

2020

Arkansas Voters' Guide

*Putting children at the center
of policy discussions and election season*



December 2019



Voters' Guide

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Resources for Arkansas's Statewide Elections in 2020

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What's on the Ballot

- President of the United States
- U.S. Senate
- U.S. House
- Arkansas Senate
- Arkansas House
- Arkansas Supreme Court
- Arkansas Court of Appeals Justices (nonpartisan)
- Ballot measures

Dates to Remember

February 3: Deadline to apply to register to vote in March 3 election

February 17 – March 2: Early Voting for Preferential Primaries and Nonpartisan General Election

March 3: Preferential Primary Election and Nonpartisan General Election

March 31: Preferential Primary Runoff Election

October 5: Deadline to apply to register to vote in November 3 election

October 19 – November 2: Early Voting for General Election and Nonpartisan Runoff Election

November 3: General Election and Nonpartisan Runoff Election

December 1: General Runoff Election

Early voting takes place between the hours of 8 A.M. and 6 P.M., Monday-Friday and 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. on Saturday. Early voting ends at 5 P.M. on the Monday prior to the election.

On Election Day, all polls are open from 7:30 A.M. to 7:30 P.M. If you are in line at your designated polling place before 7:30 P.M., you must be allowed to vote.



Where to Learn More

SOS.Arkansas.gov Register to vote, search for candidates, and learn about absentee voting.

VoterView.org Check to make sure you are registered, find where your polling place is located, and check the status of your absentee ballot.

UAEX.edu Learn about the proposed state laws and constitutional amendments that will be on the ballot.

Your Rights as a Voter

The organizations below can assist you if you cannot access your polling place, are turned away from voting, or have other issues when exercising your right to vote.

American Civil Liberties Union Voter Protection Hotline: 877-523-2792

Disability Rights Arkansas: 800-482-1174

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense Fund Election Protection: 866-687-8683

Para Español: Si se encuentra con dificultades al votar y necesita ayuda en Español, por favor contacte a Arkansas Unidos: 479-763-2822

4 **Vote for the Change You Wish to See**

The November 2020 elections are crucial to the current and future well-being of Arkansas's children and families. Arkansas voters will elect candidates to the Arkansas General Assembly, the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. Presidency. These policymakers will have the power to pass and influence public policies that will shape the resources and opportunities available to help future generations of Arkansas's children and families thrive and succeed, especially our most vulnerable children and families.

Children should be a top priority for Arkansas voters and candidates this election season. According to the 2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, released annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Arkansas ranks just 40th in overall child well-being. While some of our state and national leaders tout a "growing" economy, the latest Census data shows an increase in child poverty rates between 2017 and 2018. Nearly one in four of all Arkansas's children and more than a third of our children of color continue to live in poverty, which research indicates can hurt a child's ability to reach their full potential.

The candidates we elect in November will be in a position to make critical decisions on a range of issues important to the well-being of children and families, including health care; juvenile justice; early childhood and K-12 education; and family economic security issues such as taxes, paid family leave, housing, and the minimum wage. They will also decide state and federal tax and budget policies that determine the amount of public funding available for the investments needed to help our children, our future workforce, and our state have the greatest opportunity for success.

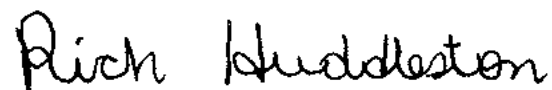
The 2020 elections are more important than ever given the extreme partisanship and lack of consensus that plagues our political and policymaking processes. Policymaking, especially at the federal level, is increasingly driven not by what research says is most effective at improving the well-being of children and families, but by self-interested politics and what will benefit the rich and powerful.

Organizations like AACF advocate for research- and data-driven policies to remove barriers, helping our children and families, especially children of color and those in low-income families, thrive. We want to be a state where every child can grow up into a healthy, successful adult. But without a statewide consensus and a clear vision on how to achieve that goal, we will continue to struggle to make that a reality. Electing lawmakers with the best interest of children at heart is key to our state's future.

Arkansas's children need champions to represent them at both the state capital in Little Rock and at our nation's capital in Washington, D.C. Children can't vote, they don't run for political office, they don't make political campaign contributions, and they don't host political fundraisers for candidates or political parties. Yet they are the ones most impacted by the candidates who get elected and the decisions they make while in office. It's up to us to ensure that their voices are heard, that voters and candidates consider the issues most important to the well-being of our children and families, and to help ensure that policymakers are held accountable for the decisions they make that impact kids after they are elected.

We offer the "2020 Voter and Candidates Guide" in this spirit. We hope voters and candidates across the political spectrum will read this guide and become informed on the issues, and then make their decisions based on what is best for our children and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rich Huddleston". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rich Huddleston, AACF Executive Director

Racial Equity and Inclusion

Racial identity should have no influence on how well a child fares in society. But it's no secret that both historic and structural racism in our laws and policies have had a negative impact on the lives of children and families of color statewide, like zoning laws that have led to the divestment and disenfranchisement of communities of color and inequitable criminal justice laws. However, in recent years, Arkansas has taken steps to dismantle oppressive policies in favor of policies, such as legislation to reform the Arkansas juvenile justice system and the minimum wage increase, that improve the outcomes of our children and families.

Although we have made progress, there remain major gaps along racial and ethnic lines. For example, in Arkansas, 45 percent of our Black children and 33 percent of our Hispanic children live in poverty, compared to 17 percent of our White children. These figures are alarming, as children living in poverty are far more likely to lack stable housing, experience significant educational gaps and suffer worse health outcomes. Children who grow up in poverty are also more likely to have trouble transitioning into stable, productive adults.

