



Arkansas CITIZEN

FEBRUARY 2026

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

Dear Friends,

Back about 16 years ago, when I was 24, I realized I had a problem. I was at least 80 pounds overweight, and I had most of the risk factors for diabetes. Zig Ziglar once joked that he was overweight by choice, because he had never accidentally eaten anything. That was me. I didn't gain 80 pounds by accident, and I wouldn't lose it by accident either. I needed to make a change. So I made a plan. I found a simple exercise routine on YouTube, and I began doing it three days a week. It took time. I missed workouts, and I still ate the occasional combo meal. But after a lot of work, I finally lost five pounds. Nobody noticed—except me.

I did more workouts and ate more vegetables. Time passed. After nearly a year, I had dropped about 40 pounds, and I decided to run a 5K. Had I ever run a 5K? Did I understand how to train for a 5K? Did I know how many miles were in a 5K? None of that seemed important. I found a "couch to 5K" training program, and I ran a 5K in an unimpressive time of half-an-hour. But I finished it. Goal completed.

Sometime later, my wife suggested I run a half-marathon. I knew how far *that* was. I found a 20 week training plan, and I copied it onto our calendar at home. Fortunately, you don't start by running 13.1 miles. You build up each week, and most days you don't run more than three to six miles. Because of my work and family schedules, I had to run early in the morning or late in the evening—like, 4:45 A.M. or 8:30 P.M. When I arrived at the race, I was 90 pounds lighter than I was at age 24, and I finished in just under two hours. That's considered "competitive" if you're 65 or older. But I finished it. Goal completed. Over the next few years, I ran about a dozen more 5Ks and half-marathons. I even took First Place in one. Coincidentally, I was the only runner who showed up, but my family assured me the medal counted. A lot went wrong with my training plans. I had to skip or reschedule runs because of bad weather or sickness. Some races were harder than others. But I learned that much of reaching a goal has to do with planning and then adapting when things don't go according to plan. A few friends asked why I ran half-marathons instead of full marathons. I joked, "It's because I'm only half crazy." The truth is, I knew it was a goal I could reach. Marathons take more planning and more training than I could afford.

By February, most New Year's resolutions have become next year's resolutions:

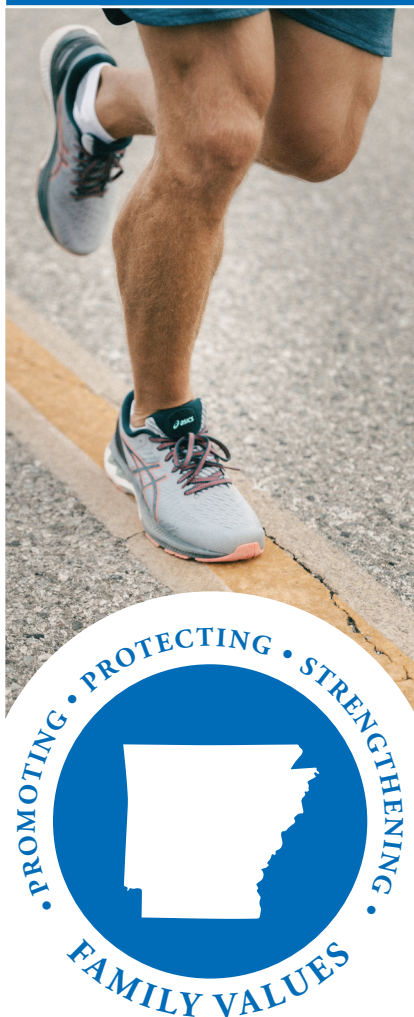
They're things people will try again someday. I quit making New Year's resolutions, because I don't enjoy the endless cycle of trying, failing, and trying again. But I love setting goals, making plans to achieve those goals, and then following the plan. Without a plan, a goal is just a dream. A lot of the people who come to work at Family Council are shocked by how much time we set aside to plan. The countless hours we spend poring over plans feels like a waste at first, but you can't distribute 50,000 voter's guides or stop bad legislation without a plan. We set goals, and we make plans to achieve them. And we often say we don't work for the plan; the plan works for us. That's a reminder that you must adapt when God calls you to something else or when things don't go as planned—because I can almost guarantee they won't. Or to borrow from Zig Ziglar again, "You don't change your decision to go. You simply change your direction in order to get there." I hope you will keep reading to learn more about what Family Council has planned and about the goals you've helped us achieve so far.

