Senate committee.

Over 93 days of meetings, Arkansas’s 95th General Assembly filed 1,928 bills, passing 1,043 of them. The session officially ended on May 5. We’re so grateful for the work of our fellow child advocates around the state who worked tirelessly to keep the well-being of children at the heart of important debates. As always, we look forward to continuing our efforts alongside our supporters and partners.

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Child Welfare

As child labor violations continue to rise at the state and national levels, several bills designed to increase child labor protections were filed this session but failed to advance. In particular, HB1731 would have reinstated employment certificates for youth younger than 16. Employment certificates, which were repealed during the 2023 legislative session, had served as an important educational touchpoint for youth and their caregivers to understand the days, hours, and conditions under which these younger teens are allowed to work. Unfortunately, the bill did not have the political support to reach a committee meeting.

Outside of child labor issues, there was a win for older teens in foster care. In most cases, before an adoption can be finalized, the child must live in the prospective adoptive home for at least six months. Act 139 adds an exception that allows the Director of the Division of Children and Family Services to waive that 6-month adoption residency requirement for youth in foster care ages 16 and older if they are participating in a technical or vocational program.

This means a youth who is participating in these kinds of programs and living on campus can still achieve permanency while gaining important life skills. The Act may only apply to a small group of youth; however, gaining a forever family sooner rather than later will have a powerful impact on those teens.

Sadly, there were harmful laws passed as well. For example, Act 636 will almost double the number of psychiatric residential treatment facilities (PRTFs) in our state. There are many documented safety and well-being concerns related to PRTFs. However, this bill will result in more children being institutionalized in this highly restrictive setting type without first addressing quality of care standards. While the bill requires the state to promulgate rules to ensure quality of care, PRTFs are still allowed to expand prior to the implementation of those rules.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

CHILD WELFARE

Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
Sen. Missy Irvin and Rep. Carol Dalby SB320	Act 518 creates a new chapter in statute for the Arkansas Juvenile Code and largely reorganizes the existing statute in that chapter for clean-up purposes.	Supported
Rep. Mary Bentley and Sen. Kim Hammer HB1292	Act 139 clarifies residency requirements for adoptions in Arkansas. It also creates a new exception to the adoption residency requirements that allows the Director of the Division of Children and Family Services to waive the residency requirement for a minor in foster care who is 16 or older under certain conditions.	Supported

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Bills That Became Law CONTINUED		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Rep. Frances Cavanaugh</u> and <u>Sen. Missy Irvin</u> <u>HB1653</u>	<u>Act 636</u> allows the number of psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) beds in Arkansas to increase to a total of 900 beds. It also classifies PRTFs as a “long-term care facility” and moves the oversight of PRTFs from the Child Welfare Agency Review Board to the DHS Office of Long Term Care.	Opposed
<u>Rep. Mary Bentley</u> and <u>Sen. Alan Clark</u> <u>HB1669</u>	<u>Act 509</u> prohibits state government from taking any discriminatory action, such as taking away funding or licenses, against faith-based foster care or adoption agencies that refuse to serve LGBTQ+ individuals and families based on religious beliefs. It also mandates that the state not take action against a foster or adoptive family who “guides, instructs, or raises a child, or intends to guide, instruct, or raise a child, based upon or in a manner consistent with a sincerely held religious belief.”	Opposed
Missed Opportunities		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Sen. Greg Leding</u> and <u>Rep. Diana Gonzales</u> <u>Worthen</u> <u>SB585</u>	This bill would have required every employer with more than 10 employees to provide pay stubs to each employee who is under the age of 18.	Died on House Calendar at Sine Die adjournment
<u>Rep. DeAnn Vaught</u> <u>HB1731</u>	This bill would have required employers who hire children under the age of 16 to acquire from the Arkansas Department of Labor and Licensing an employment certificate form. The employment certificate would have required proof of the minor's age, a description of the work and work schedule, and written consent of the parent or guardian. It would have reinstated a child labor protection that the Legislature revoked in 2023.	Withdrawn by author
<u>Rep. Zack Gramlich</u> <u>HB1996</u>	This bill would have allowed a civil penalty for a first-time child labor violation to be waived if the offender completed an educational module developed by the Arkansas Department of Labor and Licensing. It would also have required all public, charter, and private schools in the state to display a poster providing information on state and federal child labor rules and regulations.	Recommended for Interim Study by the House Committee on Public Health, Welfare and Labor

Democracy and Voting Rights

Recent legislative sessions have consistently rolled back ballot and voting rights. The 95th General Assembly was no exception. New laws drastically alter the direct democracy process, creating many new arduous restrictions to the ballot measure process that make it practically impossible for citizen-initiated measures to succeed. And unfortunately, most legislation that would have increased voting and ballot rights, such as creating

online voter registration and expanding access to absentee voting, were unsuccessful. Hopefully this will be the last session to promote so many anti-democracy laws, and we will turn the tide back toward making it easier for Arkansans to exercise their constitutional rights.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

DEMOCRACY AND VOTING RIGHTS

Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Sen. Kim Hammer</u> and <u>Rep. Kendon Underwood</u> SB207	<u>Act 218</u> requires canvassers collecting signatures for a ballot measure to inform individuals before signing that petition fraud is a criminal offense.	Opposed
<u>Sen. Kim Hammer</u> and <u>Rep. Kendon Underwood</u> SB208	<u>Act 240</u> requires that canvassers request and review a photo ID before allowing a voter to sign a ballot measure petition.	Opposed
<u>Sen. Kim Hammer</u> and <u>Rep. Kendon Underwood</u> SB209	<u>Act 273</u> disqualifies all signatures collected by a canvasser, including legitimate signatures, if a canvasser is found to have violated Arkansas law or the Arkansas Constitution while collecting signatures for a petition.	Opposed
<u>Sen. Kim Hammer</u> and <u>Rep. Kendon Underwood</u> SB210	<u>Act 274</u> requires canvassers to read the ballot title of a measure out loud to a voter or observe a voter read the ballot title before allowing them to sign a ballot measure petition.	Opposed
<u>Sen. Kim Hammer</u> and <u>Rep. Kendon Underwood</u> SB211	<u>Act 241</u> requires canvassers to file an affidavit with the Secretary of State's office before the signatures they collected can be counted and prevents them from collecting additional signatures after a campaign has submitted signatures to the Secretary of State's office until the Secretary of State's office determines the campaign met certain requirements.	Opposed
<u>Sen. Clarke Tucker</u> and <u>Rep. Howard M. Beaty, Jr.</u> SB403	<u>Act 449</u> establishes a Complete Count Committee, made up of government officials and local leaders, to help plan for outreach, communications, and data gathering for the 2030 Census.	Supported

