

Arkansas SEPTEMBER 2025

The following is from Family Council's Assistant Director, David Cox:

Dear Friends,

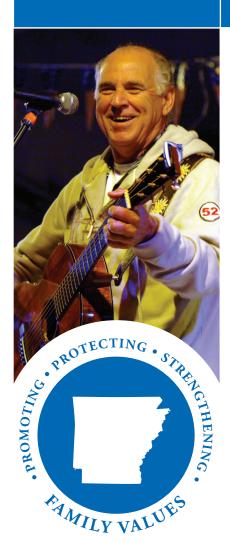
In 1985, singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffett released a greatest hits album called, *Songs You Know By Heart*. On it were 13 songs Buffett was famous for singing—songs like "Margaritaville" and "A Pirate Looks at 40"—in Buffett's signature, lighthearted "island escapism" style. Granted, I once heard a critic remark that if you pay attention to the lyrics, you'll realize most of Jimmy Buffett's songs are about a heartbroken man slowly drinking himself to death in Florida. That's fair, but be that as it may, even people who don't listen to Jimmy Buffett probably have heard one or two A-side singles from *Songs You Know By Heart*.

I don't know enough Jimmy Buffett songs by heart to qualify as a "fan," but back in 2020, Buffett did something I've always found funny. He released another album: *Songs You Don't Know By Heart*. It's a hodge podge of tunes Buffett performed at different points in his career. None of them became famous. I'm not sure all the reasons Buffett released the album, but I suspect after 50 years of singing the same 10 or 12 songs at every show, week after week, Buffett was ready for a change in "latitudes and attitudes" with his music.

Johnny Cash did something similar in the twilight of his career. By the 1990s, a lot of people thought Cash should ride off into the sunset, performing classics he was known for—like "Folsom Prison" and "I Walk the Line"—at theaters in Branson or Nashville. There would be no new hits and no more world tours for the Man in Black. Instead, music producer Rick Rubin approached Cash at a show in California with a simple offer: He would let Johnny Cash sit down with a guitar and a microphone and record whatever songs he wanted. Cash told Rubin, "You're talking about a dream I had a long time ago..." I'm sure the hits that Johnny Cash sang for decades meant a lot to him, but it also seems like there were other songs that meant as much or more.

When Glen Campbell was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, he went on a literal "farewell tour," and then he released a "farewell" album appropriately called *Adios*—eleven songs that Campbell loved but had never recorded. In the song "Arkansas Farmboy," Campbell sang: *I recall how grandaddy held me and taught me / The melody to "In The Pines" / On a five-dollar guitar that led to a fortune / I'd trade just to go back in time.*

Whatever their reasons for recording these albums near the ends of their lives, one thing seems safe to say: None of these men did it for the money. I doubt Jimmy Buffett was trying to make another million with *Songs You Don't Know By Heart*. With Rick Rubin's help, Johnny Cash recorded "Hurt"—one of his very best songs—about how fortune is fleeting. Glen Campbell literally sang about how he would have traded his wealth to be a little boy with his grandaddy again. It reminds me of Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes about the "vanities" of life. There are two lessons I take away from their stories: One is about the power of not giving up—of running the race to the very end. You'll read about that in the rest of this letter. The other is about keeping our priorities in order. In the end, the world and its desires—fame, fortune, power, and so on—are "passing away" (1 John 2:17). Understanding that puts our priorities in perspective. I hope you will keep reading this letter to learn a little more about our priorities for the coming months and how you can make a difference in Arkansas.



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My Thoughts: SAFE Act Ruling Reminds Us "The Race is Not to the Swift"

By Jerry Cox, Executive Director

On August 12, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a decision letting Arkansas enforce its 2021 Save Adolescents From Experimentation (SAFE) Act. This decision is a victory for children and for common sense. The SAFE Act is a good law by Rep. Robin Lundstrum (R – Springdale) and

Sen. Alan Clark (R – Lonsdale) that protects children from puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and sex-change surgeries. The Arkansas Legislature overwhelmingly passed the SAFE Act in 2021, but a federal judge in Little Rock blocked the law before it could take effect. In the time it has taken our courts to sort through the SAFE Act, students in Arkansas have started and finished high school and enrolled in college! That's how long this legal battle has been going on, and it reminds us that what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 9:11 is true: The race is not to the swift.

