



Arkansas House Newsletter

December 13, 2019

Christmas in the Capitol



The holidays are a magical time at the State Capitol. Lights illuminate the exterior at night, the halls are draped with garland, and school choirs from across the state serenade us with carols throughout the day.

But there is one particular day in the season here that stands apart from the rest. On Tuesday, we celebrated the 5th year of Christmas in the Capitol. At this event, legislators gather with the Governor, constitutional officers, and state employees as we bring gifts for the more than 4,000 children in Arkansas foster care.

This year was the biggest yet. Several of the children were able to make it the event. And seeing their faces as they open the gifts is a humble reminder of our duty to them as legislators. As Rep. Charlene Fite said, "We love them. And we see a bright, bright future for them."

Earlier that day, the committee for Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs was given a quarterly report from the Division of Children and Family Services.

Currently, there are 4,362 children in foster care. Neglect and substance abuse are the most prevalent reasons for children entering foster care.

Additional funding for DHS approved by the legislature in recent years has helped to increase the number of caseworkers and decrease the average worker caseload. The average caseload statewide stands at 21 cases per worker. The Division's goal is 20 or fewer.

Arkansas consistently exceeds the national standard of 40.5% in finding a permanent living situation for children within 12 months removal from their home.

There are 1,502 licensed foster family homes open statewide, providing a total of 3,394 available beds. The ratio of foster home beds to children in foster care was less than one (.78) at the end of the first quarter. The goal is to have at least one foster home bed available for each child.

Kids in foster care do better in homes, not facilities. We need caring, patient, and flexible foster families who can provide temporary care to kids while we work to get them safely back home to their original families as quickly as possible.

While we need foster homes for all of our kids in foster care, we especially need homes for teens and for sibling groups.

If you are interested in becoming a foster parent, visit www.fosterarkansas.org.