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Bills That Became Law CONTINUED		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Sen. Kim Hammer</u> and <u>Rep. Jon S. Eubanks</u> <u>SB551</u>	<u>Act 764</u> addresses local ballot measure petitions and requires canvassers for those to either read aloud the ballot title or watch a potential petition signer read the title. It also requires a person acting as a canvasser to tell a potential signer that ballot measure fraud is a criminal offense before allowing an individual to sign. It also mandates that county clerks throw out all signatures collected by a canvasser, including valid ones, if the canvasser is found by a preponderance of the evidence to have violated any laws when collecting signatures.	Opposed
<u>Sen. Kim Hammer</u> and <u>Rep. RJ Hawk</u> <u>SB584</u>	<u>Act 768</u> aligns local ballot measure petition law with state law in various ways including requiring that county clerks throw out all signatures collected by a canvasser, including valid ones, if the canvasser is found by a preponderance of the evidence to have violated any laws when collecting signatures. It also prevents canvassers for local measures from collecting additional signatures until the county clerk deems the campaign met the requirements to collect additional signatures under what is known as the "cure" period.	Opposed
<u>Rep. David Ray</u> and <u>Sen. Kim Hammer</u> <u>HB1222</u>	<u>Act 154</u> allows the Arkansas Attorney General to reject a proposed ballot measure based on whether he or she determines the proposed measure would violate the United States Constitution or federal law. Historically, the AG has only provided opinions and guidance on the topic.	Opposed
<u>Rep. Jessie McGruder</u> <u>HB1878</u>	<u>Act 978</u> requires county election commissions to designate an early voting site during primary elections and general elections in any city with a population of 15,000 or more and where the county clerk is not conducting early voting.	Supported
<u>Rep. Howard M. Beaty, Jr.</u> and <u>Sen. Ben Gilmore</u> <u>HB1925</u>	<u>Act 846</u> makes it harder for some people to vote absentee by requiring that they obtain a witness's signature as part of their ballot forms.	Opposed

Education

The biggest pieces of education legislation during the 2025 session were the Bell to Bell, No Cell Act and the Arkansas ACCESS Act. After proclaimed success from participating districts’ cell phone restrictions during the pilot year and the positive impact on students, the state moved forward to make the policy a statewide requirement, which enjoyed widespread bipartisan support. The Arkansas ACCESS Act was first touted as a transformational counterpart to the 2023 LEARNS Act except for higher education, but many aspects of the law were ideological instead of innovative. We will monitor ACCESS implementation going forward.

There were a few attempts to increase the accountability and financial soundness of the state’s education voucher program created by the LEARNS Act, but the only one that passed places some limitations on how the funds can be spent now that the program is expanding to universal eligibility for the 2025-2026 school year. Another update to LEARNS included the increase of the amount for the Literacy Tutoring Grant program, allowing up to \$1,500 to be granted per student.

Causing much debate this session was an attempt to require a controversial video known as “Meet Baby Olivia” to be shown to public school students as part of a required human fetal growth and

development education. Ultimately, legislation did pass to require the Department of Education to include human fetal growth and development in academic standards but did not include a specific video or vendor in the law. Many legislators expressed concern about teacher safety in the classroom, and Act 565 is a piece of legislation that passed as an attempt to address this issue. We remain concerned that this Act will increase districts’ use of exclusionary practices instead of providing students with the services they need for behavioral changes.

For early childhood education, there was success in passing a bill to allow early childhood educators in publicly funded programs to participate in the Arkansas State Teacher Retirement System, although no state funding or match will be offered to those who choose to participate. There was a lot of hope for passing a program to help increase access to child care with new income tax credits for businesses and licensed child care providers, but unfortunately, it was never heard in committee. Legislation did pass to streamline the eligibility for the Arkansas Better Chance program, which will benefit some providers to better organize their child care slots.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

EDUCATION		
Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas’s children and families	AACF’s position
Sen. Tyler Dees and Rep. Jon S. Eubanks SB142	Act 122 requires every public school district and open-enrollment public charter school to adopt a policy prohibiting the use of cell phones by students during the school day, except during an emergency. The policy is required to allow exceptions for students with disabilities, if the use of a personal electronic device is included on their IEP or 504 Plan. It requires the districts to post their policies on their websites and submit them to the Arkansas Department of Education for approval.	Supported

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Bills That Became Law CONTINUED		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Sen. Jane English</u> and <u>Rep. Brandon Achor</u> <u>SB148</u>	<u>Act 587</u> allows early childhood workers to participate in the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System. Participation is voluntary, and the early childhood worker is not entitled to state matching funds or contributions.	Supported
<u>Sen. Steve Crowell</u> and <u>Rep. Rebecca Burkes</u> <u>SB206</u>	<u>Act 195</u> triples the amount of literacy tutoring grants provided to public schools on behalf of eligible students. The previous amount was \$500 per student, and this law increases it to \$1,500 per student.	Supported
<u>Sen. Jonathan Dismang</u> and <u>Rep. Matthew J. Shepherd</u> <u>SB246</u> and <u>HB1512</u>	Together, <u>Act 340</u> and <u>Act 341</u> comprise the Arkansas ACCESS Act, which addresses several issues related to higher education in Arkansas, as well as many K-12 issue areas. Changes include, but are not limited to, establishing accelerated learning in lieu of the previous Advancement Placement Training and Incentive Program; establishing that public schools, charter schools, and state-supported institutions of higher education cannot grant excused absences for student involvement in political protests; removing certain provisions from the K-12 school rating system; directing the Arkansas Division of Higher Education to create rules to update the state's higher education funding formula; and doubling the amount of Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarship available for freshmen to \$2,000.	Monitored
<u>Sen. Breanne Davis</u> and <u>Rep. Kendra Moore</u> <u>SB450</u>	<u>Act 915</u> requires a human growth and development discussion to be included in the relevant Arkansas Academic Standards. The Department of Education will consult with the Department of Health to determine the appropriate grade levels for students to receive this information. The discussion will include human biology as it relates to pregnancy and human development inside the womb; the showing of a high-definition ultrasound that shows the brain, heart, sex organs, and other vital organs in early fetal development; and the process of fertilization and every stage of human development inside the uterus, including a discussion that notes significant markers in cell growth and organ development for every significant marker of pregnancy until birth.	Monitored