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Executive Director Jerry Cox

My Thoughts: Some Cities in Arkansas Pumping the Brakes on Public Drinking

By Jerry Cox, Executive Director

News outlets report the Texarkana Board of Directors voted to place new restrictions on public drinking in the city's "entertainment district" at its first meeting of 2026. Act 812 of 2019 let cities create "entertainment districts" where alcohol can be carried and consumed publicly on streets and sidewalks. These districts can be either permanent or temporary under the law.

After Act 812's passage, El Dorado and Texarkana were among the first cities to authorize public drinking under the law. However, at its January 5 meeting, the Texarkana Board of Directors implemented new restrictions changing the entertainment district's boundaries, requiring businesses in the district to close by midnight, and preventing people from bringing in alcohol

from outside the district. KSLA News quoted Kristen Schultz with the Texarkana Arkansas Police Department as saying, "We have had for one a lot of outside underage drinking come into the district. We have also had a lot of loitering and prowling in front of the businesses creating large crowds and often large disturbances among the patrons."

Texarkana is not the only city that has encountered serious problems from public drinking in its entertainment district. In 2024, the El Dorado City Council voted unanimously to shut down its entertainment district due to ongoing problems with fighting, vandalism, and other disorderly behavior. And last fall, voters in Ozark rejected an ordinance that would have authorized public drinking. Supporters keep trying to say that public drinking doesn't cause problems, but experience seems to tell a different story. Many voters understand that, and many cities are learning that the hard way. All of this underscores why Family Council has consistently opposed efforts to legalize and expand public drinking in entertainment districts over the past two decades. Arkansans need to think twice before supporting public drinking in their communities.

Family Council Joins Letter Urging Congress, President to Preserve Pro-Life Hyde Amendment

One of our goals has been to continue standing up for the unborn in Arkansas and across the nation. On January 9, Family Council joined more than 70 other pro-life leaders and organizations in a letter urging President Trump and leaders in Congress to preserve the Hyde Amendment when it comes to Obamacare subsidies. The Hyde Amendment is a longstanding, bipartisan compromise that generally prevents federal money from paying for abortions. Experts estimate the Hyde Amendment has saved more than 2.6 million unborn children. However, that lifesaving compromise has recently come under attack.

In January, President Trump called for Republicans to be "a little flexible" on the Hyde Amendment while the U.S. House of Representatives passed a three-year Obamacare subsidy extension without Hyde's protections preventing publicly funded abortion. In response, Americans United for Life's Government Affairs Director, Brad Kehr, called the decision "the largest ever expansion of taxpayer funding for abortion." National Right to Life issued a statement, saying, "No federal dollar should ever pay for abortion. Not one. House members who walked away from that principle betrayed the children we fight for and the voters who trusted them. The Senate must stop this bill."

A coalition of pro-life organizations and leaders—including Family Council—sent a letter to President

Trump, Vice President Vance, Speaker Mike Johnson, and Senate Majority Leader John Thune urging them to stop public tax dollars from paying for abortions under Obamacare. The letter said in part:

The Hyde Amendment is at the core of protecting and supporting life. It has saved 2.64 million lives since its bipartisan enactment in 1976. Even today, a nearly 60% majority of Americans do not want their tax dollars to pay for abortion or abortion coverage. Hyde policies are applied extensively to federal programs and have been over the last nearly fifty years.

Please stand with all Americans who do not want to be forced to pay for abortions. Americans elected a Republican trifecta in 2024, and Congress should not now scorn their widespread support by forcing Americans to fund abortion through a "flexibility" on Hyde.

