



Arkansas CITIZEN

AUGUST 2026

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

Dear Friends,

How do you measure success?

Recently, I was visiting with a family member who's a little younger than I am, and our conversation drifted back to twenty-plus years ago, when we were still in school. The high school I attended in Little Rock had a reputation for strong academics. High grades and good test scores were a measure of success. Two members of my graduating class went on to attend the U.S. Naval Academy—one shortly after graduation, and the other the following year. In fact, I still remember the day Sen. Mark Pryor called the school to tell one of them that he would be a midshipman at Annapolis in the fall. We were all very happy for him. Both were—and are—highly intelligent gentlemen who served our nation honorably. Other members of my class were accepted to Ivy League schools or had more scholarship offers than they knew what to do with. Compared to them, my transcript didn't seem like much to brag about, but I was able to get into John Brown University in Siloam Springs. I've always been pleased with the education I received there.

**"Godliness with contentment is great gain."
—1 Timothy 6:6—**

My family member asked what became of some of the guys I went to school with. I thought for a bit before I answered. Tragically, a few are no longer with us either due to accidents or other circumstances. For some, addiction and sobriety seem to have been a challenge. The vast majority are leading lives that I would call very successful. They earned degrees, and they are gainfully employed. Some are teachers educating a new generation. Others started small businesses. Some practice law or medicine, work in real estate, sell cars or insurance, enlisted in the military, or found other types of honest work. We're only in our early forties, but so far so good. I'd call that success.

But there is another type of "success" I thought about as we talked: As a whole, the classmates and other friends I've kept up with generally seem to have successful personal lives, too. They have spouses, homes, and families. They go to ballgames, spend time with their kids, or serve faithfully at church. Their communities are better places because of them. Some are watching their children graduate from the same schools that they and their parents attended. It's more than just report cards, "Employee of the Month" certificates, or gold watches and pension plans. It's a different kind of success.

The British writer G.K. Chesterton is credited with saying, "The most extraordinary thing in the world is an ordinary man and an ordinary woman and their ordinary children." 1 Timothy 6:6 reminds us that "godliness with contentment is great gain." At the end of the day, serving the Lord, finding contentment, and tending faithfully to the "ordinary" parts of life may be the best measure of "success."

One of our goals at Family Council is to make Arkansas a better place to live, work, and raise a family. When we do that, it helps people succeed all over the state. I hope you will keep reading this letter to learn more about what Family Council has been doing recently and what we have planned for the coming months.



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Executive Director Jerry Cox

Arkansas Named Number One in America on Religious Liberty

By Jerry Cox, Executive Director

On July 14, First Liberty Institute's Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy announced Arkansas is leading the nation in its Religious Liberty in the States index. This is something every Arkansan can celebrate.

The U.S. Constitution and the Arkansas Constitution clearly protect the free exercise of religion. Religious liberty is a basic right that comes from God. The government's job is to protect that right, and Arkansas' laws are the best in the

nation when it comes to doing exactly that. First Liberty is one of our country's leading supporters of religious freedom. Their team looked at laws in all 50 states, and their conclusion is that Arkansas is number-one when it comes to protecting religious freedom.

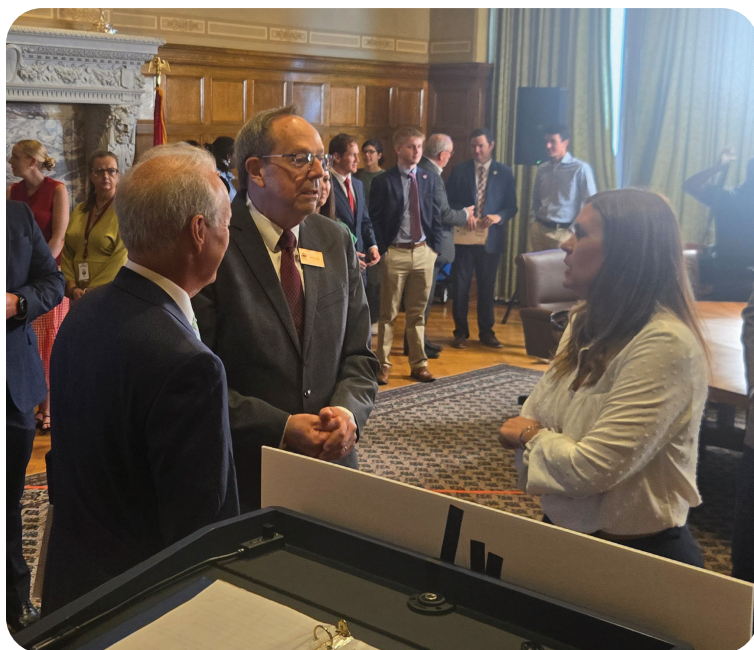
Reaching this point took years of hard work. This was a team effort. Arkansas' lawmakers spent several legislative sessions working hard to get religious freedom protections in place. For example, in 2015, former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson signed Arkansas' first Religious Freedom Restoration Act into law. It's a good law that keeps the government from burdening the free exercise of religion.

