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COUNCIL**

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**JUNE 2023  
UPDATE LETTER**

*Dear Friends,*

It was a sunny June day, and President Andrew Jackson sat at his desk, pen in hand. He was about to sign a paper that would help shape the course of history. The bill, S. 178, had faced plenty of obstacles along the way. Political debates and serious issues like slavery had delayed its passage. But now, the moment had come.

The country was expanding, and the frontier was a wild and tumultuous place. Just weeks earlier, the Republic of Texas had won its independence in a fierce battle against Santa Anna’s army. In Washington, Congress had just established Wisconsin Territory. The nation was at a crossroads, with differing opinions on what the future should hold. Some called for more land, like Texas, to be annexed. Others worried how American expansion might strain relations with Mexico and European powers.

On June 15, 1836, President Andrew Jackson proudly signed his name at the bottom of S. 178. With that stroke of the pen, Arkansas became the twenty-fifth state to join the United States of America.

But the path to statehood wasn’t an easy one. Delegates from Arkansas Territory had worked hard to draft a constitution that would satisfy Congress. And passing the statehood act had taken weeks of debates and discussions. Even after becoming a state, Arkansas would face more challenges. In less than 25 years, the state would find itself torn apart by the Civil War, as delegates at the State House in Little Rock voted to secede from the union.

Throughout its history, Arkansas has had five state constitutions. Each one marked a turning point for the state. The first was adopted in 1836, paving the way for statehood. Then, in 1861, Arkansas joined the Confederacy and adopted a new constitution. The state ratified yet another constitution in 1864 after Union forces reclaimed Little Rock. Following the Civil War, Arkansas utilized a Reconstruction-era constitution. And finally, in 1874, the state adopted the constitution that still stands today.

Fast forward to 1995, when Governor Jim Guy Tucker outlined a serious plan to rewrite Arkansas’ constitution. It sparked debates and controversy, with concerns that it could erode key constitutional protections—like the prohibition on public funding of abortion and our religious freedoms. Family Council strongly opposed the effort to rewrite our constitution. Ultimately, Governor Tucker’s plan didn’t come to fruition. However, it’s worth noting that even small changes to the constitution can have lasting impacts on our lives.

Justice Clarence Thomas once said more Americans may have read a cell phone user manual than the U.S. Constitution—and yet, the constitution is shorter and easier to understand. It’s certainly more significant. It’s amazing how a single signature, a sentence in a constitution, or a vote can shape our future.

At Family Council, we understand the power of a word, a signature, a court ruling, or a law. When it comes to influence, there’s no place like the State Capitol. Knowing that God has sent us to the most important building in the state is humbling. Seeing how we, by His Grace, are making a difference through laws is nothing short of amazing. Sometimes, even the smallest actions or change in the law can have a tremendous impact. Just like a small rudder steering a mighty ship, our humble efforts have created lasting change. We’re dedicated to leaving a godly legacy that outlasts us, and we invite you to join us on that journey.

And now let me tell you a little more about how we are doing that—and how you can too!



Executive Director Jerry Cox

## MY THOUGHTS: “THAT’S SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF”

In 2004, country music duo Montgomery Gentry recorded a song titled “That’s Something to Be Proud Of.” The chorus contains the lines, “Like a small-town flag a-flying, or a newborn baby crying in the arms of the woman that you love: That’s something to be proud of.” Of course, scripture warns us that pride goes before a fall. There’s serious danger in being self-centered and putting too much stock in own abilities. But there’s another type of pride—the pride that comes from looking back with a sense of accomplishment, or the pride that comes from realizing you got to be part of something that truly made a difference. That can be a good feeling.