There is no "compromise" on the Hyde Amendment, because the Hyde Amendment itself is a compromise that protects taxpayers. Pro-abortion groups have often said, "If you don't like abortion, don't have one." But without the Hyde Amendment, even if you don't *like* abortion and don't *have* an abortion, you could still be forced to pay for an abortion with your taxes. Pro-lifers must stand up for the Hyde Amendment.



Assistant Director David Cox

Policy Points: Pro-Life States Must Resist Assisted Suicide's Expansion

By David Cox, Assistant Director

On December 12, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker signed legislation to legalize physician-assisted suicide. The measure passed the Illinois Senate by just one vote during the fall legislative session after narrowly clearing the House. In a statement, Pritzker said the law “enables patients faced with

debilitating terminal illnesses to make a decision, in consultation with a doctor, that helps them avoid unnecessary pain and suffering at the end of their lives.”

A few days later, New York Governor Kathy Hochul announced she had reached a deal with state legislators to legalize assisted suicide. In a statement, Hochul said, “I was taught that God is merciful and compassionate, and so must we be. This includes permitting a merciful option to those facing the unimaginable and searching for comfort in their final months in this life.”

Last year, Delaware Governor Matt Meyer also signed a measure legalizing assisted suicide in his state. At the bill-signing ceremony, the governor said the law “is about relieving suffering and giving families the comfort of knowing that their loved one was able to pass on their own terms without unnecessary pain and surrounded by the people they love the most.” Delaware’s law took effect last month.

Decades of experience have shown assisted suicide doesn’t help people who are sick and dying. Oregon first allowed physician-assisted suicide in 1998, and official state reports have shown for years that the reasons people give most often for wanting to end their lives are loss of autonomy, decreasing ability to participate in activities that make life enjoyable, and loss of dignity. Most patients do not express concerns about pain, and only a very small handful are ever referred for psychiatric evaluation before being given a lethal prescription.

Canada’s most recent Annual Report on Medical Assistance in Dying shows a record 16,499 Canadians died through physician-assisted suicide in 2024. Euthanasia and assisted suicide now account for roughly one in twenty deaths in Canada.

Canada operates two different “tracks” for assisted suicide and euthanasia. Track 1 lets doctors kill patients whose natural death is “reasonably foreseeable”—meaning they are terminally ill. But Track 2 allows euthanasia for people who are not dying at all. Track 2 deaths increased by 17% in 2024, with 732 people killed even though they were not terminally ill. These victims tended to be young-

er, more likely to be women, and far more likely to be living with a disability.

The groups who support assisted suicide and euthanasia seem to be following a two-part strategy: They are going to try to convince pro-life states like Arkansas to legalize physician-assisted suicide the way Illinois and New York have done. And they are going to try to convince states like Illinois and New York to expand assisted suicide and euthanasia the way Canada has done. In other words, if assisted suicide isn’t legal, they want the state to legalize it. And if assisted suicide is legal, they want the state to make it easier for people to end their lives.

Back in 2019, Arkansas lawmakers wisely rejected a very bad measure that would have legalized assisted suicide, and in 2021 the Arkansas House of Representatives defeated two deeply flawed end-of-life bills that fundamentally disrespected the right to life. Family Council worked closely with our friends in the legislature to stop all three of these proposals.

Being pro-life means believing innocent human life is sacred from conception until natural death. Just like abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide are murder, and they violate the sanctity of human life. Given the rise of assisted suicide in some parts of the country, pro-lifers in Arkansas need to prepare for the issue to come up here as well. That is something Family Council plans to do in the coming months.



Seven Health Problems Linked to Marijuana

A growing body of scientific evidence shows marijuana is a dangerous drug and a health hazard. Below are just seven health problems linked to marijuana that you can mention the next time someone tells you marijuana is “harmless.”

1. Marijuana Users are Twice as Likely to Die from Heart Disease.

Marijuana has been tied to a number of deadly heart problems—including heart attack, heart failure, and stroke. Researchers writing in the journal *Heart* now say marijuana use raises a person’s risk of stroke by 20%, and it doubles a person’s risk of death from heart disease.

2. Marijuana Users Face a High Risk for Diabetes.

Research published at the Annual Meeting of The European Association for the Study of Diabetes last year shows marijuana is linked to a 400% increased risk for developing diabetes.