In 2023, Governor Sanders signed an even better law that strengthened the 2015 measure. Since 2021, the Arkansas Legislature has passed laws protecting healthcare workers' rights of conscience, affirming religious freedom at school,

We protect the free exercise of religion. It's the right to exercise your faith—the right to live according to your deeply held convictions. Arkansas' religious freedom laws will help protect that right for years to come.

and protecting people of faith from being penalized for living out their convictions. A lot of leaders deserve credit for making Arkansas number-one in the nation on religious liberty. Family Council has been happy to support those good efforts.

I have often said that if you don't think religious freedom is under attack, just try exercising it sometime. You may be surprised at the pushback you get. Many people think religious liberty is simply the freedom to believe something in your heart, but that's not it. We protect the *free exercise* of religion. It's the right to exercise your faith—the right to live according to your deeply held convictions. Arkansas' religious freedom laws will help protect that right for years to come.



Above: Jerry Cox, First Liberty President Kelly Shackelford, and Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders visit during a special event celebrating Arkansas being number one in the nation on religious freedom.



Above: Sen. Gary Stubblefield and Rep. Robin Lundstrum present religious freedom measure H.B. 1615 in committee. The Arkansas Legislature passed the bill last year, and Gov. Sanders signed it into law as Act 677 of 2025. Act 677 is just one of the many good laws that has helped make Arkansas a leader when it comes to protecting religious liberty.



Above: Sen. Missy Irvin announces the Fairness in Women's Sports Act during a press conference in the Capitol Building on February 25, 2021. The measure passed and became Act 461 of 2021.

Good News: U.S. Supreme Court Upholds Fairness in Women's Sports

On June 30, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a good decision upholding state laws that protect fairness in women's sports. The ruling makes it clear that states can pass laws protecting women and girls from being forced to compete against biological males in school sports. It took five years to win this fight, but the ruling should help stop activists from hijacking girls' sports programs to promote pro-LGBT ideology.

Letting boys compete in girls' sports is unfair. It erases 50 years of advancements for women and girls. It hurts their athletic and scholarship opportunities as students, and it hurts their professional opportunities as adults. Female cyclists, swimmers, powerlifters, sprinters, volleyball players, and others have seen their sports radically changed by men who claim to be women. Earlier this year, a biological male won first place in the girls shot put at a West Virginia state track and field championship—beating the second-place finisher by more than two feet.

Stories like this are part of the reason so many states have enacted laws to keep biological males out of girls' sports. In 2020, Idaho passed The Fairness in Women's Sports Act to prevent male student athletes from competing against girls in women's athletics at school. However, the ACLU sued, claiming the act is unconstitutional, and a panel of judges from the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against the law. The case was combined with a federal lawsuit against a similar measure that West Virginia enacted in 2021. In June, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld both laws as constitutional.

The decision says in no uncertain terms that states are free to establish girls' athletic teams based on biological sex. That's a victory. The decision also addresses federal laws like Title IX that prohibit discrimination in education and in school athletic programs. The ruling makes it clear that

the word "sex" in Title IX means "biological sex"—not gender identity. That's a victory, because LGBT activists have argued in the past that laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex should be reinterpreted to apply to gender identity and sexual orientation as well.

Public opinion polling from Gallup has shown most Americans agree that athletes should compete according to their biological sex—not their gender identity. Protecting fairness in women's sports is just common sense.

Arkansas was actually the first state in America to officially protect fairness in women's sports. In 2021 Arkansas passed Act 461 by Sen. Missy Irvin (R – Mountain View) and Rep. Sonia Barker (R – Smackover) preventing male student athletes from competing against girls in women's athletics at school. Even though Idaho and West Virginia passed their laws first, federal courts blocked those good laws before they could take effect. Arkansas' Act 461 was never challenged. It went into effect in August of 2021, and it has been protecting girls' sports ever since. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision just goes to show that Act 461 is a good law.