On June 18, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a 6-3 decision upholding a Tennessee law that is very similar to the SAFE Act. That ruling probably guaranteed the Eighth Circuit would uphold Arkansas' law, but winning the court cases in Tennessee and in Arkansas was a process—and it did not always feel like we were winning. Back in 2021, when pro-LGBT activists shouted at lawmakers or were disruptive during committee meetings, it did not "feel" like we were winning— even though legislators supported the SAFE Act. When former Gov. Asa Hutchinson vetoed the SAFE Act, it didn't "feel" like we were winning—even though the legislature overrode his veto and passed the law. When U.S. District Judge James Moody blocked the SAFE Act in 2021 and ruled it unconstitutional in 2023, those decisions did not "feel" like victories—even though we believed the higher courts would support the SAFE Act.

To be clear, I have never held it against former Gov. Hutchinson that he vetoed the SAFE Act in 2021. He did what he believed was right based on the information he had available at the time. The legislature overrode his veto, and the Eighth Circuit upheld the SAFE Act. There is no sense in being a sore winner. But new information has come to light over the past four and a half years showing lawmakers did the right thing by passing the SAFE Act. For one thing, we now know pro-LGBT groups like WPATH manufactured the "medical consensus" in favor of giving children puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones. Doctors actually do not know the long term effects these procedures may have on kids. Groups like Do No Harm have

found clinics in Arkansas performed mastectomies and hysterectomies on girls as part of gender-transitions—even though lawmakers were told in 2021 that sex-change surgeries don't happen in Arkansas. We know these things partly because people kept "running the race" for good laws like the SAFE Act.

Rep. Lundstrum and Sen. Clark did not have to sponsor the SAFE Act in 2021, but they did. Lawmakers could have let the governor's veto stand, but they didn't. Former Attorney General Leslie Rutledge didn't have to defend the SAFE Act in court, but she did. When he took office, Attorney General Tim Griffin could have told his team to focus on other priorities besides the SAFE Act, but he didn't. **This was a four-and-a-half-year marathon that Arkansas won, partly because all the different people running it never gave up.**

I often say that public policy work is not an event. It's a process. The race is not to the swift. Sometimes the race simply goes to the runners who don't quit running. Few victories show that more than the ruling in support of the SAFE Act.

Bring Your Bible to School on October 2!

Thursday, October 2, is national Bring Your Bible to School Day. This is a day for students across the country to exercise their First Amendment rights by bringing copies of God's Word with them to school. It's also an opportunity for students to discuss their faith and share the gospel with their friends outside of class time. Bring Your Bible to School Day is a movement sponsored by our friends at Focus on the Family.



Last year, more than a million students participated in this amazing event! If you don't have a student in public school, there still may be ways you or your church can help Bring Your Bible to School Day be successful. Take Action: Visit BringYourBible.com to learn more.

Unpacking the 8th Circuit Decision Upholding the SAFE Act

On August 12, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a decision upholding Arkansas' Save Adolescents From Experimentation (SAFE) Act—a good law that protects children from puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and sexchange surgeries. The Arkansas Legislature overwhelmingly passed the SAFE Act in 2021, but the ACLU and others sued, and a federal judge in Little Rock blocked the state from enforcing the law. However, the Arkansas Attorney General appealed that decision. The Eighth Circuit's ruling effectively ends the years-long lawsuit over the SAFE Act.

This decision is a victory for children and for common sense. Over the past five years, it has become clear that the medical "consensus" regarding transgender procedures on children was mostly manufactured by pro-LGBT activists. Men and women have come forward with chilling testimony about how they were rushed through gender transitions as children without knowing the procedures' risks, consequences, and alternatives. Doctors do not understand the long-term effects that these procedures might have, but we do know that sex-change surgeries, puberty blockers, and cross-sex hormones can leave children permanently scarred, sterilized, and at risk of serious health conditions.