Over the past 30 years, no one knows how many children and adults are alive today because Family Council worked with legislators and pro-life organizations like Arkansas Right to Life to secure passage of laws that save the unborn and help women. Since 1989, Family Council has successfully supported passage of at least 60 good pro-life resolutions and laws at the Arkansas Capitol. Those laws set the stage for Arkansas to prohibit abortion except to save the life of the mother once the U.S. Supreme Court reversed *Roe v. Wade*. We’ve seen Arkansas’ abortion rate plummet over the decades as pro-life laws helped women choose options besides abortion. That’s something to be proud of.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito once said, “Religious freedom is the cornerstone of a civilized society.” No one should ever be forced to violate their religious convictions. A baker shouldn’t have to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding. A coach shouldn’t be stopped from kneeling in prayer after a ballgame. A minister shouldn’t be punished for proclaiming timeless biblical truths in print, online, from the pulpit, on a sidewalk—or anywhere else, for that matter. That’s why Family Council helped secure passage of the state’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 2015 and the Conscience Protection Act this year. These laws are like the airbags in a car: Most people won’t know they’re even there unless they run into something—but they provide vital protection. That’s something to be proud of.

Marijuana use is scientifically linked to deadly heart diseases and to mental health conditions like schizophrenia. That’s what the American Heart Association and the National Institutes of Health have both indicated a few weeks ago. That’s why I’m not ashamed when I tell folks that we oppose marijuana and Delta-8 THC—a dangerous drug manufactured from the cannabis plant. Sen. Tyler Dees and Rep. Mindy McAlindon sponsored a bill this year that bans Delta-8. We had to activate our entire statewide network to call the capitol, overcome lobbying efforts by the drug industry, and help pass the bill. That’s something to be proud of.

Until now, many people felt helpless in knowing how to protect kids from pornography and other harmful material on the Internet. Thankfully, Sen. Tyler Dees and Rep. Mindy McAlindon learned about a new approach pioneered in Louisiana. It requires age verification by copying and uploading a driver’s license for anyone accessing an Internet pornography website to ensure that the person is over 18. This year we provided expert testimony to help pass this good law. Someone is finally trying to protect kids from harmful material online. That’s something to be proud of.

These aren’t Family Council’s accomplishments. We’re able to do this, because good friends like you believe in us enough to support us, and because good lawmakers and good organizations are willing to work with us. It’s a team effort, and you and I get to be part of it. That truly is something to be proud of!



## News Report Highlights Importance of Addressing CRT, Implicit Bias Training in Arkansas Public Schools

A recent news report has shed light on why it is so important that lawmakers addressed critical race theory (CRT) and implicit bias training in Arkansas public schools this year. In April the *Washington Free Beacon* revealed how corporate giant Walmart played a role in advocating for these ideologies within the state's educational system. Walmart connected Bentonville school administrators with the Racial Equity Institute, a consulting group that conducts the company's own diversity training. The report stated that school officials accepted the offer and scheduled mandatory training for teachers in August 2020.

During the training, examples of "white supremacy culture" were listed, including "perfectionism," "a sense of urgency," and "worship of the written word." It also referred to "assimilation" and "tolerance" as markers of "internalized racial inferiority" and defended racial preferences by citing white people's perceived "400 years of affirmative action." These teachings were presented using a Walmart-branded workbook that encouraged participants to reflect on each concept and included diagrams explaining the difference between "equality" and "equity."

**This story underscores why the legislature's actions against CRT and implicit bias training were so important this year.** Act 237 of 2023—the LEARNS Act—is an omnibus education law that, among other things, prohibits critical race theory in public schools. Act 511 of 2023 prohibits public schools from mandating "implicit bias training" that attempts to expose employees' hidden biases or change their point of view. Together, these new laws address concerns raised by incidents like the one in Bentonville.

**This story also highlights the growing disconnect between Walmart and the values held by everyday Arkansans.** For example, Walmart opposed religious freedom legislation at the capitol in 2015, opposed healthcare workers' rights of conscience in 2021, and endorsed "hate crimes" measures that create protected classes of citizens. The Walmart Foundation's grant application process has also raised questions by inquiring about the sexual orientation and gender identity of charity leaders, board members, and staff members. Walmart announced last year that it would pay for abortions and travel expenses related to abortion for its employees. The Walton Family Foundation has opposed legislation that would protect children from sex-reassignment procedures, and it has facilitated grants to pro-LGBT groups in Arkansas. While the state legislature has taken steps to counter this agenda, more may be necessary in the future.

