



## Arkansas Families First

# An Opportunity Agenda for Arkansas Families

The Arkansas legislature recently passed \$102 million in tax cuts. The median wage earner in Arkansas will pay just under \$40 less per year in taxes with the plan. Low-income families saw no tax relief at all despite already being taxed more than any other income group. Legislators continue to propose further tax cuts for corporations and the wealthiest Arkansans, but this is the wrong priority for Arkansas today.

It's time to put Arkansas families' needs first in future spending. There are many options for our state dollars, but some things can give Arkansas families the best chance to get ahead:



# Our priorities

## SAFER COMMUNITIES:

Fix our parole system and create the reentry system the Department of Community Correction says we need to reduce recidivism, reduce our prison population and make our communities safer

- **Establish reentry centers:** Provide programming to equip inmates with the necessary skills for successful reentry during the last 6 months to one year of incarceration. Require reentry planning for all inmates being released from ADC and ACC.  
Cost: \$9.4 million
- **Fix our parole system:** Add ACC officers to reduce caseloads and improve supervision. Current caseload average for probation and parole officers is 118, far more than they can safely and effectively manage. Implement a case-management system and employ case managers in all facilities and parole areas to improve continuity of services and ensure inmates and offenders remain on track with their discharge plan. <http://www.dcc.arkansas.gov/publications/Documents/publications/Act-1190%20-%20Comprehensive-Final-Report.pdf>  
Cost: \$44.8 million
- **Fix holes in Arkansas' child welfare system** to give abused and neglected children the care and protection they need.  
Cost: \$10 million

## SMARTER COMMUNITIES:



- **Increase Pre-K Funding:** Arkansas' award winning pre-K program has not had a cost of living increase since 2008 and is overstretched. We need to invest in the most effective way to boost learning opportunities for all students. Children who participate in pre-K, particularly low-income children, are better prepared for kindergarten. 80 percent of brain development occurs before children enter kindergarten. Early experiences are the foundation on which all later learning is built. Investing at this early point provides the most efficient and effective intervention to insure later success in school. Every dollar invested in early childhood education provides a \$9.21 return in increased economic productivity because it helps create healthier, happier and more successful children.  
Cost: \$16 million

- **Afterschool and Summer Programs:** Arkansas students lose a lot of their learning gains in the Summer without a structured and safe environment to keep enhancing their learning. Many children do not have adequate after school care, or the tutoring and support they need to keep up with their peers. A pilot after-school and summer program would help demonstrate the value of afterschool and Summer programs to the state, while giving children the opportunities they need to excel.

Cost: \$4 million

- **School Breakfast Programs:** Hungry kids do not learn as well as they can, fueling the achievement gap for low-income kids. Kim Wilson, Arkansas Teacher of the Year 2012, said “I have had students who come to school and haven’t eaten since lunch the day before. Hungry students simply can’t focus and learn.” No child should be hungry at school and Arkansas can solve the problem with a stronger breakfast program in our schools and by continuing the Arkansas Meals for Achievement pilot program.

Cost: \$1 million



## ECONOMICALLY STRONG COMMUNITIES:

- **Create a state Earned Income Tax Credit:** Arkansas has one of the least fair tax systems in the country, taxing our poorest residents at twice the tax rate that we tax the wealthy. A state Earned Income Tax Credit would offer real relief to Arkansas' working poor and boost the economy for all Arkansans. EITCs are credits that reduce the amount of taxes that low-income families owe. The idea is to encourage work until, eventually, you earn enough that you don't qualify for the credits. The Federal EITC is championed by conservatives and liberals alike as a way to help working families escape poverty. EITCs did more to increase employment among single mothers than either welfare reform or economic recovery during the 1990s. Everyone benefits from working families getting EITC's too: every dollar of EITC refunds result in \$1.58 in total economic activity, and every \$37,000 supports a permanent job in the community.

<http://www.aradvocates.org/state-eitc-would-help-working-families/>

Cost: \$40 million.



## STRONGER DEMOCRACY:

- **Election Reform:** Our democracy would work better and build more confidence in our elections if we had better trained poll workers running our elections, required criminal background checks for candidates when they file for office and allowed same day voter registrations.  
Cost \$340 k

## INVESTING IN OUR FAMILIES AS A PRIORITY:

**A budget is a statement of values and priorities.** As state revenues increase we think Arkansas families and the policies they need to be successful should be our priority. We also think Arkansas should have a conversation about raising more revenue to make smart investments that create opportunities for families to be successful. We could consider a range of options from broadening the tax base for existing taxes, combined reporting to reduce the number of corporations hiding profits in out of state shell companies and reforming our tax system to create a more equitable structure that asks the wealthiest Arkansans to pay their fair share towards creating a better Arkansas. **Most importantly, as new proposals to cut revenue are considered we must ask what impacts those cuts will have on limiting opportunity for Arkansas families.**

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