State of Arkansas
87th General Assembly
Regular Session, 2009

A Bill

SENATE BILL 470

By: Senator Elliott
By: Representative Rainey

For An Act To Be Entitled
AN ACT TO CREATE A LEGISLATIVE TASKFORCE ON REDUCING POVERTY AND PROMOTING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Subtitle
AN ACT TO CREATE A LEGISLATIVE TASKFORCE ON REDUCING POVERTY AND PROMOTING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

SECTION 1. Findings.
The General Assembly finds that:

(1) The State of Arkansas has one of the highest child and overall poverty rates in the United States;

(2) Children and families who live in poverty are subject to a number of harsh realities that include without limitation:
   (A) Lacking the basic necessities of life;
   (B) Poorer educational outcomes such as dropping out of school before obtaining a high school degree;
   (C) Poorer health outcomes;
   (D) Reduced likelihood of employment;
   (E) Lower earnings; and
   (F) A greater likelihood of dying earlier in life;

(3) The State of Arkansas recognizes the moral and economic interest in reducing child and family poverty, and the potential impact of
reducing poverty on the well-being of its children, families, and local communities; and

(4) The State of Arkansas needs to develop innovative strategies and a roadmap for reducing poverty and promoting economic opportunity for its most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families.

SECTION 2. Arkansas Legislative Taskforce on Reducing Poverty and Promoting Economic Opportunity -- Creation -- Membership.

(a) There is created the “Arkansas Legislative Taskforce on Reducing Poverty and Promoting Economic Opportunity” to consist of twenty-two (22) members as follows:

(1) Seven (7) members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives as follows:

(A) Two (2) members of the House of Representatives;
(B) Two (2) members of the business community or economic development organizations;
(C) One (1) member of a faith-based organization;
(D) One (1) member who is an individual living at or near poverty; and
(E) One (1) member who is a city or county government official;

(2) Seven (7) members appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate as follows:

(A) Two (2) members of the Senate;
(B) Two (2) members of the business community or economic development organizations;
(C) One (1) member of a faith-based organization;
(D) One (1) member who is an individual living in or near poverty; and
(E) One (1) member who is a city or county government official;

(3) One (1) member to represent Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families;
(4) One (1) member to represent the Southern Good Faith Fund;
(5) One (1) member to represent the Arkansas Public Policy Panel;
(6) One (1) member to represent the labor community;

(7) One (1) member to represent the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance;

(8) One (1) member to represent the Arkansas Association of Community Action Agencies;

(9) One (1) member to represent Arkansas Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now; and

(10) One (1) member to represent a local community development corporation.

(b) The taskforce shall hold its first meeting no later than sixty (60) days after the adjournment of the regular session of the General Assembly.

(c) The members of the task force shall elect a chair.

(d) A majority of a quorum is necessary for the transaction of business.

(e) If any vacancy occurs on the task force, the vacancy shall be filled by the same process as the original appointment.

(h) The Bureau of Legislative Research shall provide staff for the task force.

SECTION 3. Arkansas Legislative Taskforce on Reducing Poverty and Promoting Economic Opportunity -- Powers and duties.

The Arkansas Legislative Taskforce on Reducing Poverty and Promoting Economic Opportunity shall:

(1) Identify the number of individuals living at or near the poverty level in the state, and among certain subpopulations, including without limitation:

   (A) Children;  
   (B) Households headed by single parents;  
   (C) The elderly; and  
   (D) Racial and ethnic minorities;  

(2) Identify the risk factors and underlying causes of poverty through consultation with experts, service providers, and individuals living at or near poverty;

(3) Examine the long-term effects of poverty on children, adults, families, and communities;
(4) Analyze and identify the costs of poverty to families, municipalities, and the state;

(5) Identify existing statewide public and private programs that address poverty, especially child poverty, and any deficiencies in statewide public and private programs;

(6) Identify and assess best practices, model programs, and strategies that existing research has proven to reduce poverty, including without limitation:

(A) Low and middle income tax policies including a state earned income tax credit;

(B) Education and workforce development policies;

(C) Asset development policies;

(D) Community and economic development policies;

(E) Citizen engagement strategies; and

(F) Work supports such as child care and health care.

(7) Recommend public policy strategies and legislation that have the potential to reduce poverty on a statewide or regional basis;

(8) Engage all state agencies to help determine the innovative roles each state agency, both individually and in cooperation, can play in the elimination of poverty;

(9) Explore the possible use of a Common Client Data base; and

(10) Establish measurable benchmarks for the elimination of poverty in the state by setting percentage reductions in the number of people living at or near poverty in the next five (5), ten (10), and twenty (20) years.

SECTION 4. Submission of Final Report and Recommendations

The Arkansas Legislative Taskforce on Reducing Poverty and Promoting Economic Opportunity shall submit its final report on “Recommendations for Reducing Child and Family Poverty and Promoting Economic Opportunity” to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate on or before November 1, 2010.

SECTION 5. Expiration.

The Arkansas Legislative Taskforce on Reducing Poverty and Promoting Economic Opportunity shall expire on December 31, 2010.