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Bills That Became Law CONTINUED

Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Sen. Breanne Davis</u> and <u>Rep. Keith Brooks</u> <u>SB625</u>	<u>Act 920</u> changes the state's private and home school voucher program. It clarifies that voucher funds can be used on reasonable costs associated with co-curricular courses in the fine arts, music, or STEM fields if that course is available in a public school district in the state and cannot be used toward telephones, cell phones, or other communication devices unless that item is needed for a student with a disability and meets other requirements. It caps the amount of the voucher to 25% that can be used toward extracurricular activities, physical education activities, and educational field trips within the state and to 25% that can be spent on transportation to and from a service provider or school. The new law adds that if a participating student is expelled, their voucher account will be closed. It also creates a timeframe for applications for the voucher program to begin no earlier than February 1 and end no later than May 1 for each year prior to the upcoming school year the funds will be used. The law also rewrites the eligibility section to include universal availability beginning with the 2025-2026 school year and to create a priority list of categories, if there are insufficient funds to pay for every student requesting a voucher.	Supported
<u>Rep. Andrew Collins</u> and <u>Sen. Breanne Davis</u> <u>HB1017</u>	<u>Act 904</u> expands maternity leave for public school and open-enrollment public charter school employees to all eligible employees, not just those in participating districts, and shifts the cost to 100% paid by the state instead of split between the district and the state. It also allows maternity leave for school employees who have a foster placement of an infant under 1.	Supported
<u>Rep. R. Scott Richardson</u> and <u>Sen. Tyler Dees</u> <u>HB1062</u>	<u>Act 565</u> requires a student who is violent or abusive toward a teacher or another student to be removed from class and placed in an appropriate learning environment (such as another classroom or placed in in-school suspension) pending a school conference. If the student is allowed to leave the appropriate learning environment after the conference, the student will not be allowed to return to the same class as the teacher or student. If a teacher removes a student three times in a year for violent or abusive behavior, then the student must be placed in an appropriate interim learning environment for the remainder of the year or disciplined according to the written discipline policy of that school.	Opposed

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Bills That Became Law CONTINUED		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Rep. Mary Bentley and Sen. Joshua Bryant</u> <u>HB1215</u>	<u>Act 119</u> changes the 2023 school bathroom bill that targeted transgender youth. It allows a coach to visit student athletes in a locker room, changing room, shower room, or restroom that is designated for a sex different from the coach's, provided other parameters are met. Instead of adding more exceptions to this law, we maintain that the whole section, ACA 6-21-120, should be repealed.	Opposed
<u>Rep. Denise Jones Ennett and Sen. Breanne Davis</u> <u>HB1728</u>	<u>Act 906</u> requires institutions of higher education that are eligible to receive Title IV federal funds to collect and report nonidentifying data for students with disabilities. Specifically, the institutions will report to the Division of Higher Education the number of students registered to receive accommodations, the percentage of students registered to receive accommodations of all undergraduate students, and the number of undergraduate certificates or degrees awarded to students with disabilities who are registered to receive accommodations.	Supported
<u>Rep. Joey L. Carr and Sen. Ronald Caldwell</u> <u>HB1733</u>	<u>Act 504</u> aligns the eligibility requirements for the Arkansas Better Chance program and the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success program. Before now, there were two different sets of rules for eligibility, and the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success program was the state and locally funded pre-K program. With this new law, slots in the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success program will be allowed to be used for birth through 5 years of age, and the eligibility will broaden to match the ABC umbrella program.	Supported
<u>Rep. Denise Jones Ennett and Sen. Breanne Davis</u> <u>HB1766</u>	<u>Act 907</u> requires institutions of higher education to adopt a transparent policy for students with disabilities that provides information on how the institution determines eligibility for accommodations and about the disability resource center. The new policy will be given to students during the application process, at orientation, in the academic catalog, and on the institution's website. The institution will also provide a representative list of accommodations and resources for students with disabilities.	Supported
<u>Rep. Steven Walker and Sen. Jane English</u> <u>HB1903</u>	<u>Act 911</u> removes the requirement that all school districts offer an alternative learning environment and instead makes it optional.	Monitored