Public opinion polling from Gallup has shown most Americans agree that athletes should compete according to their biological sex—not their gender identity. Protecting fairness in women's sports is just common sense. Americans understand that, and our federal courts do too. That's something to celebrate.



Assistant Director David Cox

Policy Points: U.S. Department of Justice Memo Directs Prosecutors to Address Fraudulent “Birth Tourism”

By David Cox, Assistant Director

In June, the U.S. Department of Justice issued a memo directing prosecutors to address fraudulent “birth tourism” in the United States. U.S. citizenship is guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment for “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof,” and courts have held that nearly everyone born

within the country’s boundaries is a U.S. citizen. But testimony before members of Congress has shown that foreign nationals are using fraudulent tourist visas and international surrogacy contracts to have children born on American soil with U.S. citizenship—a practice commonly referred to as “birth tourism.”

Peter Schweizer, President of the Government Accountability Institute, testified before the U.S. Senate in March that between 750,000 and 1.5 million Chinese babies have been born in the U.S. specifically to obtain American citizenship—with the intention of being raised in China. In his testimony, Schweizer said:

These individuals grow up in China, often educated in CCP-controlled schools with distorted views of U.S. history, values, and culture. They have no lived connection or demonstrated allegiance to our country, yet they possess full rights as U.S. citizens: the ability to vote in elections, relocate here at will, and—upon turning 21—sponsor their parents as permanent residents.

Birth tourism often relies on false visa applications—which violates federal law. Now the U.S. Department of Justice appears to be prepared to address the issue. In a memo released June 30, the DOJ said, “The Department of Justice will investigate and hold accountable those who engage in this unlawful conduct, as well as those who solicit and sell these criminal services to others.” The memo notes that while most of these cases may be prosecuted as visa fraud, prosecutors should consider other possible violations—such as wire fraud, money laundering, identity theft, health care fraud, and others.

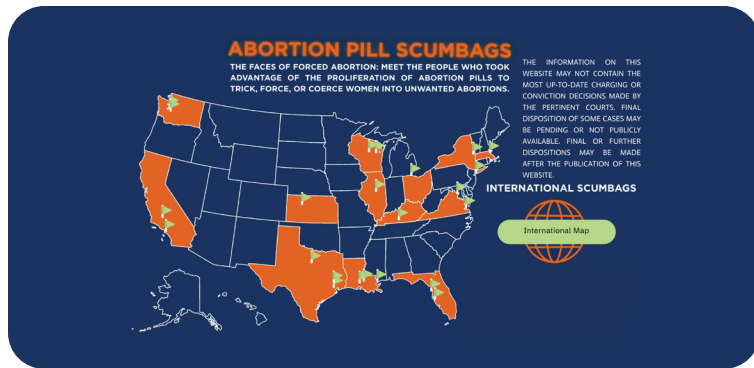
Birth tourism is fraud, and it wrongly abuses birthright citizenship. When it’s done through commercial surrogacy, it also demeans women and children. We have written again and again how commercial surrogacy laws in the U.S. make it possible for corporations and wealthy customers to pay women thousands of dollars to carry children for

them. News outlets like *The Wall Street Journal* report Chinese nationals are acquiring children born in the U.S. with U.S. citizenship via commercial surrogacy. Arkansas U.S. Senator Tom Cotton and Florida U.S. Senator Rick Scott recently urged the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate surrogacy centers operated by foreign nationals, writing:

“Recent reports have uncovered more than 107 Chinese-owned surrogacy agencies operating in Southern California alone. These agencies cater almost exclusively to wealthy Chinese clients, and some are affiliated with Chinese state-owned entities. Chinese nationals pay women living in the United States more than \$50,000 to serve as surrogates. The children are born on United States soil and granted automatic citizenship. And in most cases, the infants are promptly flown to China and raised there under the direct influence of the Chinese Communist Party.”

Social commentators and policymakers worldwide have raised concerns about how commercial surrogacy financially pressures women into providing children for paying customers. That’s part of the reason Family Council has opposed commercial surrogacy in Arkansas. Commercial surrogacy deliberately deprives children of their biological mothers or fathers. It treats pregnancy like a “service” that can be purchased. It treats women like commodities, and it treats children like products that can be made to order and sold for profit. Human beings are not products that can be manufactured and exported to other countries. Our laws need to respect that fact. Policymakers need to do more to address commercial surrogacy and “birth tourism” in America.