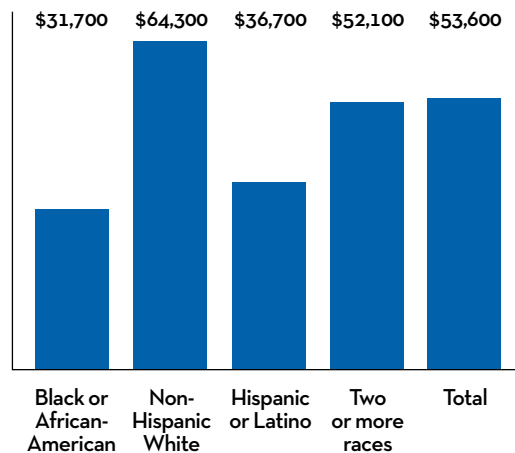
Policy options that can help children and families achieve more equitable outcomes include investment in early childhood education (pre-K) and afterschool programs, Earned Income Tax Credits, preventive health care and hunger relief programs.

What to Ask Candidates

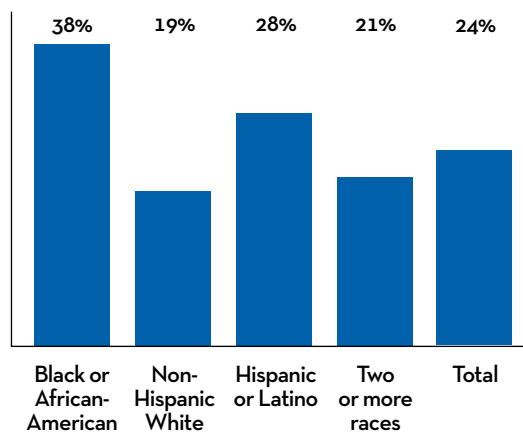
- What is your definition of racial equity?
- To what extent has pursuing racial equity and inclusion been a priority in your work, and how do you approach it?
- How should Arkansas address the significant disparities in poverty rates of Black and Brown children compared to their White counterparts?
- What do you think are the root causes of these and other disparities along racial and ethnic lines?

In Arkansas, Children of Color Struggle Against Racial Inequity

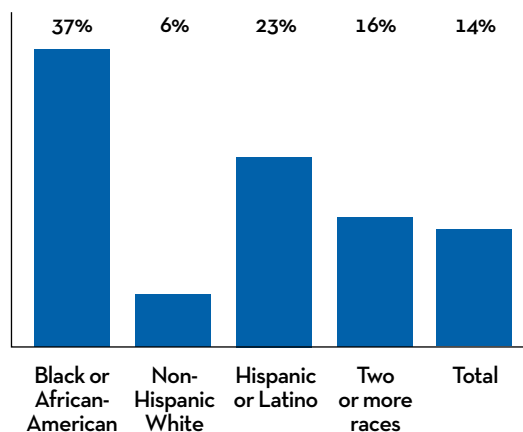
*Median Family Income
Among Arkansas Households with Children*



Arkansas Children Living in Households with a High Housing Cost Burden



Arkansas Children Living in High Poverty Areas



Source: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#AR/2/0/char/0>

6 Family Economic Security

Protecting Programs Kids Need: Because many Arkansas jobs pay wages that are too low to meet the needs of families, many full-time working families in the state live in poverty. About a quarter of the kids in Arkansas grow up in poverty and rely on social safety net programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly “Food Stamps”) to meet basic needs. Protecting these types of programs means protecting the futures and aspirations of all kids in Arkansas.

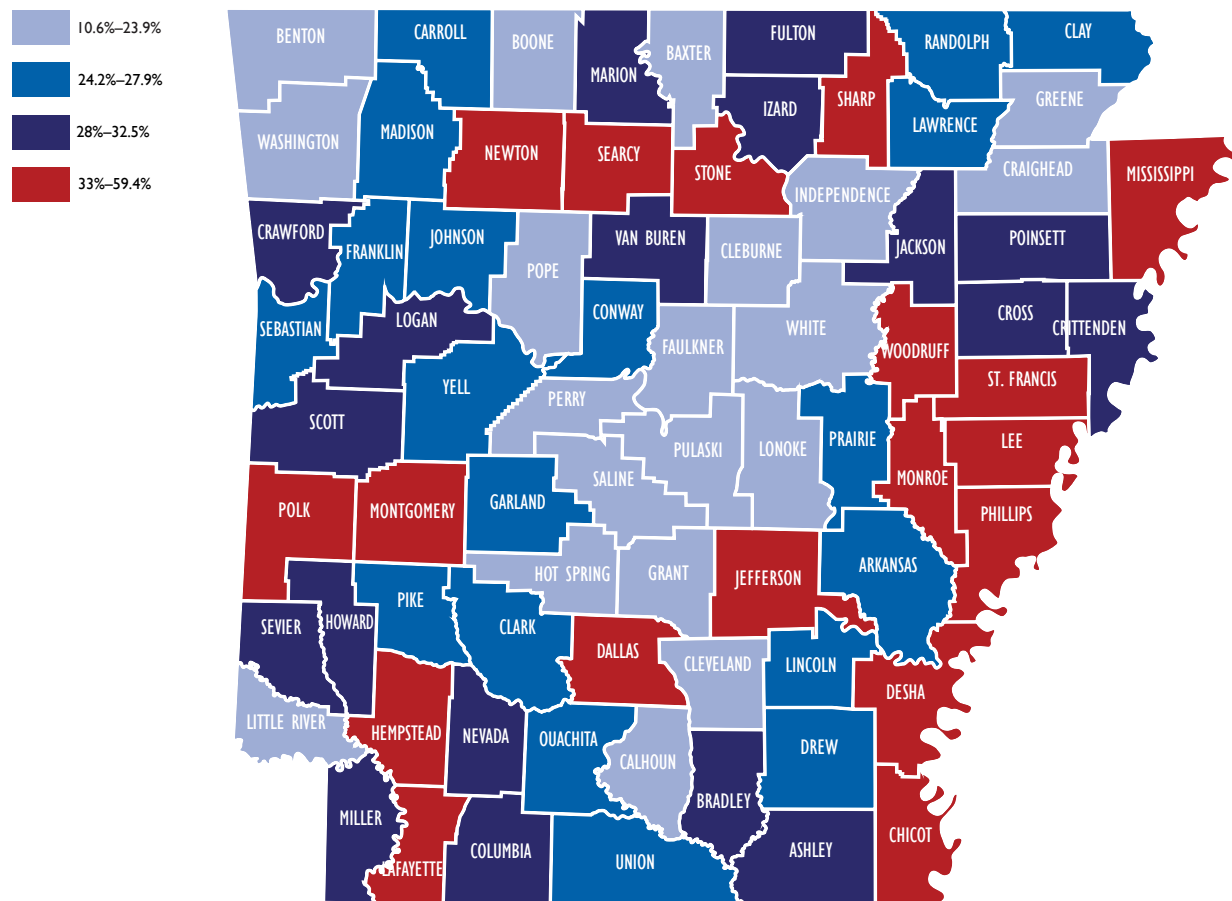
Helping Working Families Keep More of What They Earn: We can do more than just protect programs that help our kids succeed. We can demand more on their behalf. A state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) would allow low-income working families to keep more of what they earn and move up the income ladder. An EITC is proven to have long-term benefits for children’s health, educational outcomes, and even future career options and job

