

update letter
FEBRUARY 2024



Dear Friends,

When I was in first grade the Sears catalog was our Amazon. In it there was a picture of a J.C. Higgins brand bicycle. It was red and white with lots of chrome and dual headlights. It had whitewall tires and a rack behind the seat. I'd been learning to ride a little ol' beat up, 20-inch bike borrowed from my cousin, but stepping up to that Sears bicycle was my goal.

It wasn't even Christmas, but one spring day I got off the school bus and walked through the front gate of our yard. There by the front steps were my mother and dad standing next to that brand new red and white bicycle—the very one I wanted. I was shocked, amazed, and overjoyed! I immediately hopped on the bike and took off riding across the green grass in our front yard. Somehow I just couldn't locate the brakes, and before I knew it, I plowed directly into the net wire fence surrounding our house. I fell to the ground, but what a glorious crash! It didn't seem to matter, because I had a new bike, and I knew I would eventually locate the brakes, and life would be grand.

I rode that bicycle many miles for many years on great adventures to swim in the Saline River, to Jimmy Jones' Store for a Coke and peanuts, to fish in Fletcher Watson's pond, to explore the gravel pit, and to the Green's Chapel Methodist Church. In the summer it took me on daily "patrols" all around the community. I learned the terror of flying past the handlebars and the pain of gravel grinding into my hands or knees during some epic wreck.

It really was "my ticket to ride." It was more than a bicycle. It enabled me to learn to take risks, use my imagination, and be independent. Along the way I learned to get along with other kids, settle arguments, and develop friendships. It helped me grow!

Growth. For almost 35 years, that's what Family Council has been about. We're not stopping. We're shifting gears and gaining altitude—by the grace of God. Last summer we set some goals. I am pleased to report that we have reached those goals, but now there is lots of work to be done.

In October, we raised enough money to pay cash for the building where our office is located near the State Capitol. In January, we launched the Arkansas Justice Institute with attorney Stephanie Nichols as its director and chief legal counsel. This division of Family Council will bring much needed legal firepower into the work. In February, Family Council will launch an outreach to churches that will bring pastors and government leaders together for a greater biblical influence in the government arena. In February we also will have a new office administrator to help with bookkeeping and social media.

This brings our total staff to thirteen—with one more joining us in July. I will be telling you more about how we are going to make a big difference in Arkansas with our new staff members and our new divisions. For now, I feel a bit like I did when I got that shiny, red and white bicycle back in first grade. I'm planning on Family Council going lots of places on lots of big adventures. Thank you for being with us along the way.

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Executive Director Jerry Cox

My Thoughts: Family Council Hires Attorney Stephanie Nichols to Lead Arkansas Justice Institute Effort

By Jerry Cox, Executive Director

On January 2, Arkansas attorney Stephanie Nichols of Craighead County became chief legal counsel for the Arkansas Justice Institute. Stephanie will direct the Arkansas Justice Institute, a division of Family Council that has been largely inactive for some time. Last year we revived the Justice Institute concept and the organizational structure, and we overhauled it to make it relevant in 2024.

The Arkansas Justice Institute’s mission is to promote, protect, and strengthen traditional family values through laws and the judicial system. Stephanie brings extensive legal expertise gained through four years of legal work with the Alliance Defending Freedom at the national level. In her capacity there, she traveled across the country to provide expert testimony at state capitols in defense of

religious freedom and rights of conscience. She has testified frequently at the Arkansas Legislature as well. Now she will have the opportunity to focus fully on legal issues in Arkansas. Here is a little more about the Arkansas Justice Institute’s mission:

- To develop a statewide network of conservative attorneys who can use their influence and expertise to help draft laws and policies.
- To provide the public with sound legal interpretations and understanding of laws, proposed ballot measures, government rules, and constitutional rights.
- To counter any threats against our schools and other government institutions from the ACLU, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, and others who oppose religious liberty.
- To work with national legal advocacy organizations like the Alliance Defending Freedom, Liberty Counsel, First Liberty, the American Center for Law and Justice, and others who promote a biblical worldview in the legal and judicial arena.
- To provide sound legal counsel for Family Council, its divisions, and associated organizations.