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Missed Opportunities		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Rep. Denise Garner</u> <u>HB1019</u>	This bill would have provided a refundable income tax credit to businesses providing or paying for licensed child care services for the dependent children of its employees. This bill would have repealed current employer-provided tax care child credits (which are not currently used by Arkansas employers).	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment
<u>Rep. Denise Garner</u> <u>HB1021</u>	This bill aimed to provide an income tax credit for program directors, teachers, and instructional staff employed in an early childhood education program that meets the requirements of the Better Beginnings quality rating system of the Department of Education and earn less than the state's minimum salary for K-12 public school teachers. The amount of tax credit would have ranged from \$1,800 to \$3,000 depending on educational certification. The credit would have been refundable.	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment
<u>Rep. Andrew Collins</u> <u>HB1028</u>	This bill would have repealed Arkansas Code Annotated (ACA) §5-27-212, which introduced a new definition of furnishing harmful material to a minor in 2023. It would also have removed the criminal penalties put in place to make employees, trustees, and directors of schools, museums, and libraries legally responsible for minors accessing materials "claimed" to be obscene if done in the regular scope of employment. It also would have required a public library to have a written policy that prohibits books bans because of "partisan or doctrinal disapproval" in order to be eligible for funding from state programs of aid. It would have deleted ACA §13-2-704(b), which allows libraries to disclose information about books checked out to people other than the patron.	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment
<u>Rep. Denise Garner</u> <u>HB1031</u>	This bill would have required public schools to offer health education for grades 7-12 covering mental health, substance abuse, diet and obesity, tobacco prevention, and teenage pregnancy prevention. The curriculum would have been required to be evidence-based, with an opt-out mechanism for parents regarding pregnancy prevention content.	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment
<u>Rep. Jim Wooten</u> <u>HB1144</u>	This bill would have required a private school that accepts a LEARNS Act voucher to be responsible for the same reporting requirements as public schools and public charter schools in Arkansas. This would have added an accountability measure to private schools receiving public funds.	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Missed Opportunities CONTINUED

Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Rep. Brandon Achor and Sen. Jane English</u> <u>HB1435</u>	<p>This bill would have provided income tax credits to businesses that financially support the child care needs of their employees. To be eligible for the credit, the business could have paid for: reserved slots or tuition and fees at a child care facility, construction or renovation costs for a child care facility to provide services for the business's employees, or contributions toward an employee's dependent care savings account. A portion of the overall maximum credit allowed would have been reserved for small businesses and businesses in rural communities. This bill would have also created an income tax credit for licensed child care providers, with a specific allotment for providers located in rural areas.</p>	<p>Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment</p>
<u>Rep. Denise Garner</u> <u>HB1761</u>	<p>This bill would have changed eligibility for the school voucher program created under the 2023 LEARNS Act. The vouchers would be available, beginning in the next school year, for anyone who already received one in the prior two years and for students whose families have a gross income not exceeding 250% of the federal poverty level. A reduced voucher amount would be available for students whose families' gross income is between 250%-350% of the federal poverty level and for students whose families' gross income is between 350%-400% of the federal poverty level.</p>	<p>Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment</p>

Narrow Misses

Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Rep. Mary Bentley and Sen. Clint Penzo</u> <u>HB1180</u>	<p>This bill would have required public schools and open-enrollment public charter schools to teach, beginning in 6th grade, human growth and development as it relates to pregnancy and fetal development inside the womb, to include a three-minute-minimum, high-definition ultrasound video and the "Meet Baby Olivia" animated video, developed by Live Action, or similar video.</p>	<p>Died in Senate Committee at Sine Die adjournment</p>
<u>Sen. Bart Hester and Rep. R. Scott Richardson</u> <u>SB451</u>	<p>This bill would have required the Department of Human Services, in consultation with the Department of Education, to establish regional behavioral health programs to assist public schools and charter schools with a student who demonstrates a behavior that is substantially likely to cause injury to the student, other students, or staff. Instead of growing community-based behavioral health services to keep kids in their schools, when possible, this new program would likely have resulted in more kids going to placements like residential treatment facilities, where there is a lack of accountability for educational progress and positive treatment outcomes.</p>	<p>Died in Senate at Sine Die adjournment</p>

Equity

Understanding equity requires recognition that each person has different circumstances and needs that will require varying resources to ensure that each individual can thrive. This is a fundamental piece of what legislators should look at when deciding what new laws are needed.

This session, legislators passed pieces of legislation that targeted historically excluded groups of people, including Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC); transgender children and adults; and women. Seriously harmful legislation targeting the transgender community passed, including Act 955, which essentially removes transgender individuals' access to public restrooms and other locations.

An anti-affirmative action law, Act 116, eliminates Arkansas's affirmative action statute and several

provisions related to equity in K-12 education settings. It also severely limits the scope of programs designed to promote opportunities for historically excluded people, like a scholarship program originally aimed at drawing BIPOC teachers to work in high-need areas such as the Delta.

Equity wins included Act 16, a law intended to improve police interactions during traffic incidents with individuals with autism. And we were relieved when HB1668, a bill intended to ensure that transgender children had no support network at all, was withdrawn based on its unconstitutionality.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

EQUITY

Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Sen. Dan Sullivan</u> and <u>Rep. Mary Bentley</u> <u>SB3</u>	<u>Act 116</u> prohibits state agencies from providing programs targeted toward historically excluded groups, including on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin. It specifically excludes veteran status in matters of state employment, public education, or state procurement. This will result in the elimination of scholarships specifically targeted to Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans who commit to teaching in the Delta; as well as university retention programs for Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American students, faculty, and staff. This new law also allows a person to bring a civil action if the person believes his or her rights have been impacted as it relates to discrimination or providing preferential treatment on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin in matters of state employment, public education, or state procurement.	Opposed