security. The EITC is a straightforward way to help low-income families that also helps address the regressive nature of our state tax system. When all taxes are considered, including income, property and sales taxes, the top 1 percent pay less as a share of their income than those with lower incomes.

What to Ask Candidates

- What do you see as the biggest financial barriers preventing low-wage workers in Arkansas from getting ahead?
- What kinds of policies would you like to see help families who work full time but still can’t make ends meet?
- How will you protect social safety net programs that help low-income families in Arkansas meet their kids’ basic needs?

Arkansas Child Poverty Rates, by County, 2017



Early Childhood (0-5)

Early Childhood Education: Positive, encouraging adult-child interactions are important to high-quality early learning, in both home and classroom environments. Children who receive high-quality early childhood education (ECE) are better prepared to succeed in K-12, are more likely to go on to college, and see improved outcomes as adults. But the ECE workforce is facing major challenges, including high turnover, food and economic insecurity, and high levels of depression. There is also a lack of financial incentives that promote professional development and a better-trained workforce. These challenges stem from underfunding of the ECE system and low wages paid to ECE staff. Support for the ECE workforce is necessary to build skills for children's positive social and emotional development.

Health and Education Linked: Ensuring that children receive developmental screenings, referrals, and support services that lead to assessments and treatment improves outcomes for learning and healthy brain development. Infants and toddlers should have access to mental health screenings so that parents and caregivers can address issues early on by nurturing social-emotional learning. The Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) provides comprehensive and preventative health services for children under 21 enrolled in Medicaid. For ages birth to 9 months, Arkansas Medicaid requirements cover only five of seven EPSDT visits recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics Bright Futures program.

What to Ask Candidates

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- What are your thoughts on increasing funding to support high-quality infant and toddler programs?
- What are your thoughts on a refundable tax credit for early childhood educators based on their level of education or credentials?
- What can be done to increase the number of well child visits in Arkansas's Medicaid Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment schedule to meet the American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendations for Preventative Pediatric Health Care?

More than Half of Arkansas's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Workforce has Less than a Bachelor's Degree, and Average Pay is Well Below Other State Averages

Education Level	Percentage
Less than a bachelor's degree without credentials	34.1%
Less than a bachelor's degree with credentials	28.6%
Any degree in unrelated field	6.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher in related field, regardless of credentials	30.7%

Average Pay Rate in Arkansas	Dollars
ECCE with Associate's degree without credentials	\$24,315
ECCE with Associate's degree with credentials	\$25,459
ECCE with Bachelor's degree in related field, regardless of credentials	\$32,240
All women in Arkansas	\$37,733
ECCE with Master's degree or higher in related field, regardless of credentials	\$40,206
Arkansas kindergarten teachers	\$45,850
All men in Arkansas	\$51,694

K-12 Education

Out-of-School Programs: Before-, after- and summer-school programs are vital to student success because they support academic and emotional development, keep kids safe, improve their long-term outcomes as adults, and provide parents with peace of mind and help them keep their jobs. Arkansas's existing programs reach a fraction of the children who need them.

Effective and Equitable School Discipline:

Children of color face discriminatory school discipline practices, including higher rates of expulsions and out-of-school suspensions for the same offenses as their white peers, that help feed the school-to-prison pipeline. Arkansas also still allows the use of corporal punishment for most students. Other practices, such as restorative justice, are more effective at keeping kids in school, improving behavior, and on track to graduate.

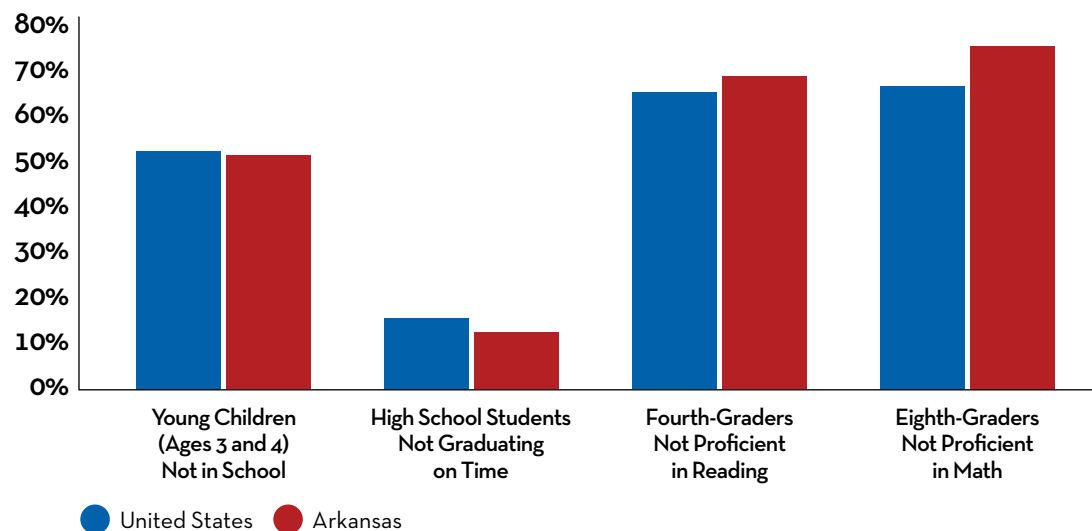
Community Schools Model: Community schools can promote school success by serving as the hub of local neighborhoods/communities. They are characterized by strong partnerships; high parental involvement; and supports for students, including health.

