

INTERIM STUDY PROPOSAL 2019-165

REQUESTING THAT THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL REFER TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGING, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, LEGISLATIVE AND MILITARY AFFAIRS A STUDY REGARDING THE FEASIBILITY OF EXPANDING SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CHILDREN’S ADVOCACY CENTERS OF ARKANSAS.

WHEREAS, according to the 2019 Arkansas State Police Crimes Against Children Division Annual Report and the Annual Report Card produced for the Division of Children and Family Services for State Fiscal Year 2019, over thirty thousand (30,000) reports of child maltreatment were accepted by the Child Abuse Hotline; and

WHEREAS, according to the Annual Report Card produced for the Division of Children and Family Services for State Fiscal Year 2019, ninety-five percent (95%) of the reports of child maltreatment accepted by the Child Abuse Hotline were assigned for investigation by the Crimes Against Children Division or by the Division of Children and Family Services; and

WHEREAS, according to the Annual Report Card produced for the Division of Children and Family Services for State Fiscal Year 2019, over four thousand (4,000) children in true determinations were involved in allegations of physical abuse and sexual abuse; and

WHEREAS, Acts 2007, No. 703, § 5, otherwise known as the "Arkansas Child Safety Center Act", § 9-5-101 et seq., was enacted for the purpose of establishing a program that would provide a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, nonprofit, and coordinated response to the investigation of sexual abuse of children and serious physical abuse of children in Arkansas in a child-focused and child-friendly facility otherwise known as a "child safety center"; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of the Children’s Advocacy Centers of Arkansas is to promote, assist, and support the development, growth, and continuation of child safety centers in Arkansas so that every child in Arkansas who is a

1 victim of sexual abuse or physical abuse has access to the services of a
2 child safety center; and

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4 WHEREAS, child safety centers provide forensic interviews, forensic
5 medical examinations, and other specialized mental health services to
6 children in Arkansas who are victims of sexual abuse or physical abuse at no
7 cost to the children or their families; and

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9 WHEREAS, the services provided by child safety centers assist
10 prosecutors in securing the criminal convictions of perpetrators who have
11 committed acts of sexual abuse or physical abuse against a child; and

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13 WHEREAS, the Children's Advocacy Centers of Arkansas has experienced
14 steady growth since its formation on July 22, 1999, and there are now
15 seventeen (17) child safety centers and eight (8) satellite locations that
16 provide services to children in Arkansas who have been traumatized by
17 physical abuse or sexual abuse; and

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19 WHEREAS, in 2019, child safety centers collectively offered one (1) or
20 more services to more than seven thousand (7,000) children in Arkansas; and

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22 WHEREAS, there are several areas in Arkansas, including rural areas
23 with low-income communities and families, to which the services offered by
24 child safety centers cannot reasonably and feasibly extend unless the
25 Children's Advocacy Centers of Arkansas receives additional financial
26 assistance; and

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28 WHEREAS, in order for the Children's Advocacy Centers of Arkansas to
29 expand its services to the unreached areas of Arkansas and continue to
30 provide free services to children who are victims of physical abuse or sexual
31 abuse and to the families of these children, the financial resources of the
32 Children's Advocacy Centers of Arkansas would need to increase by
33 approximately six million dollars (\$6,000,000) per year; and

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35 WHEREAS, the provision of additional funding to the Children's Advocacy
36 Centers of Arkansas would facilitate:

1 (1) The expansion of services to areas across Arkansas that are
2 in need;

3 (2) An increase in the number of children served in Arkansas;

4 (3) An increase in the number of service providers and other
5 employees of the Children's Advocacy Centers of Arkansas, so that the quality
6 and consistency of the services provided by child safety centers remains
7 uncompromised;

8 (4) The customization of an in-depth analysis focused on the
9 development, growth, and improvement of the Children's Advocacy Centers of
10 Arkansas; and

11 (5) The provision of statewide training opportunities that
12 would enhance the skills of service providers,
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14 NOW THEREFORE,

15 BE IT PROPOSED BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF THE NINETY-SECOND GENERAL
16 ASSEMBLY:
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18 THAT the Legislative Council refer to the House Committee on Aging,
19 Children and Youth, and Legislative and Military Affairs a study regarding
20 the feasibility of expanding the services provided by the Children's Advocacy
21 Centers of Arkansas.
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24 Respectfully submitted,
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28 Representative Joe Jett
29 District 56
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36 Prepared by: JNL/JNL