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Bills That Became Law CONTINUED		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Sen. Blake Johnson</u> and <u>Rep. Mary Bentley</u> <u>SB486</u>	<u>Act 955</u> prohibits transgender individuals from using restrooms, changing rooms, sleeping quarters, and other accommodations corresponding to their gender identification. It requires shelters, state and local correctional facilities, and all public buildings to ensure that they do not allow transgender individuals to use facilities that correspond to their gender identity and take steps to prevent transgender individuals from doing so. An individual can file a civil case against the state agency if they encounter a person of the “opposite sex” in any of the above areas and may recover damages, declaratory and injunctive relief, and reasonable attorney’s fees and costs within two years of the incident.	Opposed
<u>Rep. Aaron Pilkington</u> and <u>Sen. Breanne Davis</u> <u>HB1046</u>	<u>Act 16</u> requires the Department of Finance and Administration to create a specially designed blue envelope that will become available to those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by January 2026. It will provide law enforcement with specific information about how to adapt their response when interacting with an individual with ASD during a motor-vehicle-related interaction.	Supported
<u>Rep. Robin Lundstrum</u> and <u>Sen. Gary Stubblefield</u> <u>HB1615</u>	<u>Act 677</u> prohibits higher education institutions from requiring that a student participate in a program that would violate their “sincerely held” religious beliefs about marriage and “biological sex.” It also prevents the state from taking discriminatory action against any religious organization or person that refuses services to LGBTQ+ couples attempting to get married or hires, fires, or disciplines a person whose conduct or religious beliefs are inconsistent with those of the religious organization. In addition, government employees cannot be sanctioned for speaking out against LGBTQ+ individuals, and county clerks may refuse to issue marriage licenses. This new law also prohibits individuals from suing for discrimination against any person or entity providing services in compliance with this law.	Opposed
<u>Rep. Mary Bentley</u> and <u>Sen. Alan Clark</u> <u>HB1916</u>	<u>Act 979</u> adds “gender-affirming intervention” to support a patient’s gender identity to the Protecting Minors from Medical Malpractice Act of 2023 as a form of malpractice. It allows a mental health professional who provides a “gender-affirming intervention” to be sued up to 15 years after the date on which the minor turns 18. The definition of “gender-affirming intervention” is overly broad and could include actions such as respecting a trans child’s name and pronouns or providing therapy.	Opposed

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Narrow Misses		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Rep. Mary Bentley</u> and <u>Sen. Alan Clark</u> <u>HB1668</u>	This bill would have defined “castration, sterilization, and mutilation” of a minor to include using legally prescribed medications that temporarily stop puberty. It would also have defined the term “social transitioning” to mean any act by which a minor adopts or espouses a gender identity that differs from the minor’s biological sex, such as changes to clothing, pronouns, hairstyle, and name. The bill would have allowed the minor or their parent to sue for damages related to “social transitioning” or “castration, sterilization, and mutilation” for 20 years after the alleged harm. A person could have recovered statutory damages of at least \$10,000 per defendant and punitive damages of \$10 million for certain medical interventions.	Withdrawn by author

Family Economic Security

The legislature continued its recent trend of undermining family economic security. During the session, legislators failed to enact policies that would help children and families thrive, such as a homestead tax credit for families who rent their homes. For working parents, lawmakers missed opportunities to incentivize access to child care and

paid family and medical leave. At the same time, a new law makes it harder for families to access Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) when they need support the most.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY

Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Sen. Jonathan Dismang</u> <u>and Rep. Les D. Eaves</u> <u>SB307</u>	<u>Act 373</u> retools the ability of public utilities in Arkansas to finance strategic investments by allowing the utilities to recover costs during the period of construction instead of after, as the law previously mandated. The new law reduces the oversight of the Public Service Commission in the process and changes the energy rate increase rules without protections for lower-income residents.	Opposed
<u>Rep. Kendon Underwood</u> <u>and Sen. Joshua Bryant</u> <u>HB1751</u>	<u>Act 640</u> requires a job-ready applicant for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, known in the state as the Arkansas Work Pays Program, to be engaged in job search activities while their application is being processed.	Opposed

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Missed Opportunities		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Rep. Ashley Hudson</u> <u>HB1018</u>	<p>This bill aimed to provide an income tax credit for an employer who provides paid family and medical leave to a qualified employee who has been employed for at least 12 consecutive months. The tax credit would have been equal to 25% of the wages paid to a qualified employee during the period the employee is on family and medical leave. However, it would have been limited to a maximum of 12 weeks of leave and \$4,000 per qualified employee per year. The credit would not have been allowed to exceed the employer's tax liability, and any unused amounts could not have been carried forward to subsequent tax years.</p>	<p>Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment</p>
<u>Rep. Andrew Collins</u> <u>HB1024</u>	<p>This bill would have restored the rights of public employees and employers to bargain collectively.</p>	<p>Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment</p>
<u>Rep. Denise Garner</u> <u>HB1985</u>	<p>This bill would have created a homestead credit for renters. A taxpayer who rents his primary residence for the entire tax year, is not claimed as a dependent on another person's tax return, and makes less than \$40,000, would have been allowed a \$500 nonrefundable tax credit.</p>	<p>Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment</p>

Food Security

This session brought both good and bad news for food-insecure Arkansans. HB1915, which would have raised the asset limit for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility in Arkansas – thereby increasing access to SNAP for more families – failed to advance. As a result, Arkansas remains one of the states with the most restrictive asset limits in the nation. In addition, Act 969 requires DHS to make an annual request to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to exclude candy and soda from SNAP-eligible purchases until that request is granted in Arkansas. This legislation is intended to essentially serve as a back-up plan in case the waiver that the governor recently submitted to make certain foods SNAP ineligible is not approved.

On the other hand, we saw success for Arkansas's kids with Act 123, which provides every child enrolled in public school with free breakfast. This is an expansion of Act 656 of 2023, which provided free meals to students who qualified for reduced-price meals. Although school lunch is not a part of Act 123, we look forward to the 2027 session, when hopefully all school meals can be free for children. This will go a long way towards reducing food insecurity for the 1 in 4 Arkansas children who do not have enough to eat daily.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

FOOD SECURITY

Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
Sen. Jonathan Dismang and Rep. Zack Gramlich SB59	Act 123 requires public schools to provide a free breakfast to any student who requests it, even if the student does not qualify for free meals under any federal, state, or local program.	Supported
Sen. Clint Penzo and Rep. Mary Bentley SB217	Act 969 requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to request a waiver that will allow Arkansas to exclude from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) any payments for candy and soft drinks.	Opposed
Missed Opportunities		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
Rep. Jon S. Eubanks and Sen. Jonathan Dismang HB1915	This bill would have made it easier for low-income families to become eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). It would have required the Department of Human Services (DHS) to apply for a waiver to increase the state's asset limit to \$6,000 and index it to inflation.	Died in Senate Committee at Sine Die adjournment

Health

AACF entered the 2025 legislative session with a strong focus on improving maternal and child health in Arkansas. Through the Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies Act, Arkansas passed a landmark set of reforms years in the making. The law includes presumptive eligibility for pregnant women, allowing faster access to Medicaid coverage; increases reimbursement rates for OB-GYNs; unbundles global maternity payments to support more comprehensive prenatal care; and expands remote blood pressure monitoring for rural mothers, helping to address some of the leading causes of maternal death in our state.