Strong K-12 Public Schools: Despite the 2002 Lake View Supreme Court decision on educational adequacy, major gaps remain in achievement and educational opportunities, as do disparities in quality and school facilities and teacher pay. Recent state investments in public education have been at levels below what many consider to be adequate, and more tax dollars are being shifted to schools that are not accountable to the public, including charter and private schools.

What to Ask Candidates

- What is your position on allowing public tax dollars to fund private schools?
- What would you do to improve access to out-of-school programs and community schools?
- Black students in Arkansas are far more likely to be suspended and punished more harshly for the same infractions than their non-Black peers. How would you address school discipline policies and practices to address this reality?
- What would you do to ensure equitable educational opportunities for low-income students, children of color, English language learners, and students with special needs?

Arkansas Ranks 32nd Overall for Child Well Being in Education



Health Care

Coverage for All Children: Health coverage is essential to a child's ability to be successful in life. For the past two years, and following the national trend, Arkansas has seen its uninsured rate for children increase. This increase comes after years of being a leader in children's health coverage after the implementation of the ARKids First program. ARKids First is funded by Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and provides health insurance coverage for more than 70,000 children across Arkansas. Maintaining ARKids First and insuring more of Arkansas's children can help provide all the state's families with the affordable coverage that they need for the care of their children.

Coverage for Adults: Thanks to Arkansas Works, the state's Medicaid expansion program, almost 250,000 adults in Arkansas have access to affordable health insurance coverage. This includes some non-elderly adults with disabilities. Like traditional Medicaid, Arkansas Works coverage allows families more financial flexibility and economic security, since many of these individuals would be unable to access needed care in their own communities without the program. Many doctors and hospitals in Arkansas

are helped by Medicaid expansion, as it lowers the number of uninsured patients who are seen but are unable to pay for the services that they receive.

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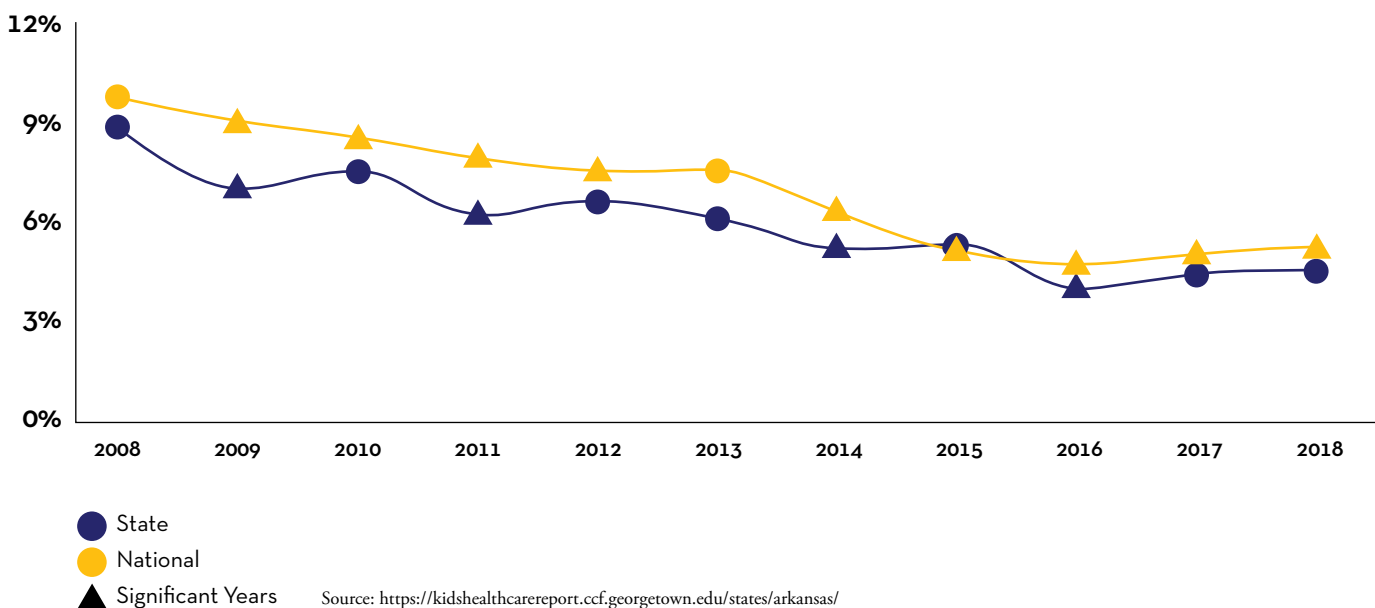
What to Ask Candidates

- How will you protect health coverage for children?
- What is your position on providing affordable coverage to adults who are low-income earners?
- How will you ensure that all of Arkansas's children and families have access to high-quality, yet affordable, health care?
- What will you do to improve the health of Arkansas's children and families?



Arkansas Better than National Average, But Losing Ground in Insuring Kids

Rate of Uninsured Children Over Last 10 Years



Tax and Budget

Investing in Families: Every issue in this guide connects to taxes. We need tax revenue to make the public investments necessary to support children reaching their full potential. A good tax plan is balanced and doesn't rely too much on any one type of tax. A good tax system is also transparent. It should also be adequate, meaning that we have enough to fund the public investments that we all care about. And finally, it should be based on a family's ability to pay. The state budget is a moral document. If we truly care about the needs of our children and families, we need a budget that funds the programs they depend on.