The Justice Institute’s capacity will grow as we add more paid staff and as we network with Arkansas attorneys who will use their God-given legal talents on a voluntary basis. If you are a Christian attorney and you want to help us with your legal expertise or if you know of an attorney who would be interested in working with us, call us at (501) 375-7000 or email Stephanie Nichols at Stephanie@FamilyCouncil.org. Working together, we can win major victories ahead.

On a personal note, we at Family Council are looking forward to financial support from our friends across the state that will make this part of our work strong enough to meet any challenge. You can mark your tax-deductible gift for the Arkansas Justice Institute.



Arkansas Moving Closer to Protecting Children from Sex-Change Procedures

By Stephanie Nichols, Chief Legal Counsel and Director of Family Council's Arkansas Justice Institute

In 2021, Arkansas led the charge as the first state in the nation to prohibit gender transition procedures and surgeries on kids by passing the Save Adolescents From Experimentation (SAFE) Act. Since then, many other states have followed suit, and nearly half the states in America have now restricted these procedures in some form or fashion. However, the ACLU and similar organizations are fighting hard

against these good laws that protect kids. Arkansas’ law has been held up in court since the summer of 2021, and U.S. District Judge James Moody has blocked the state from letting this vitally important law go into effect.

Thankfully, Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin’s legal team has appealed this decision to the federal Eighth Circuit. Normally, a panel of three judges would hear and decide the appeal. However, in September, the A.G.’s legal team made a bold request: that the entire Eighth circuit panel of judges hear the appeal instead of the normal three-judge panel. This is called initial “en banc” review, and it is used in cases where the issues are particularly important. In a rare grant of this

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Stephanie Nichols, Chief Legal Counsel and Director of Family Council's Arkansas Justice Institute

Arkansas Moving Closer to Protecting Children from Sex-Change Procedures *(continued)*

special procedure, the full 11-member Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals has agreed to this request and will hear the appeal.

The A.G.'s legal team has been hard at work preparing the appeal. In their excellent reply brief, they note that sex is a "biological reality" and that "there is no fundamental right to subject a child to experimental medical procedures," including the procedures prohibited by the SAFE Act that irreversibly sterilize and mutilate children. The brief also notes that:

1. "There are significant risks to these procedures, most importantly sterilization";
2. "There are no randomized controlled clinical trials evaluating the efficacy of [gender transition procedures]... and the studies conducted thus far are rated as low or very low-quality evidence"; and
3. "Some individuals undergo [gender transition procedures] and later come to regret it and identify with their biological sex rather than the gender identity they perceived earlier in life."

We are blessed in Arkansas to have a legal team that goes to bat for these important truths—even when they are politically incorrect to some. In this case, the State of Arkansas is part of a monumental, nationwide battle over whether children can be protected from unproven, and recently discredited, medical experimentation that results in irreversible bodily changes and sterilization. This issue, which has divided courts, will likely land before the U.S. Supreme Court. The Sixth and Eleventh circuits have rejected lower court rulings that temporarily blocked similar laws in Tennessee and Alabama, allowing these similar laws to go into effect and protect kids. However, because the challenge to the Arkansas law is further along in the legal process than cases in other circuits, Arkansas' law might make it to the U.S. Supreme Court first.

Family Council was proud to support the SAFE Act in 2021, and we believe it will ultimately be upheld. When it is, Arkansas' children will be safer, and our culture of medicine will more accurately reflect the Hippocratic Oath to "do no harm."

Light shines brightly in dark places. Whether we win or lose on a particular matter in a particular courthouse, we know that ultimately, truth will prevail. It's a blessing that the State of Arkansas has the opportunity to be an advocate for truth in one of the most significant battles of our time—the battle over whether God truly designed male and female according to Genesis 1:27. It is not scientifically possible to change the biological sex of a person, no matter how hard science or medicine may try. This imprint is deeply embedded in our DNA. Court rulings can change at procedural steps along the way, but God's truth is forever.