Other key advances included establishing Medicaid coverage mechanisms for community-based doulas (Act 965) and breastfeeding support services (Act 627), both important tools for improving maternal and infant outcomes. Lawmakers also passed Act 556, which requires insurers to cover services provided by mobile health units the same way

they cover care in traditional settings, a critical step toward improving access in hard-to-reach communities.

While these successes mark important progress, there were still missed opportunities. HB1004, which would have extended postpartum Medicaid coverage to 12 months, overwhelmingly passed the House but ultimately failed in a Senate committee. Extending postpartum coverage is vital to addressing Arkansas’s high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, and AACF remains committed to making this a reality in future sessions.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

HEALTH

Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas’s children and families	AACF’s position
<u>Rep. Lee Johnson</u> and <u>Sen. Missy Irvin</u> <u>HB1252</u>	<u>Act 965</u> creates a certification process for community-based doulas in Arkansas and describes their scope of practice. It outlines requirements for certification, including training, privacy, and application procedures. It requires that the Department of Health maintain a public registry of certified community-based doulas. It authorizes certified community-based doulas to be reimbursed for certain services under Medicaid.	Supported

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Bills That Became Law CONTINUED		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Rep. Lee Johnson</u> and <u>Sen. Missy Irvin</u> <u>HB1258</u>	<u>Act 435</u> establishes the definition of a community health worker for certification purposes and authorizes services to be covered under the Medicaid program.	Supported
<u>Rep. Frances Cavanaugh</u> and <u>Sen. Blake Johnson</u> <u>HB1275</u>	<u>Act 389</u> prohibits health care insurers from requiring prior authorization for treatment of a mental health crisis.	Supported
<u>Rep. Lee Johnson</u> and <u>Sen. Missy Irvin</u> <u>HB1296</u>	<u>Act 556</u> requires that health insurers cover services provided in mobile units in the same way they cover services provided in other health care settings. It also ensures that any cost-sharing requirements for mobile unit services are no less favorable than those for similar services provided elsewhere.	Supported
<u>Rep. Lee Johnson</u> and <u>Sen. Missy Irvin</u> <u>HB1300</u>	<u>Act 510</u> amends the Prior Authorization Transparency Act by expanding disclosure requirements for health care services that need prior authorization. It exempts certain health care services from prior authorization, establishes a process for reviewing approvals when guidelines are not followed, and creates a trust fund for educating stakeholders and improving compliance.	Supported
<u>Rep. Ashley Hudson</u> and <u>Sen. Jamie Scott</u> <u>HB1333</u>	<u>Act 627</u> requires health insurers to cover breastfeeding and lactation consultant services, beginning January 1, 2026.	Supported
<u>Rep. Aaron Pilkington</u> and <u>Sen. Missy Irvin</u> <u>HB1427</u> and <u>SB213</u>	<u>Act 124</u> and <u>Act 140</u> , together are known as the Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies Act, which changes multiple policies relating to pregnancy and postpartum care. It fast-tracks Medicaid coverage for pregnant women (presumptive eligibility), unbundles Medicaid coverage for pregnant women, and authorizes Medicaid reimbursement for prenatal and postpartum home visitation care by doulas and community health workers. It also provides coverage for blood pressure monitors and remote ultrasounds.	Supported

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Missed Opportunities		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Rep. Aaron Pilkington</u> and <u>Sen. Breanne Davis</u> <u>HB1004</u>	This bill would have required DHS to submit a state plan amendment or waiver request to obtain federal approval to extend pregnancy Medicaid coverage to a full year postpartum for certain low-income women who do not already qualify for other Medicaid categories. This approach would have used existing Children's Health Insurance Program funding, which would have required no new state general revenue dollars.	Died in Senate Committee at Sine Die adjournment
<u>Rep. Andrew Collins</u> <u>HB1009</u>	The bill would have allowed pregnant individuals to sign up for health insurance through the state employee and public school insurance plans outside the regular enrollment periods by establishing pregnancy as a qualifying event.	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment

Immigrant Families

National rhetoric that scapegoats immigrants was evident in the Arkansas Legislature this session, with several bills filed to limit services to immigrant families and prosecute people who help them. For the most part, legislation targeting the immigrant community failed, but we saw more of this type of legislation than we have in recent years.

For example, we saw legislation to limit public services only to citizens and would have allowed prosecution of any non-citizen for theft of benefits. That would have targeted the few immigrants and migrants who receive such services, including

lawfully residing immigrant and migrant children enrolled in ARKids First health insurance. Thankfully, this failed. This type of legislation, which often clearly violates federal law, adds to the misperception of immigrant families who, as study after study shows, are contributing meaningfully to our state, our labor force and our overall economy.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Sen. Bart Hester and Rep. Frances Cavanaugh</u> <u>SB426</u>	<u>Act 654</u> creates enhanced penalties for certain “serious felony involving violence” convictions if the person committed those crimes while they were present in the United States without authorization. The enhanced penalty will run consecutive to (after) the penalty imposed by the court for the crime, and the individual is not eligible for early release on parole, transfer to post-release supervision, or community correction transfer. This new law also requires the Department of Corrections and county jails to apply for and participate in the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Warrant Officer Program, which allows them to serve administrative warrants (signed by an immigration officer, not a judge). Further, the law allows the state to withhold funds from any locality that the Attorney General finds as having policies in violation of this law.	Opposed
<u>Rep. Rebecca Burkes and Sen. Joshua Bryant</u> <u>HB1789</u>	<u>Act 605</u> restricts local government from funding any municipal identification card programs either directly through a municipal program or through providing funds to an agency or person to run such a program if the program does not require the applicant for the municipal identification to provide proof of lawful presence in the United States.	Opposed