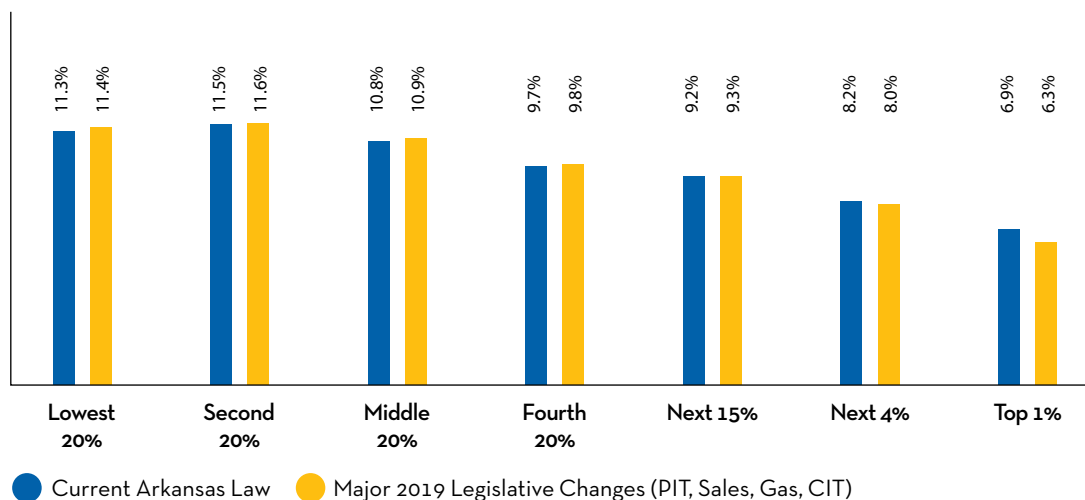


A Tax System That Works for All: Arkansas has a regressive tax system, which means low-income people are paying a higher percentage of their income in taxes, when all taxes (including income, property and sales) are considered. Low-income Arkansans have long paid more as a share of their income in state and local taxes compared to the wealthy. Tax cuts to corporations and top earners have made this worse in recent years. A weak state budget threatens the well-being of kids who depend on things like an adequately funded state foster care system, summer reading programs, pre-K, and a strong public education system.

What to Ask Candidates

- How much will this tax change cost (or save) a middle-income family? (What about low-income and upper-income earners?)
- If there is a tax cut, how will we make up for lost revenue? Will taxes be raised in other areas, or will there be budget cuts?
- Which programs will be reduced or lost because of this tax cut?
- How will you make sure that tax changes benefit regular Arkansans and not just wealthy taxpayers?
- Instead of cutting taxes to benefit a few, how could we use this money to pay for new programs that benefit many?

With 2019 Legislation, All but the Top 5% of Earners in Arkansas Will Pay Greater Share of Income in Taxes



Immigrant Children and Families

As stated earlier, Arkansas has made important advancements in improving the lives of children statewide. However, deep racial and ethnic disparities persist in children's achievement levels, and laws at the local, state and federal levels continue to perpetuate long-standing inequity. In addition to the disparities we see for children of color, children in immigrant families in Arkansas are more likely to live in or near poverty than their peers in other states.

More than 80,000 children in Arkansas have parents who were born abroad or are immigrants themselves. More than two-thirds of those children — 69 percent — are growing up in low-income families, or those whose incomes are not higher than \$41,560 for a family of three. In comparison, 52 percent of Arkansas children whose parents were both born in the United States live in low-income families.

These gaps in economic security are made worse by policies that keep young people and their parents from participating fully in our economy, driving down wages for families in all ethnic and racial groups. We need all children in Arkansas to reach their full potential if we are to reach ours as a state.

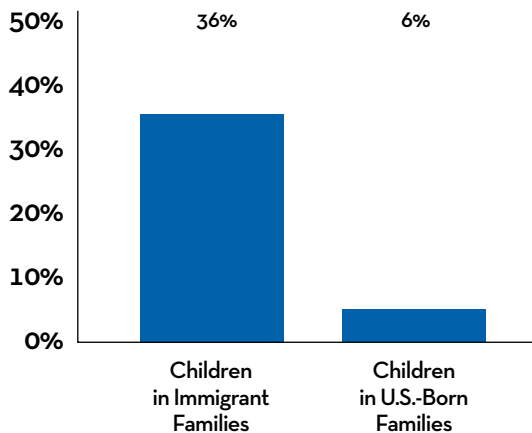
What to Ask Candidates

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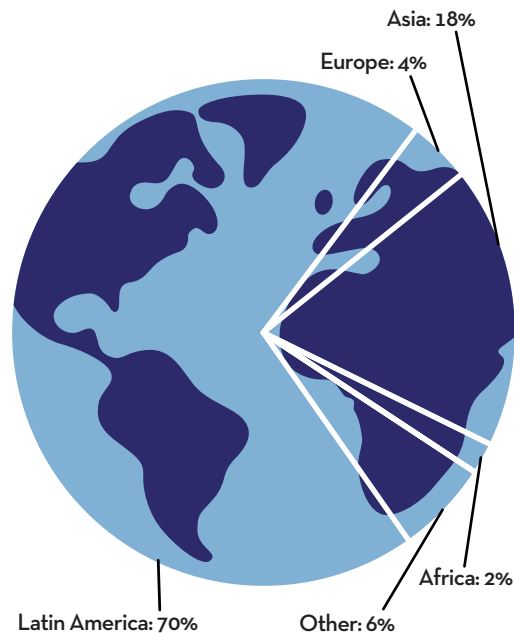
- Under federal law, adults who were born in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, who live and work lawfully in Arkansas, aren't eligible for programs like Medicaid or SNAP (food stamps). How can Arkansas work to address disparities in family economic security?
- How would you approach changing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, which protects young immigrants from deportation and allows them to work lawfully in the United States?
- Many working Arkansans, especially immigrants, are victims of "wage theft," or the denial of wages owed an employee. What are your thoughts on legislation that would require employers to issue a paystub to workers, a policy in place in all but a few states, including Arkansas?