Since 2021, public health experts in the U.S., the U.K., Sweden, Finland, and other nations have found that science simply does not support giving puberty blockers and crosssex hormones to kids. In the U.S., the FDA never approved puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones for gender transition. Doctors have given these medications to children "off label"—in a way that health experts never intended. In July, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) launched a pub-

lic inquiry into whether U.S. doctors and clinics may have deceived parents and children about the risks of these gender transitions, and the U.S. Department of Justice announced it had issued subpoenas to doctors and medical facilities involved in performing sex-change procedures on minors.

Many of these concerns were highlighted in the federal court case over Arkansas' SAFE Act and came out in the Eighth Circuit's ruling in favor of the law. The Eighth Circuit rejected the idea that children have a "fundamental right"

Right: Rep. Robin Lundstrum asks the Arkansas House of Representatives to support the SAFE Act in this file photo from April 6, 2021. to gender transition. The ruling found that Arkansas' SAFE Act promotes legitimate state interests like restricting dangerous medical procedures and protecting children from harm. The court wrote, "The [SAFE] Act is rationally related

There is a good reason why most lawmakers and most voters in Arkansas support the SAFE Act: It's common-sense legislation that protects children from dangerous sex-change procedures.

to the state's legitimate interest in protecting the well-being of minors." The judges pointed out that children who use puberty blockers are at greater risk of low bone density, and that "risks for minors using cross-sex hormones include changes in cholesterol and blood thickness, blood clots (increasing stroke risk), and infertility." The judges also cited evidence that sex-change surgeries themselves carry risks. All of these findings underscore just how dangerous these procedures are.

We have said for years that we believed our courts ultimately would uphold the SAFE Act as constitutional—and that is exactly what has happened. There is a good reason why most lawmakers and most voters in Arkansas support the SAFE Act: It's common-sense legislation that protects children from dangerous sex-change procedures. This ruling from the Eighth Circuit underscores that the SAFE Act is a good law that Arkansans should be proud of.





As Election Season Approaches, IRS Clarifies Rules for Churches Endorsing Candidates

By Dr. Jim Lagrone, D. Min, Church Ambassador Network Director

On July 8, the IRS filed a proposed consent judgment in a Texas federal court, resolving a lawsuit brought by two Texas churches along with the National Religious Broadcasters that challenged the 1954 Johnson Amendment that prohibited churches from endorsing candidates. Before 1954, churches could endorse candi-

dates just like anybody else could. Since 1954, things haven't been so clear. The new judgment clarifies the free speech protections for churches and ministers and should help support the First Amendment freedoms of pastors and churches.

Many people believe state and federal law prevents churches and pastors from addressing "politics," but churches and ministers actually have always had tremendous leeway to talk about legislation, campaign issues, and even candidates. Churches and ministers are free to address social and moral issues—even if some people consider those issues "political." That means they are free to stand up against abortion, promote biblical marriage, encourage responsible citizenship, support laws that protect children from sex-change procedures, and so forth. That's part of what the Church Ambassador Network exists to do—help churches address the social issues in our communities.

However, on July 8, the IRS filed a court motion reinforcing that churches have plenty of leeway when it comes to free speech and religious liberty. The motion says,

When a house of worship in good faith speaks to its congregation, through its customary channels of communication on matters of faith in connection with religious services, concerning electoral politics viewed through the lens of religious faith, it neither "participate[s]" nor "intervene[s]" in a "political campaign," within the ordinary meaning of those words... Bona fide communications internal to a house of worship, between the house of worship and its congregation, in connection with religious services, do neither of those things, any more than does a family discussion concerning candidates. Thus, communications from a house of worship to its congregation in connection with religious services through its usual channels of communication on matters of faith do not run afoul of the Johnson Amendment as properly interpreted.

The IRS says it has always believed that churches are free to endorse candidates, but it's not often you hear the agency go on record saying that in court. The IRS may not be ready to let churches run campaign ads on TV yet, but for now a pastor or a deacon committee can endorse a candidate in front of their friends at church without worrying what the IRS might say. So does this mean more pastors and churches will start endorsing or opposing candidates? Time will tell. One thing is for sure: The Church Ambassador Network of Arkansas plans to work even harder in the coming months to help elected leaders and church leaders work together to make our state a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

Take Action: If you would like to be part of the Church Ambassador Network's mission of fostering intentional relationships between pastors and government leaders, please give us a call at (501) 375-7000.