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Narrow Misses		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Rep. Wayne Long and Sen. Mark Johnson</u> <u>HB1422</u>	<p>This bill would have required the Secretary of the Department of Finance and Administration to prepare a monthly report with the names and identifying information of anyone with a driver's license in addition to a valid nonimmigrant visa or entry into the United States and deliver it to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State would then be made to verify if any person were listed in the voter rolls of the state, and that person would be removed from the voter rolls. This bill would also have required DFA to modify the driver's license of a person with nonimmigrant status to be printed vertically and to clearly state on its face "Limited Term." This bill would also have restricted the forms of ID that Arkansans could use to vote.</p>	<p>Died on House Calendar at Sine Die adjournment</p>
<u>Rep. Wayne Long</u> <u>HB1655</u>	<p>This bill would have created a new state-level felony of "harboring illegal immigrants," an offense that the legislation describes as concealing, harboring or shielding from protection someone who is undocumented. It also would have created the state-level felony of "human smuggling," which would have included transporting an undocumented immigrant into Arkansas.</p>	<p>Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment</p>
<u>Rep. Wayne Long</u> <u>HB1908</u>	<p>This bill would have invalidated existing regulations for receipt of public benefits like SNAP, Medicaid, and TANF by requiring individuals receiving benefits to prove their residency in the state by providing certain documents. However, programs already require proof of residency and have a list of allowed documents in their regulations. This list of documents was especially problematic as it would not have taken into account mothers who do not work and may have everything in their partner's name.</p>	<p>Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment</p>
<u>Rep. Wayne Long</u> <u>HB1909</u>	<p>This bill would have required that anyone who receives public benefits, including SNAP, WIC, TANF, and Medicaid be a U.S. citizen. Each applicant 18 and older would be required to sign a written affidavit attesting that they are a U.S. citizen. Anyone who is not a U.S. citizen who received benefits could have been prosecuted for theft of benefits and subject to jail time and monetary penalties. This bill would have been contrary to federal law, which defines who is eligible for federal benefits and would have excluded the Marshallese, victims of human trafficking, victims of domestic violence, and other qualified migrants.</p>	<p>Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment</p>

Juvenile Justice

Unfortunately, the third time was not the charm in the attempt to eliminate fines and fees assessed to young people and their families involved in the juvenile court system. Even though the juvenile justice system is required by state law to be rehabilitative for young people who encounter the system, all too often the costs of juvenile justice programs and services fall on the backs of already struggling families. Legislation proposed this session would have removed those fines and fees but still required juveniles to pay restitution to victims. Even with a companion bill (SB341) that would have appropriated some funding to help courts mitigate the initial loss of fines and fees, there were too many concerns regarding the loss of fines and fees revenue (given the already limited funding juvenile courts have for community-based services) for the bill to advance.

However, there were some bright spots. Act 988 will ensure courts take a more trauma-informed approach during a transfer or sentencing hearing for minors who have committed crimes.

In addition, House Concurrent Resolution 1010 establishes an interim committee to study ways to improve the juvenile justice system, specifically for those youth committed to the Division of Youth Services. AACF is one of the stakeholders required to be involved in the study. We look forward to collaborating with partners from across the state, as well as families and youth directly impacted by the system, to identify best practices that will reduce unnecessary reliance on juvenile correctional facilities and promote the development of community-based treatment alternatives.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Sen. Greg Leding</u> and <u>Rep. Nicole Clowney</u> <u>SB458</u>	<u>Act 988</u> requires the court, when sentencing a juvenile or person convicted for an offense committed as a juvenile, to consider any adverse childhood experiences or other trauma the individual had prior to the age of 18 and the impact of the trauma on their behavior.	Supported
<u>Sen. Missy Irvin</u> and <u>Rep. Nicole Clowney</u> <u>SB490</u>	<u>Act 972</u> allows courts to waive the \$250 registration fee for juveniles who are ordered to register as a sex offender.	Supported

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Bills That Became Law CONTINUED		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Rep. Tara Shephard and Sen. Jamie Scott</u> <u>HCR1010</u>	This House concurrent resolution requests the legislature to study ways, with input from independent expert consultants, to improve the state's juvenile justice system. The study would include conducting needs and risks assessments of juveniles incarcerated in Division of Youth Services facilities; identifying best practices to reduce unnecessary reliance on juvenile correctional facilities; promoting the development of community-based treatment alternatives; and developing a juvenile justice reform plan by no later than 12 months from the adoption of the resolution.	Supported
Missed Opportunities		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Sen. Alan Clark</u> <u>SB340</u>	This bill would have eliminated fees and fines in the juvenile court system, while still requiring young people to make restitution to victims in delinquency cases.	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment
<u>Sen. Alan Clark</u> <u>SB341</u>	This bill would have established an appropriation to the Administrative Office of the Courts to help backfill funds that may have been lost as a result of eliminating fines and fees.	Died in Senate Committee at Sine Die adjournment

Preemption

Local control is a cornerstone of American democracy, allowing communities to make decisions that best reflect their unique needs and values. This principle empowers citizens to have a direct impact on the policies that affect their daily lives, from zoning regulations to public safety measures. However, there has been a growing trend of state legislatures introducing preemption bills that threaten to erode the function and purpose of local government.