Nearly All (91%) of Arkansas's Children in Immigrant Families are U.S. Citizens; Still Lack Advantages of Children in U.S.-Born Families

Arkansas Children Whose Parents All Have Less than a High School Diploma



Arkansas Children in Immigrant Families by Parent's Region of Origin



12 Hunger and Nutrition

The State of Hunger in Arkansas: Arkansas has a rich hunting and agricultural history. Our state contains acres of incredibly fertile soil and even claims bragging rights as the rice and duck capitol of the world. Yet, a surprisingly large number of Arkansans suffer from hunger and food insecurity.

In Arkansas, 518,960 people are struggling with hunger; 167,440 are children, meaning one in four, or 23.6 percent of Arkansas's children are at risk. In fact, Arkansas ranks second in childhood food insecurity nationwide, only behind New Mexico.

Helping Kids Eat and Be Healthy: There are programs available to lessen the burdens of hunger and food insecurity for families. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's largest anti-hunger program. During Fiscal Year 2017, SNAP reached over 388,000 Arkansans

residents. Also, local organizations like the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, Feeding America food banks, and statewide hunger agencies have formed collaborative relationships to more effectively meet the needs of the hungry within our state. These groups work to increase the availability school breakfast, and afterschool and summer feeding programs.

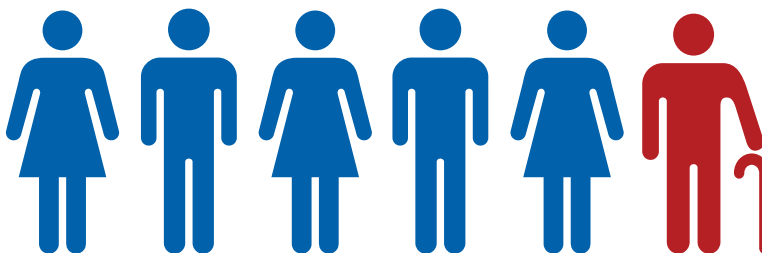
What to Ask Candidates

- With Arkansas's hunting and agricultural history, why do you feel so many Arkansans are food insecure?
- How will you ensure that all children and families in Arkansas have access to nutritious food?
- What can be done to help serve the 28 percent of Arkansans who are eligible for SNAP but do not participate?

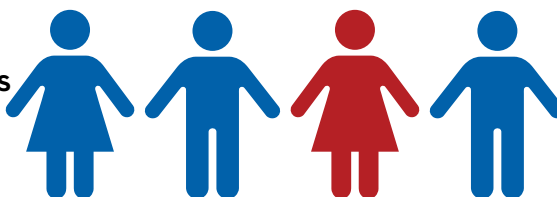
What Does Hunger Look Like in Arkansas?

72%
of Arkansans
who are eligible
participate
in SNAP

1 in 6
Arkansans
struggles
with hunger.

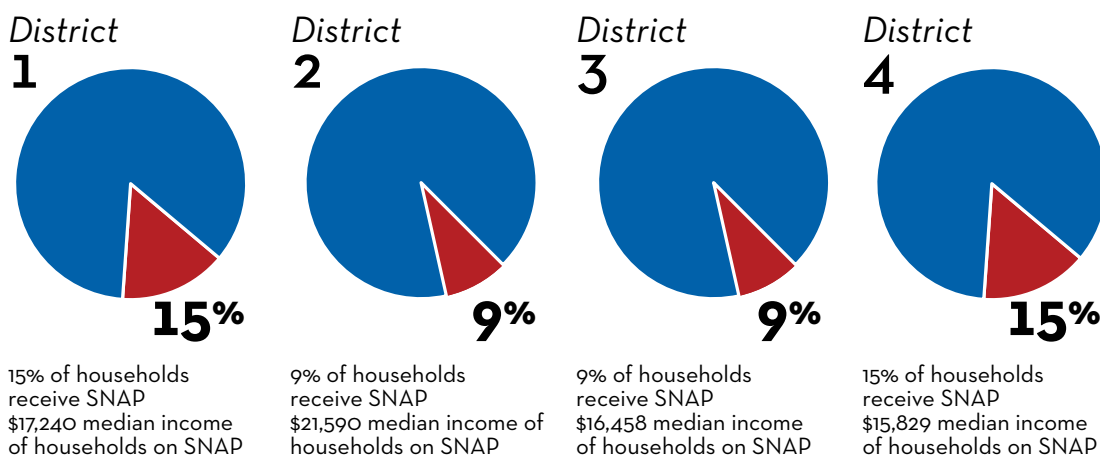


1 in 4
of Arkansas's
children
struggles
with hunger.



Sources <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/arkansas>
<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/Arkansas.pdf>

SNAP participants by congressional district



Housing

Shelter That Is Safe: Arkansas is the only state without a policy known as an “implied warranty of habitability.” Landlords in Arkansas have no legal obligation to ensure minimum standards for rental properties. That means kids in vulnerable families in Arkansas don’t have the right to basic necessities and protections in housing that many of us take for granted – things like roofs that don’t leak, doors that lock appropriately, and utilities like running water and working plumbing. Rental buildings don’t even need to be structurally sound.