3. Marijuana Users are More Likely to Develop Cancer.

Experts writing in *Preventive Medicine Reports* found heavy marijuana use is strongly linked to a 325% increased risk of oral cancer. A 2024 study published in *JAMA Otolaryngology* found daily marijuana use is linked to a higher risk of head and neck cancers. And the American Lung Association notes that marijuana smoke contains many of the same toxins and carcinogens found in tobacco.

4. Marijuana May Harm Fertility and Hurt Unborn Children.

Research published in *Nature Communications* found that marijuana use may harm female fertility and increase chromosome errors. THC—the main active substance in marijuana—can disrupt egg cell growth, alter

important genes, and cause problems with chromosomes. Marijuana use during pregnancy also has been shown to hurt unborn children and newborns.

5. Marijuana Use is Commonly Associated with Mental Disorders.

For years researchers have found links between marijuana use and serious mental health problems. A study published in the American College of Physicians’ journal found marijuana that is high in THC is associated with “anxiety, depression, psychosis or schizophrenia, and cannabis use disorder (CUD).” Researchers have raised concerns about the number of teens struggling with cannabis-induced mental disorders. Experts have found heavy marijuana use is linked to paranoia, schizophrenia, self-harm, and other serious problems.

6. Marijuana is Tied to Cognitive Problems.

Experts routinely link marijuana use with dementia, memory loss, and lower cognitive abilities. These effects may continue even after someone stops using marijuana.

7. Marijuana Users Face Greater Risk of Dependence and Addiction.

Marijuana is addictive, and studies published in *JAMA Psychiatry* have found nearly one-third of users develop some form of marijuana use disorder. The risk is even higher—up to 17%—for those who start using in adolescence. Dependence and addiction can lead to a number of other physical and mental problems.

In Arkansas, marijuana industry insiders worked unsuccessfully to expand marijuana via the state’s ballot initiative process in 2022 and 2024. Fortunately, neither of those bad measures passed.



Scientific evidence shows again and again that marijuana is a health hazard, but marijuana also hurts whole communities. Marijuana legalization in other states has actually fueled the black market, emboldened drug cartels, and increased the flow of illegal drugs across America. News outlets report organized crime is dominating black market marijuana in many states where marijuana is legal. In Arkansas, marijuana industry insiders worked unsuccessfully to expand marijuana via the state’s ballot initiative process in 2022 and 2024. Fortunately, neither of those bad measures passed. We are prepared to stand up against future attempts to legalize marijuana in Arkansas.

Oklahoma's Medical Marijuana Fuels Massive Black Market Operations

News reports in Oklahoma show marijuana legalization has created a shocking black market problem across the region. The Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics (OBN) revealed that law enforcement in other states have alleged 40% of America's black market marijuana comes from Oklahoma.

The numbers are staggering. Over a twelve month period from 2023 to 2024, authorities say more than 85 million pounds of marijuana in Oklahoma went unaccounted for. That means it's possible tens of millions of pounds of marijuana grown legally in Oklahoma may have been sold illegally on the black market in just one year.

Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond told reporters that criminal organizations have exploited the

state's "lax medical marijuana laws" to "flood the black market across state lines." His Organized Crime Task Force has shut down more than 7,000 illegal operations and seized over 329,000 marijuana plants.

Contrary to popular belief, legalization in other states has actually emboldened drug cartels and increased the flow of illegal marijuana across the country. Press releases from the Arkansas State Police show their troopers routinely confiscate illegal marijuana from Oklahoma and other states. All of this underscores why Arkansans should think twice before passing any amendment or measure expanding marijuana in our state.

Sports Betting Sees a Full Court Press As March Madness Approaches

March Madness is just a few weeks away, and with it comes a flood of advertisements for sports betting. Last March, Arkansans wagered some \$70 million on sports—most of which was on the NCAA men's basketball championship. It's only been a few years since sports gambling became mainstream in America, but it's clear that gambling is devastating individuals and families, and it's corrupting sports.