Pro-Life Group Highlights Abortion Pill “Scumbags”

A Texas-based pro-life group has produced a list of abortion pill horror stories from across the nation. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration first approved abortion drugs like RU-486 nearly 26 years ago, and in 2022 the agency loosened its safety protocols to make the drugs available by mail. But a recent study by the experts at the Ethics and Public Policy Center found abortion drugs are much more dangerous than policymakers previously thought. Since becoming available by mail, we have also heard stories about women coerced into taking abortion drugs or being given the drugs secretly, without their consent.

Pro-life organization 40 Days for Life has produced a summary of some of those stories. For example, the group says a Kansas man “was sentenced to nearly a decade in prison for conspiracy to commit murder following allegations that he sprinkled a crushed abortion pill on his girlfriend’s pancakes to cause an abortion.” In another case, the group says a Texas man was charged with slipping abortion drugs into his mistress’s coffee and cookies. A California man was sentenced to nine years in prison after drugging his pregnant girlfriend and then administering abortion drugs to her. **The entire list of stories is available at 40daysforlife.com/scumbags.**

As we have said many times, abortion drugs are dangerous. They hurt women, and they kill unborn children. They should not be available at all—much less through the mail. That’s why Family Council has joined with other groups to oppose these dangerous drugs. In May, Family Council sent a letter to the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Arkansas respectfully asking the office to enforce federal law as it applies to mail-order abortion drugs. In June, Family Council joined a coalition of 83 state and national pro-life leaders urging acting U.S. Attorney General Todd Blanche to stop mail-order abortion drugs. We have also partnered with pro-life organizations in an amicus brief asking a federal court to block mail-order abortion drugs nationwide.

In June, we launched a grassroots effort in Arkansas calling on the Trump administration and members of Congress to end former President Joe Biden’s dangerous mail-order abortion policies and restore the FDA’s safety protocols. You can ask your members of Congress to oppose mail-order abortion by going to abortioncrimebymail.com today.

Most Americans Want to Keep Kids Off Social Media: Pew Research Center

Alf you think kids spend too much time on their phones, you aren’t alone. A recent survey from the Pew Research Center shows most Americans support banning children under 16 from using social media. Between Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, YouTube, and other platforms, most teens and young adults are on some form of social media. The U.S. Surgeon General says 95% of American teenagers use social media, and about one-third say they use it “almost constantly.” But parents, policymakers, and pundits have raised concerns about the harm that social media can cause to kids.

Pew found 56% of U.S. adults support a ban on social media use for anyone under 16. Only 21% oppose it. Pew pointed out that support for the ban is bipartisan and is strong across every major age group—especially among parents with children under 18.

A growing body of evidence shows that—by design—social media platforms are harmful for children. Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin has said in court that Facebook and Instagram use algorithms intentionally designed “to exploit human psychology and foster addiction to maximize users’ screen time.” TikTok has been criticized for serving kids a steady “diet of darkness” online. This year, courts in New Mexico and California have found the owner of Facebook and Instagram liable for harming children and concealing what it knew about child sexual exploitation on its platforms.

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Social media is more than just websites or phone apps. These are multibillion dollar businesses. The adults who own and profit from these businesses have a responsibility to protect children on their platforms.

Arkansas has been ahead of the curve on this issue. The Arkansas Legislature passed laws designed to protect children online, and Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin has sued Meta and TikTok in state court. In fact, Family Council is not aware of any attorney general in America who is doing more to hold social media giants accountable and protect children online than Attorney General Griffin. Our lawmakers are working hard on this issue as well, but more needs to be done. Pew’s survey confirms that adults understand these platforms are not safe for kids and support stronger protections for children online. Policymakers need to be sure those protections are put in place.



John Stonestreet is President of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview.

Guest Column: The Slippery Slope Keeps Slipping

By John Stonestreet, Colson Center for Christian Worldview

If killing critically ill newborns isn't the line, where is it for medically assisted suicide?

Back in April, a reckless assisted suicide bill looked like it was going to pass and be made British law. Instead, it was shut down by the House of Lords. Then, in May, the Irish parliament rejected an expanded abortion bill by a vote

of 85-30. On this side of the Atlantic, things are headed in the opposite direction.

Like all such “mercy” killing laws, Canada’s MAiD was promised as an option only for those facing imminent death and who could consent. Things are long past that and will likely go even further. Recently, a Quebec physician suggested that the nation’s already draconian MAiD program be expanded to include babies. In response, Brandon Tran of Canada’s Campaign Life Coalition said:

Canadian law currently permits the withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment for critically ill newborns. This medical practitioner's proposal goes further. He calls for the calculated killing of an infant. These are patients, babies, who cannot speak, cannot consent, and cannot ask for help. If we cannot draw the line here, I am not sure where medical professionals imagine the line to be.