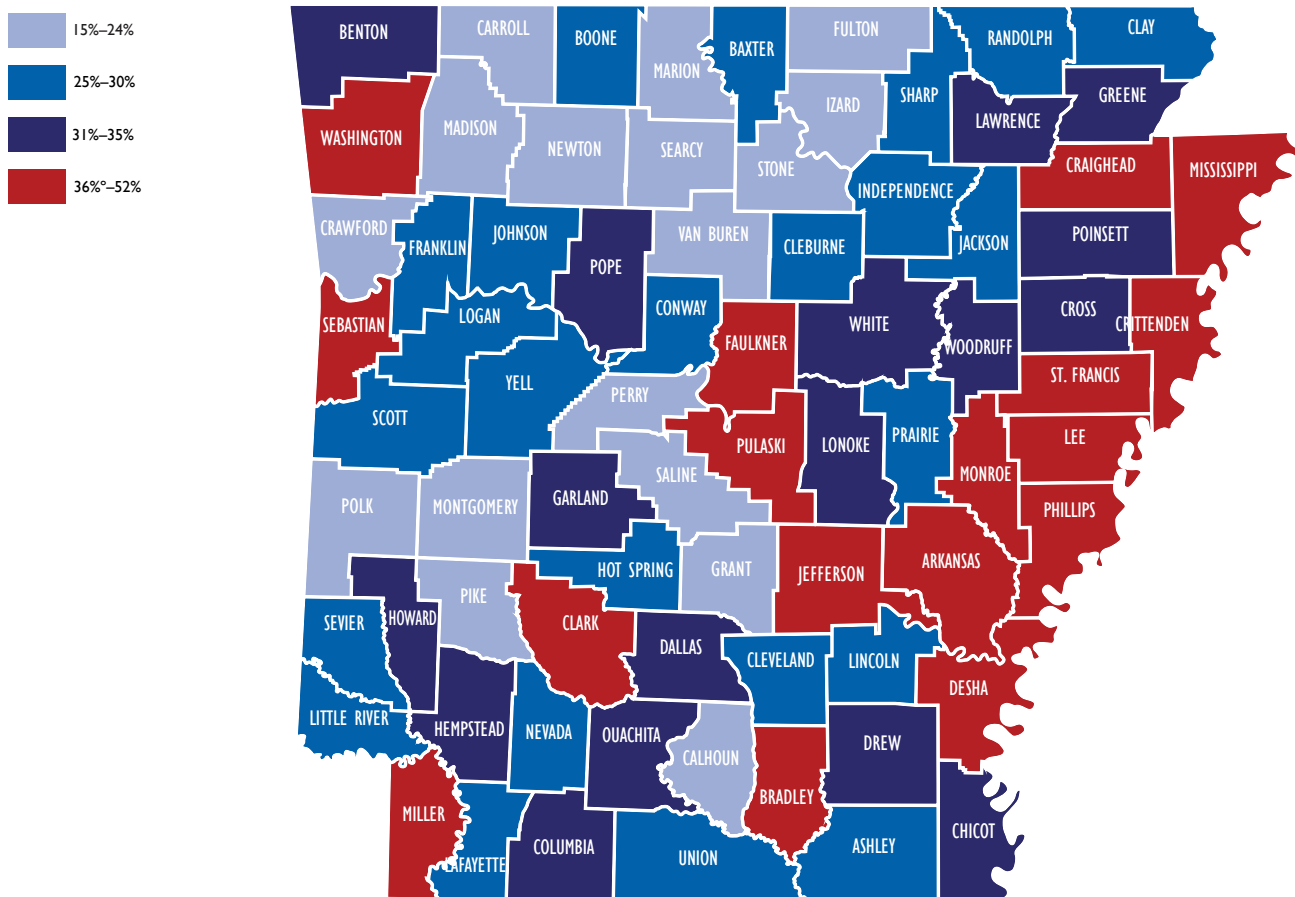
But kids in Arkansas can’t flourish in school and grow up to be productive adults if they are constantly struggling with issues like mold, rodents, or uncertain access to running water. An implied warranty of habitability would ensure that vulnerable Arkansas families would no longer need to accept substandard housing without legal recourse.



What to Ask Candidates

- How do you propose protecting renters and ensuring that kids don’t need to go without basic housing needs like safe shelter?
- If Arkansas created an “implied warranty of habitability,” what do you think should be included in the definition?

More than a Third of Arkansas Households are Renters



Child Welfare

Children in Foster Care: The number of children in the Arkansas foster care system has decreased from an all-time high of 5,200 children in foster care to 4,331. The majority of these were cases of neglect by parents, which we know can be addressed through preventive services and programs.

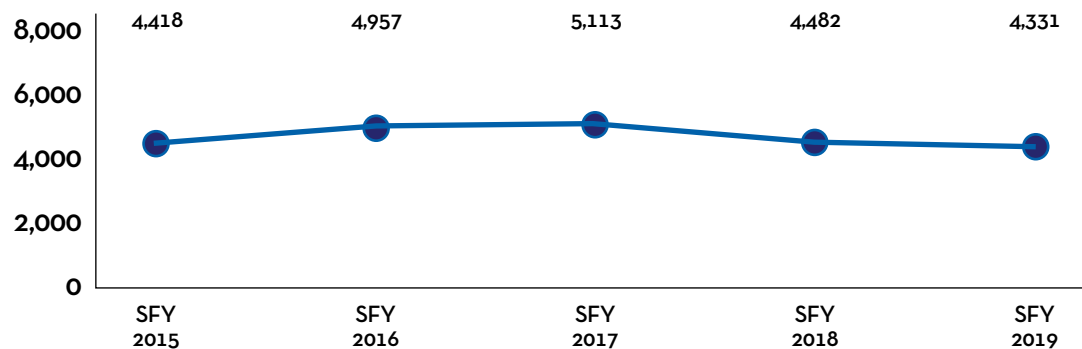
The Family First Prevention Services Act is a landmark piece of federal legislation recently passed by Congress and is the first major federal child welfare law enacted in decades. The new federal law focuses on keeping children safely with their families when possible, because entering foster care can be traumatizing for many children. It also places an emphasis on placing children with relatives, so that a child can maintain a connection with their family. And if children do have to enter foster care, it encourages children to be placed in the most family-like setting available, such as a family foster home, and it discourages using group care for children by limiting funds for group care settings.

What to Ask Candidates

- What are your thoughts on the role that the state government can play in making sure that children are in safe and nurturing homes?
- How can state government help provide services so that children can remain safely in their homes without entering foster care?
- For those children who do enter foster care, how can state government help them and their families receive the services they need so that they do not remain for a long period of time?