## Hundreds of Home Schooled Students Compete in Sports, Take Classes Alongside Public, Private School Students

According to documents from the Arkansas Department of Education, since 2019, hundreds of home school students have participated in interscholastic activities and taken classes alongside public and private school students. Arkansas' "Tim Tebow" Law lets home schoolers participate in athletics and other interscholastic activities at public and private schools, and state law also allows home schoolers and private school students to enroll in specific classes offered at public schools. These laws broaden educational opportunities for all students.

Data obtained by Family Council through the Freedom of Information Act reveals a growing number of non-public school students are participating in these programs. In 2020, some 643 home school and private school students took classes or played sports at public schools in Arkansas. By 2023, this number increased to 886. Meanwhile, the total number of public school students decreased from 479,432 to 476,579 during that time.

Families today need educational opportunities that go beyond a one-size-fits-all approach. The Arkansas Legislature has consistently enacted laws since 2013 that expand these opportunities. Family Council supported the passage of the LEARNS Act this year, which offers unprecedented access to education by providing families with funding for public or private school or for home education. Many families feel dissatisfied with the current state of public education and prefer alternative paths. Legislation like the "Tim Tebow" Law and the LEARNS Act empowers them to pursue options that will set their children up for success.





## Super Mario Bros. Movie Proves Entertainment Can Succeed Without Being Woke or Crass

By David Cox, Assistant Director

In May I took my kids to see the new *Super Mario Bros.* movie at a local theater while my wife hosted a get-together at our house with a few ladies from church. You see, the Nintendo characters Mario and his brother, Luigi, are just a little older than I am, and they were a big part of

my childhood in the 1980s and 1990s. But when I first heard about the new Mario movie earlier this year, I assumed it would be awful. It's hard to craft much of a plot based on an 8-bit arcade game. And even if the plot were good, I didn't see any way Hollywood could produce the movie without ruining the characters or resorting to a lot of low-brow humor. So I was genuinely surprised when friends began telling me in April that the movie was actually decent.

My kids and I went to the theater, and we all had a blast. Yes, it's rated PG, and there were a couple of fleeting, blink-and-you-miss-them lines that weren't entirely appropriate for smaller children. To be fair, a lot of popular kids' movies 30 or 40 years ago suffered from the same issue. But the characters were fun. The storyline was both traditional and creative. The animators incorporated elements from nearly every Mario game over the past four decades. And on the

whole, the movie itself was wholesome—especially compared to a lot of children's cartoons today.

On May 1, satirists at *The Babylon Bee* joked, "Disney Execs Baffled That Mario Movie Made \$1 Billion Without Any Trans [Characters]." LGBT activists have successfully convinced entertainment giants like Disney that gay or transgender overtones are a mainstay of modern movies. Some Disney movies—like *Lightyear*—have suffered because of that. And yet as of May 5, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* is ranked the 24th highest grossing film of all time.

So what does it matter if an animation studio successfully pulls together A-list stars like Jack Black and Chris Pratt to make a relatively wholesome, immensely profitable cartoon marketed primarily at (nearly) middle-aged Millennials and their kids? The eighteenth century Scottish patriot Andrew Fletcher is credited with saying, "Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws." Sometimes entertainment makes a stronger statement than legislation. A single Mario cartoon won't change the culture, but it does seem to show there's still strong demand in our society for fun storytelling that doesn't force-feed an agenda to its audience.

## State of Arkansas Finishes Awarding \$1 Million to Pregnancy Centers for FY2023

June marks the end of the State of Arkansas' 2023 Fiscal Year, and that means this month the Department of Finance and Administration officially will conclude its grants to pregnancy resource centers for this budget cycle.

As part of our long-term plan to reduce the demand for abortion in Arkansas, we met with then-Governor Hutchinson along with leaders in the Arkansas Senate and House in January of 2022. This was nearly six months before the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Our recommendation was for Arkansas to follow a dozen other states by launching a state-funded program for pregnancy resource centers. The governor agreed. House and Senate leadership drew up the plan and presented it as a part of the state budget for the 2022–2023 fiscal year.