Physician-assisted suicide is always sold to the public as a “compassionate” measure, necessary to spare those with no reasonable chance of recovery from unbearable pain and suffering during the last days of their lives. In every context in which it has been made legal, however, assisted suicide has never remained limited to the rare instances for which it was sold.

There are reasons this slope has proven so slippery everywhere it has been made legal. Once it’s decided that certain lives are not worth living, the list of people eligible for assisted suicide inevitably grows. It becomes easier to re-evaluate lives based on some criteria other than intrinsic value, such as convenience or financial costs. It’s a small step indeed from “eligible to die” to “expected to die.”

That’s why, wherever physician-assisted suicide has been legalized, it happens by a series of bait-and-switch claims to the public. “Terminal” illness is often expanded to include “chronic” illnesses and permanent disabilities. In Belgium, the Netherlands, and Canada, even mental illness and depression are considered sufficient justification for suicide. Given this trajectory, it’s only a matter of time before the requirement of an actual illness is dispensed with.

For example, the original promise was that only those certifiably in their right minds could be euthanized. But that was always a lie. Anyone who goes into an American emergency department claiming they want to die would be diagnosed with “suicidal ideation,” admitted, and put on a psych hold. To not do so, in fact, would be medical malpractice. Suicidal ideation is rightly regarded as a symptom of an underlying mental disorder. People with untreated mental illnesses are not allowed to make life-and-death decisions.

It must become unthinkable to strip away the intrinsic and indelible dignity every human possesses, no matter their life condition. Otherwise, there is no way to stop from sliding down a slope so slippery.

Or at least they weren’t. In Oregon, for example, since physician-assisted suicide was legalized, over 96% of people given lethal drugs did not undergo a psychiatric evaluation. This is why, as a “What Would You Say” video on the topic so clearly explained, there’s nothing compassionate about physician-assisted suicide. In fact, it is the exact opposite of compassion, the abdication of a civilized society’s responsibility to offer care to those who need it most when they need it most.

In his book *The Thanatos Syndrome*, Walker Percy described how a society devolves to the point of thinking that killing patients instead of healing them is compassion. A psychiatrist, Percy wrote of well-trained and exquisitely credentialed doctors who “turn their backs on the oath of Hippocrates and kill millions of old useless people, unborn children, born malformed children, for the good of mankind.” What Percy wrote in 1987 has become reality. Some form of assisted suicide is now legal in 13 states and the District of Columbia.

Like abortion, the legal fight against assisted suicide is only part of the battle. It must become unthinkable to strip away the intrinsic and indelible dignity every human possesses, no matter their life condition. Otherwise, there is no way to stop from sliding down a slope so slippery.

John Stonestreet serves as president of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview. He’s a sought-after author and speaker on areas of faith and culture, theology, worldview, education and apologetics. John is the daily voice of Breakpoint, the nationally syndicated commentary on the culture, founded by the late Chuck Colson. Copyright 2026 by the Colson Center for Christian Worldview. Reprinted from BreakPoint.org with permission.

GOOD NEWS: Arkansas Gave \$1.7M+ to Pregnancy Resource Centers This Year

The State of Arkansas awarded more than \$1.7 million to pregnancy resource centers during the 2026 fiscal year, according to the State's transparency website. Since 2022, Arkansas law has generally prohibited abortion except to save the life of the mother, and public health data shows that thousands of children are alive today thanks to the state's many pro-life laws. But women with unplanned pregnancies still need help. That's why Arkansas has appropriated millions of dollars to charities that support women and families with unplanned pregnancies.

Arkansas' financial records show the State awarded a total of \$1,735,585 in grants to more than three dozen different pregnancy help organizations before the 2026 fiscal year ended on June 30, 2026. Last spring the Arkansas Legislature voted to increase its grant funding

for pregnancy help organizations to \$3.5 million for the 2027 budget cycle. That means even more grant money could go to organizations that are saving lives in Arkansas between now and next summer. House Speaker Brian Evans and Senate President Pro Tempore Bart Hester were among the lawmakers who were instrumental in shepherding this grant funding at the Arkansas Legislature this year.

After the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, Family Council outlined a three-part plan for eliminating abortion:

- Encourage the enforcement of existing pro-life laws.
- Work with members of the General Assembly to pass any additional laws necessary to end abortion.
- Expand our efforts to assist pregnancy help organizations.