On January 15, the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI announced indictments against 26 people in connection with an alleged bribery and point-shaving scheme to fix NCAA Division I men's basketball games and Chinese Basketball Association games. Over the past year, the NCAA Committee on Infractions has uncovered a troubling pattern of sports betting violations involving student-athletes and staff members at different universities. It's now almost routine for the NCAA to announce player suspensions for students-athletes who colluded to bet on one another. Basketball players may scheme to help each other win bets by, for example, missing free throws or scoring fewer points than expected in some games.

A recent NCAA study found that 36% of Division I men's basketball players reported harassment from bettors on social media. When gamblers miss their bets, they often blame the athletes. Besides the NCAA, recent news stories show that Major League Baseball, the NFL, the NBA, and other sports leagues have all dealt with serious corruption in the wake of sports betting's legalization.

Studies indicate people who gamble on sports may be twice as likely to suffer from gambling problems. Young men are particularly affected by sports gambling. Twenty-year-old males account for approximately 40% of calls to gambling addiction hotlines, and upwards of 20 million men are in debt or have been in debt as a result of sports betting. And research now shows that the legalization of sports betting

may be linked to serious financial problems in America—such as credit card debt, overdrafts, late payments on loans, lower credit scores, and higher bankruptcy rates. That hurts

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more than just the gamblers who wager on sporting events. It hurts their families and their communities.

Sports betting is not a harmless pastime. As powerful corporations try to make gambling part of everyday life, it's important for Arkansas to protect citizens and families from predatory gambling. Otherwise, problem gambling will simply hurt more and more people in our state. Family Council is calling on all Arkansans to do what they can to stand up against predatory sports betting.



Christians Need to Know Socialism's Fatal Flaws

In November, Zohran Mamdani won New York City's mayoral election. Mamdani, 34, belongs to the socialist Working Families Party. In his victory speech, Mamdani promised New Yorkers a "new age," saying, "We will prove that there is no problem too large for government to solve, and no concern too small for it to care about."

Unfortunately, there is nothing "new" about what Mamdani is saying. During the last century, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Fidel Castro, Mao Zedong, and others made similar promises to their citizens, and they all met with the same results. Many young people have been taught that socialism and communism failed in the past because they weren't properly implemented, but that's not the case. Socialism and communism failed every time they were implemented, because they are fatally flawed.

After the election, our friend Joseph Backholm, Senior Fellow for Biblical Worldview and Strategic Engagement at Family Research Council, published a list of some of socialism's and communism's basic flaws:

1. Socialism misunderstands human nature and implies that people will be virtuous as long as they have enough money. Then, ironically, it assumes everyone with money is sinister.
2. Socialism takes from the capable and gives to the less capable, ensuring that resources won't ever be used productively.
3. Socialism destroys competition and consequently destroys innovation.
4. Socialism destroys people's incentive to be productive by denying them the benefit of their labor. It always produces fewer, lower-quality products.
5. Socialism assumes I have the right to other people's property just because they have more than I do. It depends upon and incentivizes greed.
6. Socialism denies people the dignity of having what they earn and earning what they have.
7. Socialism assumes people engaged in commerce always operate with corrupt motives, but people in government never do.
8. While claiming to decentralize power, it always centralizes power with a handful of bureaucrats.
9. Socialism assumes it's always unjust for one person to have more than another, when real justice means the dishonest and unskilled shouldn't have as much as the honest and skilled.
10. Socialism assumes humanity's natural state is prosperity and rages over the fact that we aren't all rich, when in reality the natural state is poverty, and capitalism is the only reason we aren't all poor.

Unfortunately, there is nothing "new" about what Mamdani is saying. During the last century, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Fidel Castro, Mao Zedong, and others made similar promises to their citizens, and they all met with the same results.

Joseph concluded by rightly pointing out, "Of course, none of this means a capitalist system doesn't have weaknesses, but it can produce good outcomes and has. Communism never has because it assumes a world that does not exist and never will."