Group Working Relentlessly to Write Abortion into State Constitution

On January 4, Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin's office rejected a proposed amendment writing abortion into the state constitution. This is the second time the A.G.'s team has rejected this abortion amendment, citing ambiguities in the measure's wording. On January 8, the organization backing the amendment sent Attorney General Griffin's office a revised version of the measure. As of January 15, we are still waiting for a decision from the A.G.'s team on that measure.

The group Arkansans for Limited Government has been working for the certification of an abortion amendment since late last year. In December the group filed reports with the state Ethics Commission showing it has received \$2,341 in donations supporting the amendment effort. If approved, this amendment would write abortion into the Arkansas Constitution and could result in as many as three thousand or more elective abortions per year in Arkansas. Family Council has worked for nearly 35 years to promote and protect the sanctity and dignity of innocent human life in Arkansas. This amendment would place women and unborn children at risk. We remain committed to preserving our state's pro-life laws and ending abortion in Arkansas. **Visit FamilyCouncil.org for the latest information on the abortion amendment effort in Arkansas.**

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Family Council is now offering text alerts. You can receive breaking news and legislative updates from us right on your smartphone. You can scan the QR code on this page to sign up right now. When you sign up, simply provide your email address and cell phone number. Then we will send you important information and alerts as they occur.



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Erin Hogan, Family Council Government Affairs and Projects

We are Building a Culture of Life From the Ground Up

By Erin Hogan, Family Council Government Affairs and Projects

Act 392 of 2021 and Act 699 of 2023 affirm that counties, cities, school districts, and any other political subdivision of Arkansas could pass a resolution declaring themselves to be Pro-Life. A pro-life movement has grown out of these laws, and we don't want to stop now!

Pro-life resolutions have given Arkansans a unique way to promote the sanctity of life in

our local communities. Since the passage of the first city resolution in Springdale and the first county resolution in Washington County, we have seen 37 pro-life resolutions pass across the state. This includes 15 cities and towns

and 22 counties—and counting! Each of these communities in Arkansas has declared themselves to be pro-life. Today more than 40% of Arkansans live in a Pro-Life City or County!

Some may think the abortion fight is over. Unfortunately, that is not the case. We face new challenges today that equally threaten innocent lives. Pro-life resolutions are an intuitive way to keep the conversation going and spread a culture of life from the local level up. It is so vitally important to keep the pro-life voice active in our communities. We must talk about it and work to cultivate a flourishing culture of life. After all, change should begin in the local community and spread to the statehouse. The statehouse should be a reflection of the community. Let's resolve to be the pro-life voice in our communities. Future generations depend on it.

Here's Your Free Voter's Guide. Thank You For Making Our Work Possible!

Enclosed with this letter is a free copy of our 2024 Arkansas Voter's Guide. For the past 34 years Family Council has provided guides like this one absolutely free. We survey the candidates, and we publish their responses in print and online at ArkansasVotersGuide.com. **Your generous, tax-deductible support makes this possible.** You can help us continue educating Arkansas voters by donating to our work today. No gift is too small, and we will do our best to stretch your gift as far as we can to do the most good in Arkansas. Thank you for your friendship and support.

Sincerely,

Thank you!!

Jerry Cox, President

P.S. If you or your church would like additional voter's guides, you can request them by calling our office at (501) 375-7000 or by going to ArkansasVotersGuide.com. Please let us know if there is ever anything we can do for you.



About Us: Family Council is a conservative, Christian non-profit organization based in Little Rock, Arkansas. Jerry Cox founded Family Council in 1989 in association with Dr. James Dobson and Focus on the Family. Our mission is to promote, protect, and strengthen traditional family values. We educate and equip families and churches to make Arkansas a better place to live, work, and raise a family, and we lobby lawmakers and elected officials on important issues that matter to families. Our work is funded by generous supporters all over Arkansas.