What Do Churches Need to Know About Discussing Candidates?

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

On July 8, the IRS filed a proposed consent judgment in federal court acknowledging that houses of worship can speak to their congregations about "electoral politics viewed through the lens of religious faith" without breaking federal law. The IRS compares churches discussing candidates to "a family discussion" about politics. Since the Johnson Amendment was adopted in 1954, there has been a lot

of confusion about what churches can or cannot do when it comes to elections. Generally speaking, pastors have a lot of freedom to share their opinions about candidates. Churches can spend an insubstantial amount of money lobbying for or against legislation or ballot issues as well. Churches can host voter registration drives and candidate forums, and they can distribute voter's guides to educate citizens about candidates and elections. But the lines haven't always been clear when it comes to a church as a whole talking about a candidate.

The IRS's legal brief published in July says churches can talk about candidates as long as it stays within certain boundaries:

(continued on following page)

What Do Churches Need to Know About Discussing Candidates? (continued)

- The communication has to be during a religious service.
- It has to be directed at the members of the church.
- It needs to be done through a "customary channel."
- To be safe, it ought to be a discussion about the candidate "through the lens of religious faith."

Under these criteria, for example, a pastor could speak for or against a candidate in front of the church during a Sunday morning service the same way he might make other types of recommendations or discuss non-political issues. An elder board or deacon committee could announce during church that it had voted to recommend consideration of a candidate, just like it might make other announcements to the congregation. A minister could explain why he, as a Christian, cannot support a specific candidate or political party. A church might be able to print a candidate's information, beliefs, positions, or an endorsement in its Sunday morning bulletin the same way it prints other announcements and information. The IRS says these are like "a family discussion concerning candidates."

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Looking at the IRS's statement, endorsements announced outside a regular church service or directed to people who don't attend the church might not be covered under the IRS statement—even though they would likely be found constitutionally protected in the case of a court challenge. For example, the IRS might not let a church run campaign ads for a candidate, because that endorsement would reach more than just the church's members. They might not permit a church to host a campaign rally for a candidate, because that probably would be outside the church's regular services. A church might not want to put yard signs for a candidate in front of its building, because that might be outside its "customary channel" of communicating with its members. The simplest way to remember current IRS guidance might be that it's now okay to talk politics at church as long as it's "all in the family."

Take Action: If you have questions about campaign "do's and don'ts" for churches and ministers, please call our office at (501) 375-7000.



Policy Points: President Trump Signs Executive Order to Target Debanking

By David Cox, Assistant Director

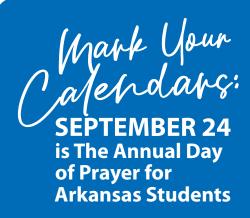
On August 7, President Trump signed an executive order "guaranteeing fair banking for all Americans." Since 2021, news outlets and congressional testi-

mony have highlighted how federal officials and financial institutions targeted conservative organizations through "reputational risk" policies. Conservatives deemed "high risk" could have their bank accounts closed without warning and without explanation.

President Trump's new executive order directs federal banking regulators to "remove the use of reputation risk or equivalent concepts that could result in politicized or unlawful debanking." The order says:

Financial institutions have engaged in unacceptable practices to restrict law-abiding individuals' and businesses' access to financial services on the basis of political or religious beliefs or lawful business activities. Some financial institutions participated in Government-directed surveillance programs targeting persons participating in activities and causes commonly associated with conservatism and the political right following the events that occurred at or near the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Over the past four years, we have written repeatedly about debanking. In 2021, Family Council's credit card processor terminated our account with only 60 seconds notice after designating our organization as "high risk." Other conservative organizations have had similar experiences as well. That is why we deeply appreciate the Trump Administration issuing this executive order to finally get rid of "reputation risk" policies that have been used to debank conservatives. After all, banks that are too big to fail are too big to discriminate.