Over the decades, other pundits have pointed out that socialism and communism are oppressive and cannot work without using force against everyday citizens. Throughout the 20th century, communist and socialist governments around the world imprisoned, punished, or executed tens of millions of innocent people for their faith. That's certainly not to suggest Mayor Mamdani is going to open a gulag in New York City, but Americans—and especially Christians—need to understand socialism's basic problems and its track record. This is a fatally flawed belief system that has produced disastrous results every time.



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Despite Cold, Arkansans March for Life in Little Rock

On Sunday, January 18, Arkansans gathered in Little Rock to mark the state's 48th annual March for Life. The event highlighted Arkansas' strong commitment to protecting innocent human life and the victories pro-lifers have achieved since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. Arkansas has earned recognition as the nation's most pro-life state for six consecutive years. This achievement reflects the dedication of Arkansas' churches, families, and lawmakers who have championed the sanctity and dignity of human life.

While celebrating these victories, speakers warned that the fight for life continues. Dr. Sharai Amaya, an obstetrician-gynecologist who spoke at the march, cautioned pro-lifers about abortion pills being mailed into Arkansas from states like New York and California.

"The threat of abortion is still crouching at our door," she said. "I am talking about the threat of abortion pills."

Attorney General Tim Griffin echoed these concerns, noting that despite "amazing strides" with the *Dobbs* deci-

sion, "the fight continues" as dangerous abortion drugs are shipped across state lines.

The march also featured Catherine Pressly Herring, who shared her powerful testimony about being secretly given abortion pills by her ex-husband. Her courage in speaking out last year helped Arkansas pass H.B. 1551 making it a felony to try to kill an unborn child by secretly giving a pregnant woman abortion-inducing drugs without her knowledge or consent. The bill passed without a single lawmaker voting against it and was signed into law by Governor Sanders in April.

As Arkansas maintains its position as America's most pro-life state, events like the March for Life remind us that protecting innocent life requires ongoing commitment from churches and families all across our state. Family Council appreciates our friends at Arkansas Right to Life who help organize this march every year. It's a great opportunity for pro-lifers to gather and take a stand for the sanctity of human life in Arkansas.



Above: Gov. Sanders greets pro-lifers at the March for Life.
Photo Credit: Arkansas Secretary of State's Office.

Here is Your Free Voter's Guide!

Enclosed with this letter is your free 2026 Arkansas Voter's Guide for the Republican and Democratic primaries happening on March 3. Early voting begins on February 16. Your local county clerk's office can provide you with a list of early voting polling sites.

You can see our voter's guide online at ArkansasVotersGuide.com, and while you are there, you can order free printed copies of the guide for your family, your friends, or your church. Our Arkansas Voter's Guide is nonpartisan. We don't use it to endorse anyone running for office or favor one candidate over another. We simply want to help voters understand where the candidates stand on the issues that matter to them. **We plan to distribute tens of thousands of voter's guides like this one in print and online this year.**



Here's How You Can Help

Here are three ways you can help promote, protect, and strengthen traditional family values in Arkansas today:

1. **Say a prayer for the Family Council team.** We agree with God's word in James' epistle that fervent prayer is very effective. We always appreciate your prayers. When you pray for us, it empowers our team to do the work we have been called to do.
2. **Share the information in this letter.** You are welcome to share this letter at church, in Bible study, or in Sunday school. You can also download this letter for free at FamilyCouncil.org. When you do that, it will help shape hearts and minds in your community.
3. **Share the Arkansas Voter's Guide with your friends and family.** When you do that, it will help Arkansans cast informed votes this March.

If you are able, I hope you will send Family Council a generous, tax-deductible donation to help us with all the work we are doing. I promise we will do our best to stretch your gift as far as we can.

Thank you for standing with us. It's so good to have friends like you. We would not be able to do this work without you. Please let me know if there is anything my staff or I can do for you.

Sincerely,

Jerry Cox, President

Thank you!!

P.S. I hope you appreciate this free voter's guide from Family Council. If you need more guides for your family or your church, please call us at (501) 375-7000 or go to ArkansasVotersGuide.com. Our voter's guide doesn't favor one candidate over another, so churches are free to distribute them. Please reach out to us if you have any questions. Thank you for your friendship and financial 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.