The Arkansas Legislature made history when it passed Act 187 of 2022 by Sen. Jimmy Hickey (R – Texarkana). That good law appropriated \$1 million for organizations that assist women with unplanned pregnancies. Lawmakers over-

whelmingly voted for Act 187, and the state began awarding grants in the following months. News outlets reported this year that the state awarded \$1 million in grants to 23 different pro-life charities spread out across Arkansas.

This year the legislature voted to renew the grant funding for the state's 2023-2024 budget cycle. Act 622 of 2023 by Sen. Scott Flippo (R – Bull Shoals) and Rep. Lane Jean (R – Magnolia) is virtually identical to the measure that lawmakers passed last year. It authorizes \$1 million in state-funded grants for crisis pregnancy centers, maternity homes, adoption agencies, and social services agencies that provide material support to women with unplanned pregnancies through June of 2024. If Arkansas is serious about truly ending abortion, then we need to do more than simply make abortion illegal. We need to eliminate the demand for abortion. These publicly-funded grants are an excellent way the State of Arkansas can do exactly that.

## Planned Parenthood Reports No Political Activity For First Three Months of 2023

In April Planned Parenthood's political action committee in Arkansas filed state reports showing it conducted virtually no activity during the first three months of 2023. Planned Parenthood Great Plains Votes Arkansas serves as the abortion giant's PAC. It donates to candidates and causes that align with Planned Parenthood's agenda in Arkansas.

The PAC currently has \$12,075.90 on hand that it could give to candidates ahead of the 2024 elections. Now that *Roe v. Wade* has been reversed and abortion is prohibited in Arkansas except to save the life of the mother, groups like Planned Parenthood are turning their attention toward state elections and legislation. With that in mind, Planned Parenthood could use its PAC in Arkansas to try to influence public policy or public opinion on abortion in the coming months.



## Marijuana "Scientifically Linked" to Heart Disease, Stroke: American Heart Association

Science increasingly links marijuana use to heart diseases, according to the American Heart Association. In a statement released this spring, the group warned that using marijuana may increase the risk of deadly cardiovascular diseases, heart attacks, and strokes. In particular, smoking marijuana is associated with heart muscle dysfunction, chest pain, heart attack, heart arrhythmia, and sudden cardiac death.

The American Heart Association isn't alone. In May the National Institutes of Health released a study that found heavy marijuana use increases the risk of schizophrenia for young men. A recent study presented at the American College of Cardiology's Annual Scientific Session found people who used marijuana daily were 34% more likely to develop coronary artery disease compared with people who have never used marijuana. A study by the Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center recently found that vaping CBD—a substance found in marijuana—can cause more severe lung damage than vaping nicotine. The list goes on and on and on.

**All of this research underscores that Arkansans were right to reject recreational marijuana at the ballot box last November, and legislators made the right call in choosing not to pass legislation that would have legalized marijuana and Delta-8 THC in Arkansas this year.**

*Left: Planned Parenthood's facility in west Little Rock no longer performs abortions, but it does promote Planned Parenthood's pro-LGBT and pro-abortion agenda.*

## We Have Big Plans for the Rest of 2023

The last half of an odd-number year is always a season of reorganizing and preparing at our office. The Arkansas Legislature isn't in session, and statewide elections are still a few months away. With that in mind, our team is looking ahead to the future, casting a vision of what we want to accomplish, and charting a course that will get us there. Here's a brief snapshot of what we are working on right now:

**Influencing the Rules for the LEARNS Act.** This year the Arkansas Legislature passed the LEARNS Act, Gov. Sanders' omnibus education law that overhauls public schools and makes it possible for students to use state dollars to pay for their education at a private school or at home. The Department of Education's executive rules for the LEARNS Act will determine how the law helps home schoolers. We plan to be part of that rulemaking process.

**Serving Home Schoolers.** We plan to work with the Arkansas Department of Education to improve college and career testing access for assessments like the PSAT, SAT, ACT, and AP tests.

**Hosting Our Leadership Summit in Little Rock this August.** Last year Family Council hosted a worldview conference in Little Rock—and it was a huge success! This August we plan to host a summit meeting on biblical leadership and statesmanship in Little Rock. Enclosed is a flier with additional details about how you can come to that event.