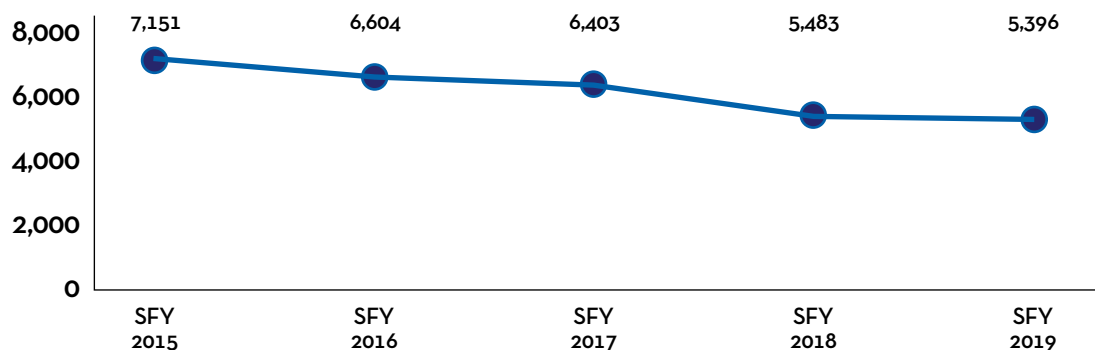
Arkansas Shows Recent Decline in Number of Children in Foster Care, But Also in Number of Children Receiving In-Home Services

Number of Children in Foster Care



Source: https://human.services.arkansas.gov/images/uploads/dcf/publications/ARC_SF_Y_2019_-_Final.pdf

Number of Children in in-home services* through protective services cases



*Children remain in their home and receive services

Juvenile Justice

Juvenile Lockup v. Community-Based Alternatives:

Most Arkansas youth who enter the juvenile system are at low or moderate risk of posing physical harm to others. Holding youth in juvenile lockups, especially for extended periods of time, is bad for their well-being and endangers their physical safety and mental health. It also increases the likelihood they will reoffend and later enter the correctional system as adults. Committing youth to juvenile lockups is expensive for taxpayers.

High quality, evidence-based community programs are more affordable than locking kids up, more effective in improving their long-term outcomes, and better at ensuring public safety. In 2019 the Arkansas legislature passed comprehensive juvenile justice reform, Act 189. Act 189's major goals include reducing the number of youth and their length of stay in juvenile lockups; redirecting funding from secure confinement to more effective (and cheaper) evidence-based programs; ensuring that youth receive the services they need to improve their outcomes; and improving the accountability of the juvenile justice system for providers, juvenile judges, and the Division of Youth Services (DYS).

Recent Reforms are Just the Beginning: The success of Act 189 and juvenile justice reform will depend on how it is funded and implemented in the future. It will depend on every child receiving an accurate assessment of their risk level and need for services; judges making good decisions about the youth that come before their courts; evidence-based community services being available in every region of the state; and greater collaboration between juvenile judges, providers, and DHS.

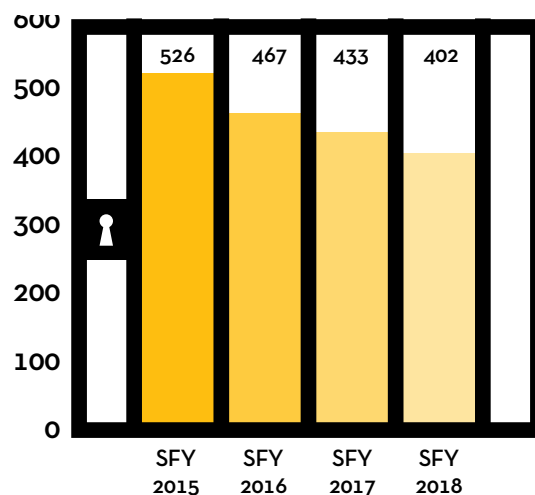


What to Ask Candidates

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- How would you ensure the state prioritizes community-based alternatives instead of new jail beds for juveniles?
- How would you ensure that developmentally appropriate, evidence-based community services are available for children in every region of the state?
- How would you hold juvenile judges, providers, and DHS accountable for their decisions and actions?
- How would you monitor the implementation and impact of Act 189, the state's major juvenile justice reform law, on Arkansas youth?

Arkansas Continues to Reduce the Number of Juveniles Committed to Detention



Source: https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/images/uploads/dys/FY2018_DYS_Annual_Report_Final.pdf



Election Advocacy Tips

Participating at the polls is an important part of our democracy. Whether voting for the candidate who will best champion the causes you care about, or voting on a ballot initiative, election day is a great time to exercise your rights!

- Find out where you will be voting: <https://www.voterview.ar-nova.org>. There you can also find a sample ballot where you can see what races and ballot measures to expect.
- Decide on what issues your vote will be determined. When it comes to elections, what issues get you to the polls? What topics do you want to hear candidates' stance on? Develop questions for candidates based on the things you care most about.
- Do your research on candidates and their positions. When learning about candidates' positions on issues, go to their social media and website pages. Look in newspapers. Email them or call them to ask them their position on an issue or go to candidate forums. Local political parties host forums near the primary elections. And civic groups, like League of Women Voters, also host forums and invite candidates to speak at events. Can't attend in person? Many forums are often available on live streaming video.
- Use elections as an opportunity to advocate on issues you care about. If there is an issue you are passionate about and want to advocate for at the Capitol, you can use candidate forums to raise awareness about an issue with the media and the general public by bringing it up with candidates. Another way to raise awareness about your issue is to create a one-pager to share with candidates about your issue including a brief overview of the issue with a few key facts and maybe a personal story.
- Go vote! And remind your friends, family, and colleagues to go vote. If you are able, give someone a ride to the polls, if they need it.
- Nonprofits can participate in election advocacy, but laws apply. Go to bolderadvocacy.org to find out more. You can also go AACF's advocacy guide to get tips for nonprofit election advocacy.

Help Make Change Happen!

Sign up for our Action E-List,
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