Arkansas's preemption efforts during this year's legislative session show a clear pattern of the state legislature stepping in to limit local government authority. Although Arkansas's approach feels more cautious and incremental compared to some other states, a shifting of power away from local control to the state continues to be the trajectory we are on.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

PREEMPTION

Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
<u>Sen. Clint Penzo</u> and <u>Rep. David Ray</u> <u>SB91</u>	<u>Act 459</u> preempts local regulation of rental application fees or deposits.	Opposed
<u>Sen. Dan Sullivan</u> and <u>Rep. Alyssa Brown</u> <u>SB520</u>	<u>Act 747</u> prohibits offices, officers, and policies related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (commonly referred to as DEI) in local government.	Opposed
<u>Rep. Austin McCollum</u> and <u>Sen. Bart Hester</u> <u>HB1706</u>	<u>Act 829</u> prohibits ranked-choice voting.	Opposed
Narrow Misses		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Rep. Brit McKenzie</u> and <u>Sen. Joshua Bryant</u> <u>HB1445</u>	This bill aimed to prevent local governments from regulating short-term rentals.	Recommended for interim study by the House Committee on City, County & Local Affairs

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Narrow Misses CONTINUED		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Rep. Brit McKenzie</u> and <u>Sen. Joshua Bryant</u> <u>HB1790</u>	As a compromise to HB1445, this bill would have amended the law on local regulation of short-term rentals.	Died on House Calendar at Sine Die adjournment
<u>Rep. Rebecca Burkes</u> and <u>Sen. Jim Dotson</u> <u>HB1936</u>	This bill would have potentially eliminated many nonpartisan elections by making all elections partisan by default, requiring localities to pass a resolution to every two years to maintain nonpartisan elections.	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment
<u>Rep. Brit McKenzie</u> <u>HB1973</u>	This bill would have prohibited the use of state/local funds for contracts with lobbyists for lobbying; it would have allowed for the direct employment of lobbyists.	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment

Tax and Budget

The final enacted budget for the 2025-2026 fiscal year remained unchanged from the one the governor proposed in fall budget hearings. The \$6.49 billion budget is 2.89% higher than the current year's budget, with nearly half of the increase attributed to Education Freedom Accounts (public vouchers for private and home schooling). While the state, through income tax cuts enacted over the past 10 years, has given away more than \$2 billion a year, and the governor continues to propose eliminating the income tax

altogether, no further income tax cuts were enacted during the session. The legislature removed the final modest grocery tax, but with diminishing revenue, there was very little action on other tax credits for Arkansas families. The legislature missed opportunities to help children and families thrive, such as enacting a state-level Child Tax Credit or Earned Income Tax Credit.

The following are a few of the relevant bills AACF tracked this session.

TAX AND BUDGET

Bills That Became Law		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it means for Arkansas's children and families	AACF's position
Rep. Kendon Underwood and Sen. Bart Hester HB1685	Act 1008 exempts food and food ingredients from state sales tax (currently 1/8th of a cent on the dollar or 0.125%) beginning January 1, 2026.	Supported
Missed Opportunities		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
Rep. Denise Garner HB1015	This bill would have provided taxpayers with a refundable child tax credit for each child under 18. The amount of credit would have been \$300 per qualifying child for an individual taxpayer having net income up to \$100,000 or taxpayers filing a joint income tax return having a net income up to \$200,000. The amount of credit would have been indexed to the cost of living through the Consumer Price Index.	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment

CATEGORY CONTINUES

Narrow Misses		
Primary sponsors and bill numbers	What it would have meant for Arkansas's children and families	What happened
<u>Rep. Howard M. Beaty, Jr. and Sen. Ben Gilmore</u> <u>HB1500</u>	During the 2023 regular session, the legislature passed a law to eliminate the “throwback rule” by 2030. This bill would have repealed the rule effective immediately (for the 2025 tax year). The throwback rule prevents corporations from paying their fair share by claiming large amounts of out-of-state sales. As these sales go completely untaxed, state revenue from corporate tax is reduced.	Died in House Committee at Sine Die adjournment
<u>Rep. David Ray and Sen. Jim Petty</u> <u>HB1636</u>	This bill aimed to phase out the soft drink tax over time (at a rate determined by the amount of tax collected on soft drinks the previous year). The soft drink tax currently produces about \$45 million a year in special revenue for the Arkansas Medicaid Program Trust Fund.	Recommended for interim study by the House Committee on Revenue and Taxation

How a Bill Becomes Law in Arkansas

(with your help)

1 Recruit Bill Sponsor

Take your idea to your legislator or a legislator you think may be passionate about your issue. You can go to the state legislature's website (www.arkleg.state.ar.us) to see who has sponsored similar bills in the past.

2 Stay in Touch

If the legislator is willing to file a bill, keep in touch and ask how you can help.

3 The Bill is Filed

In the weeks before the legislative session begins, or during the session, the legislator officially files the bill, and the bill is assigned a number.

4 The Bill is Considered by the First of Two Committees

The bill is considered and voted on in the relevant committee and on the bill sponsor's side of the chamber. Ask your bill sponsor when your bill will be discussed by the committee and how you can help.

5 The Bill is Considered by the First of Two Chambers

If the bill passes out of committee, it will move to the full chamber of the House or Senate for a vote. Ask the bill sponsor how you can help.

6 The Bill is Considered by the Second of Two Committees

The bill will then move to a committee in the opposite chamber to be considered and voted on. Check with the bill sponsor about which committee it will be heard in and ask the bill sponsor how you can help.

7 The Bill is Considered by the Second of Two Chambers

If the bill passes out of the second committee, it will go to the final chamber. Ask the bill sponsor how you can help.

8 The Bill Becomes Law

If the bill passes both committees and chambers, it will go to the governor's desk to be signed. Confirm with the bill sponsor when the bill will be signed by the governor and ask if you can invite your fellow advocates and the press to celebrate!

9 You Thank Legislators

Make sure to personally and publicly thank the legislator(s) who sponsored the bill and ask others in your network to thank the bill sponsor(s), too.

For more information on how to effectively advocate for laws to help the kids and families of Arkansas, visit aradvocates.org/publications/advocating-for-change

Fast Facts – 2025 Legislative Session

1,928
bills filed



\$6.49 billion
general revenue
budget
2024-2025



1,043
bills
passed

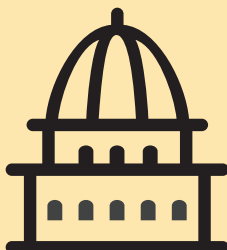


For more, visit aradvocates.org/2025Session

34 bills from AACF proactive agenda
introduced

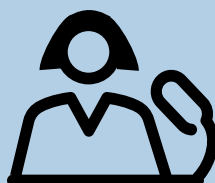


110 attendees
at our Kids Count
Day at the Capitol



7 AACF staff testified

23 times
before
legislative
committees





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