



Newsletter From Rep. Matthew J. Shepherd

District 97

June 5, 2026

Keeping Families Together

June is National Family Reunification Month, a time to recognize the importance of keeping families together whenever it can be done safely and in the best interest of a child. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the work being done across Arkansas to support families before a crisis leads to foster care placement.

The House and Senate Children and Youth Committee recently received updates from the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Arkansas State Police Crimes Against Children Division, and Children's Advocacy Centers of Arkansas. While much of the discussion focused on child safety and investigations, the reports also highlighted the value of prevention and family preservation efforts.

One of the most encouraging findings came from DCFS's latest quarterly performance report. The report showed that children receiving prevention and in-home services overwhelmingly remain safely with their families. Among children who began receiving prevention services one year ago, none entered foster care within the following year. Among those receiving in-home services, only 11 percent entered foster care during that same timeframe.

The report also found that children receiving these services were unlikely to experience repeat maltreatment. Just two percent of children involved in prevention services and 10 percent of children receiving in-home services experienced maltreatment within one year of the start of services. These numbers demonstrate that early intervention and family support can make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and parents.

Of course, there are times when removal is necessary to protect a child. The committee also reviewed reports showing the continued efforts of investigators, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, child welfare professionals, and Children's Advocacy Centers working together to respond to allegations of abuse and neglect. National Family Reunification Month reminds us that child welfare is about more than responding after something goes wrong. It is also about strengthening families, addressing challenges early, and helping parents build safe and stable homes for their children.