So far, we've encouraged the enforcement of existing pro-life laws, and we've worked with lawmakers to clarify those good laws. Providing publicly funded grants for pregnancy resource centers is a major part of that three-part plan, and we deeply appreciate the Arkansas Legislature and the governor for their commitment to supporting these good organizations. Arkansas isn't the only one awarding grants to pro-life charities. A growing number of states provide pregnancy help organizations with public funding, because they give women real options besides abortion. This funding has done a lot of good in Arkansas already, and we look forward to seeing that good work continue in the months ahead.



HELP STOP *Mail-Order Abortion* DRUGS

Family Council is urging all Arkansans to ask Congress and President Trump to stop mail-order abortion. In Arkansas, abortion is generally prohibited except to save the life of the mother, and it is a crime to mail abortion drugs like RU-486 into the state. But in 2022, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration started letting abortionists distribute abortion drugs by mail. To make matters worse, pro-abortion lawmakers in other states have passed "shield laws" that prevent abortionists from being taken to court or prosecuted if they mail abortion drugs into pro-life states like Arkansas. That's why Family Council is doing as much as possible to stop mail-order abortion drugs at the federal level.

In June, we launched a grassroots effort in Arkansas calling on the Trump administration and members of Congress to end the FDA's dangerous mail-order abortion policies. You can contact your congressman and U.S. Senators by scanning the QR code on this page or going to abortioncrimebyemail.com.

Scan this QR code to ask your congressmen and President Trump to stop mail-order abortion drugs.



There are So Many Ways to Support Traditional Family Values in Arkansas

There are so many opportunities to do good work in Arkansas right now. Here are a few examples:

Stopping Abortion Drugs: Abortion is generally prohibited except to save the life of the mother, and it is a crime to mail abortion drugs into the state. But abortionists in other parts of the country are still shipping abortion drugs to Arkansans because of bad federal policies at the FDA and the Department of Justice. That's why we are working hard this summer and fall to stop abortion drugs at the national level. We are mobilizing Arkansans to make their voices heard, and we are joining federal court filings against abortion drugs.

Equipping Voters: Every one of us knows what it's like to be disappointed by a candidate we voted for. Bad politicians get elected by good people who either don't vote or don't vote wisely. That's why Family Council has produced the Arkansas Voter's Guide every election cycle since 1990. We survey the candidates on a wide variety of issues, and we publish their responses in print and online. Our team is working on the 2026 Arkansas Voter's Guide right now, and we plan to release it this fall.

Promoting Traditional Marriage: It's been 11 years since the U.S. Supreme Court nullified marriage laws across the nation in its *Obergefell* same-sex marriage ruling. Pro-LGBT groups keep saying *Obergefell* is the "law of the land" and that people need to support pro-LGBT policies. But some conservative, Christian leaders believe it may be possible to overturn *Obergefell* just like pro-lifers were able to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Family Council has always believed marriage ought to be the union of one man and one woman. That's why we are working with other state and national organizations to promote and affirm traditional marriage.

Protecting Children Online: Social media companies make billions of dollars from teenagers who use their technology, but a lot of what teens see on social media is harmful or dangerous. A number of lawmakers and organizations around the country believe Big Tech needs to be held accountable for the harm that it causes to kids. That's why Family Council is working hard this year to educate parents about the dangers of social media for children. Arkansas has passed good laws on this issue, but more needs to be done.

Defending Religious Liberty: Arkansas has been named number one in the nation on religious liberty, and our state legislators have passed some of the very best laws letting people live out their faith. But Arkansas needs to keep that number one ranking. That's why Family Council has a list of recommendations from our friends at First Liberty explaining how Arkansas' good religious freedom laws could be even better. By working with legislators over the next year, we can make sure Arkansas always protects the free exercise of religion.

There is a lot more that I just don't have room to tell you about, but we can't do any of this without help from our friends across the state. That's why I hope you will give a generous, tax-deductible donation to Family Council today, if you are able. I never want anyone to feel pressured to give. We have always trusted that God will meet our needs through His people. But I also recognize that most people may not realize we need their help unless I ask. I promise my team and I will work hard to stretch your gift as far as it will go to do the most good in Arkansas.

Thank you for your friendship and support. It's so good to have friends like you who believe in our work and stand by what we do. Please let me know if there is anything my staff or I can do for you.

Sincerely,

Jerry Cox, President

Thank you!!