September 24 is the annual Day of Prayer for Arkansas Students. Act 902 of 2021 directs the governor to annually proclaim the last Wednesday in September of each year as a Day of Prayer for Arkansas Students, and it calls upon the citizens of Arkansas to pray for students, teachers, administrators, and schools. The Arkansas Department of Education's Division of Elementary and Secondary Education is required to notify public school districts of the day of prayer as well.

Take Action: Please encourage churches and families in your community to set aside time to pray for Arkansas' students and educators on Wednesday, September 24. Visit DayOfPrayerAR.com to learn more!

Return to Sender: A.G. Griffin Pushes Back Against Abortion Drugs by Mail

On July 29, Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin held a press conference announcing his office is leading a letter to congress urging the federal government to help states enforce their pro-life laws. Since 2022, Arkansas has generally prohibited abortion except to save the life of the mother, and state law prohibits abortion drugs from being delivered or distributed in the state. However, news outlets have highlighted how pro-abortion states are protecting abortionists who ship abortion drugs across the country. Attorney General Griffin says entities in these states are deliberately targeting women in Arkansas and elsewhere.

At the press conference, Arkansas Attorney General Griffin said his office is leading a letter along with 15 other state attorneys general asking congress to address these proabortion "shield laws." During his remarks, A.G. Griffin said, "States should be respectful of other states' laws." The A.G. says his office believes there is precedent giving congress the authority to act on this issue.

The A.G.'s office also issued four cease-and-desist letters four cease-and-desist letters to companies associated

with Plan C, Mayday Health, and LifeOnEasyPills.org—all of which allegedly promote mail-order abortion drugs to women in Arkansas. These letters warn the groups that Arkansas law generally prohibits the shipment or delivery of abortion drugs into the state. If the companies do not stop promoting abortion pills to Arkansans, the letters say they could face a formal investigation and penalties. The message from the A.G.'s office is clear: Arkansas will not be a target for out-of-state abortion pill traffickers.

All of this is good news. Abortion drugs take the life of an unborn child. They also carry significant health risks for women—including sepsis and death. Delivering abortion drugs into Arkansas is against the law, and it hurts women and unborn children. Family Council appreciates Attorney General Griffin's willingness to take a firm, pro-life stand and help lead the way on this important issue.

Take Action: If you know of a website or out-of-state abortion facility advertising abortion in Arkansas, call us at (501) 375-7000 so we can report it to the Arkansas Attorney General's office.

FDA Calls for Kratom Crackdown

On July 29, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration formally recommended classifying a compound found in kratom as a controlled substance—a move that could help rein in this dangerous and addictive drug. Kratom is often marketed as a dietary supplement, but its effects mimic opioids and can lead to addiction, seizures, and even death. The FDA's new recommendation targets 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), a powerful substance in kratom. If adopted, this change could make it illegal to possess, sell, or distribute 7-OH under federal law. The FDA says it is particularly concerned about 7-OH products that appeal to children and teenagers—including gummies and other candies.

In the past, federal public health officials have advised states to prohibit kratom, and Arkansas has done so.

The Arkansas Department of Health has restricted 7-OH as a Schedule I substance. Last April, lawmakers defeated a bad bill that would have legalized kratom and 7-OH in Arkansas. During his comments against the bill, Rep. Zack Gramlich (R – Fort Smith) described a seventh-grader who was caught using kratom and trying to sell it to other students at a school in his district. Kratom and 7-OH are dangerous drugs. We deeply appreciate our lawmakers and public health officials who have worked hard to protect people from it.

Take Action: If a vape shop or other business is selling or advertising kratom in your community, report it to your local law enforcement, and then call us at (501) 375-7000 so we can share that information with state officials.

Ten Commandments Law Faces Legal Setback in Four School Districts

On August 4, U.S. District Judge Timothy Brooks partially blocked a state law placing copies of the Ten Commandments in Arkansas' public schools. Act 573 of 2025 by Sen. Jim Dotson (R – Bentonville) and Rep. Alyssa Brown (R – Heber Springs) requires privately-funded copies of the Ten Commandments to be displayed in public schools and other public buildings in Arkansas. The measure received strong support in the Arkansas Legislature earlier this year. However, in an effort to block Act 573, lawyers from the ACLU and a group of atheist organizations filed a federal lawsuit against four public school districts in Fayetteville, Springdale, Bentonville, and Siloam Springs.

Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin has intervened in the case, and his office is defending Act 573. The law was set to take full effect statewide on August 5, but Judge Brooks blocked the four school districts from complying with the law. For the time being, Act 573 still applies to other school districts in Arkansas that are not part of the lawsuit.

In his ruling, U.S. District Judge Timothy Brooks made a shocking claim about the legislature's reason for enacting this good law, writing:

"Why would Arkansas pass an obviously unconstitutional law? Most likely because the State is part of a coordinated strategy among several states to inject Christian religious doctrine into public-school classrooms. These states view the past decade of rulings by the Supreme Court on religious displays in public spaces as a signal that the Court would be open to revisiting its precedent on religious displays in the public school context."

Over the years, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that states are free to honor and recognize documents or symbols that are important to our nation's history—like the Ten Commandments or the national motto.

In 2017 Arkansas passed the National Motto Display Act allowing the national motto—"In God We Trust"—to be displayed in classrooms along with the U.S. flag and state flag. Act 573 added the Ten Commandments to the list of historical items displayed in school. Nothing in Act 573 suggests Arkansas is part of a "coordinated strategy" to inject Christianity in public schools. That is an unnecessary attack on the state legislature. A lawmaker might just as easily accuse Judge Brooks of being part of a

coordinated strategy to keep students from learning about historical documents.

Over the years, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that states are free to honor and recognize documents or symbols that are important to our nation's history—like the Ten Commandments or the national motto. In the court proceedings, Attorney General Tim Griffin's office wrote, "As the Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized, the Ten Commandments have enormous historical significance 'in America's heritage.' ... It is therefore beyond serious dispute—and settled by the Supreme Court—that the Ten Commandments have historical significance and are 'one of the foundations of our legal system.'" Family Council believes our federal courts ultimately will agree and uphold Arkansas' Ten Commandments law as constitutional.

Take Action: If you would like to request posters of the Ten Commandments to place in public buildings in your community, please call our office at (501) 375-7000.

"SEE YOU AT THE POLE" IS ALSO ON Left temper 24

Besides being the annual Day of Prayer for Arkansas Students, September 24 is also See You At the Pole. This is a day when students across the nation will gather around the flagpoles for a time of public prayer outside of normal school hours. See You At The Pole provides students with an opportunity to exercise their constitutional rights, pray for their schools, and live out their faith—all at the same time. Many churches work with students to host special events in conjunction with See You At The Pole. **Take Action: To learn more, visit syatp.com.**



We Need Your Help

We're about to enter the final stretch of 2025, and there is so much we have accomplished this summer and so much we want to do before the end of the year. Our team has been able to work with a coalition of organizations to help Arkansans put hundreds of Ten Commandments posters in Arkansas' public schools and public buildings the way state law allows. We're equipping local people to establish released time programs in their communities so students can study scripture. In August we released a new Faith at Schools Toolkit at FamilyCouncil.org to help students, parents, educators, and ministers understand how people exercise religious liberty at public school. Looking ahead, it won't be long before we begin surveying candidates for our 2026 Arkansas Voter's Guide. We want to work with policymakers and law enforcement to continue stopping the flow of illegal abortion drugs into Arkansas. We also want to support efforts in Arkansas to assist women with unplanned pregnancies.

I hope you will send a generous, tax-deductible donation today, if you are able. Your generous support will help us do a lot of good in Arkansas. Thank you for standing with us. We deeply appreciate your friendship, your financial support, your kind words, and your prayers. It means more to me and my team than I can tell you.

Sincerely, Thank you!!

Jerry Cox, President

P.S. In October we plan to host a special Worldview Workshop at Geyer Springs Baptist Church in Little Rock. You can learn more and register today at fc.regfox.com/one-day-workshop-. Thank you for your friendship and support.







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.