**Hosting Monthly Prayer Meetings.** We plan to continue hosting monthly prayer meetings with special guests and our friends across Arkansas. Email [erin@familycouncil.org](mailto:erin@familycouncil.org) to learn how you can join these meetings.

**Preparing to Oppose Any Pro-Abortion Amendments in Arkansas.** Friends at the national level have warned us that a pro-abortion conglomerate of individuals and organizations has a state-by-state plan for enshrining abortion in each state constitution. We don't know when they may bring an abortion amendment to Arkansas, but we are confident that Arkansas is on their radar. Family Council and Arkansas Right to Life are working with other pro-lif-

*(continued on following page)*

## We Have Big Plans for the Rest of 2023 *(continued)*

ers to successfully defeat that pro-abortion campaign if it comes to Arkansas this year.

**Preparing to Oppose Any Marijuana Amendments in Arkansas.** In 2022 the marijuana industry came to Arkansas with everything it had. We were able to defeat their reckless marijuana amendment at the ballot box, because good people stepped up and said, "Not in my state." Last year, nobody anticipated the millions of dollars that corporations would spend to try to legalize marijuana in Arkansas. We don't want to make that mistake again. We are preparing for the possibility that marijuana groups may spend millions of dollars to place another marijuana amendment on the 2024 ballot. If that happens, we plan to oppose their efforts just like we did in 2022.

**Preparing the 2024 Arkansas Voter's Guide.** Since 1990 Family Council has surveyed candidates for state and federal office in Arkansas, and we have published their

responses in our Arkansas Voter's Guide. No other statewide organization surveys candidates like we do. We ask candidates where they stand on issues that voters care about—like abortion, teaching critical race theory in public schools, tax policies, immigration, and more—and we publish their responses in print and online. Our staff spends hundreds of hours preparing and publishing the Arkansas Voter's Guide. We provide it free of charge to anyone, because we believe every voter in Arkansas deserves the opportunity to cast an informed vote on Election Day. Our work on the Arkansas Voter's Guide will kick off this fall, and we will publish our first guide ahead of the spring primaries in 2024.

**Establishing Pro-Life Cities and Counties.** We want to establish hundreds of Pro-Life cities, counties and other political subdivisions all over Arkansas to help continue building a culture of life in our state.

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN PARTNER WITH US IN OUR WORK

Did you know that you and your family are the reason we're able to do what we do? God truly has blessed us with amazing friends! We have a lot we want to accomplish in the coming months, but we cannot do it without you. Here are a few ways you can partner with us in our work:

1. **Become a Prayer Partner.** We have a faithful group of friends who pray for us. You can join this team of prayer warriors by emailing [erin@familycouncil.org](mailto:erin@familycouncil.org).
2. **Join Our Rapid Response Team.** When important legislative issues come up, our Rapid Response Team springs into action! You can join this critical group of volunteers by emailing [erin@familycouncil.org](mailto:erin@familycouncil.org).
3. **Help Us Grow.** Do you have friends or family members who ought to be on our mailing list? We would love to connect with them! Ask them to email [info@familycouncil.org](mailto:info@familycouncil.org) or call 501-375-7000 so we can add them to our network.
4. **Give Financially.** We rely on the generous, financial support of friends like you. Our support comes from individuals, families, and churches all over Arkansas. If you are able, I hope you will send a generous, tax-deductible donation to Family Council today, because we cannot do this work without faithful financial supporters. You can give by check. You can also donate securely online at [FamilyCouncil.org](https://FamilyCouncil.org).

**Thank you for standing with us!** I really appreciate your faithfulness and your friendship. Please let me know if there is ever anything my staff or I can do for you.

Sincerely,  
 Thank you!!  
Jerry Cox, President

P.S. Your friendship and support make a difference! You're helping us shape Arkansas into a better place to live, work, and raise a family. We understand the importance of standing up for what is right—no matter how big or small our efforts may seem. Thank you for standing with us and for making a difference in the lives of Arkansans.