

1 State of Arkansas
2 89th General Assembly
3 Regular Session, 2013
4

A Bill

HOUSE BILL 1510

5 By: Representatives D. Whitaker, Ferguson
6
7

For An Act To Be Entitled

9 AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE ARKANSAS BENEFIT CORPORATION
10 ACT; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.
11

Subtitle

12
13 TO ESTABLISH THE ARKANSAS BENEFIT
14 CORPORATION ACT.
15
16
17

18 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:
19

20 SECTION 1. Arkansas Code Title 4, is amended to add an additional
21 chapter to read as follows:

CHAPTER 36

ARKANSAS BENEFIT CORPORATION ACT

Subchapter 1 – Preliminary Provisions

4-36-101. Title.

26
27 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Arkansas Benefit
28 Corporation Act".
29

4-36-102. Application of chapter.

30
31 (a) This chapter shall apply to all benefit corporations.

32 (b) This chapter does not imply that a contrary statute applies to a
33 business corporation that is not a benefit corporation.

34 (c)(1) Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, the Arkansas
35 Business Corporation Act, § 4-27-101 et seq., is generally applicable to a
36 benefit corporation.



1 (2) Specific provisions of this chapter shall control over the
2 general provisions of the Arkansas Business Corporation Act, § 4-27-101 et
3 seq.

4 (3) A benefit corporation may be simultaneously subject to this
5 chapter and other statutes that provide for the incorporation of a specific
6 type of business corporation.

7 (d) The articles of incorporation or bylaws of a benefit corporation
8 shall not relax, be inconsistent with, or supersede this chapter.

9
10 4-36-103. Definitions.

11 (a) As used in this chapter:

12 (1)(A) "Benefit corporation" means a business corporation that
13 elects to be subject to this chapter.

14 (B) "Benefit corporation" does not include a corporation
15 whose status as a benefit corporation is terminated;

16 (2) "Benefit director" means the director designated as the
17 benefit director of a benefit corporation under § 4-36-302;

18 (3) "Benefit enforcement proceeding" means a claim or action
19 for:

20 (A) Failure of a benefit corporation to pursue a general
21 public benefit or a specific public benefit purpose as stated in its articles
22 of incorporation; or

23 (B) Violation of an obligation, duty, or standard of
24 conduct under this chapter;

25 (4) "Benefit officer" means the individual designated as the
26 benefit officer of a benefit corporation under § 4-36-304;

27 (5) "General public benefit" means a material positive impact on
28 society and the environment, taken as a whole, assessed against a third-party
29 standard, from the business and operations of a benefit corporation;

30 (6)(A) "Independent" means having no material relationship with
31 a benefit corporation or a subsidiary of the benefit corporation.

32 (B) A person shall not be independent even if serving as
33 benefit director or benefit officer.

34 (C) A material relationship between a person and a benefit
35 corporation or its subsidiaries is conclusively presumed to exist if:

36 (i) The person is, or has been in the last three (3)

1 years, an employee other than a benefit officer of the benefit corporation or
2 a subsidiary of the benefit corporation;

3 (ii) An immediate family member of the person is, or
4 has been in the last three (3) years, an executive officer other than a
5 benefit officer of the benefit corporation or its subsidiary; or

6 (iii) There is beneficial or record ownership of
7 five percent (5%) or more of the outstanding shares of the benefit
8 corporation by the person or an association:

9 (a) Of which the person is a director, an
10 officer, or a manager; or

11 (b) In which the person owns beneficially or
12 of record five percent (5%) or more of the outstanding equity interests;

13 (7) "Minimum status vote" means:

14 (A) In the case of a business corporation, in addition to
15 any other required approval or vote, the satisfaction of the following
16 conditions:

17 (i) The shareholders of a class or series may vote
18 as a class on the corporate action regardless of a limitation stated in the
19 articles of incorporation or bylaws on the voting rights of a class or
20 series; and

21 (ii) The corporate action shall be approved by vote
22 of the shareholders of each class or series entitled to cast at least two-
23 thirds (2/3) of the votes that all shareholders of the class or series are
24 entitled to cast on the action.

25 (B) In the case of a domestic entity other than a business
26 corporation, in addition to any other required approval, vote, or consent,
27 the satisfaction of the following conditions:

28 (i) The holders of a class or series of equity
29 interest in the entity that are entitled to receive a distribution from the
30 entity may vote on or consent to the action regardless of an otherwise
31 applicable limitation on the voting or consent rights of a class or series;
32 and

33 (ii) The action shall be approved by vote or consent
34 of the holders described in subdivision (7)(B)(i) of this section entitled to
35 cast at least two-thirds (2/3) of the votes or consents that all of those
36 holders are entitled to cast on the action;

1 (8) “Specific public benefit” means:

2 (A) Providing low-income or underserved individuals or
3 communities with beneficial products or services;

4 (B) Promoting economic opportunity for individuals or
5 communities beyond the creation of jobs in the normal course of business;

6 (C) Preserving the environment;

7 (D) Improving human health;

8 (E) Promoting the arts, sciences, or advancement of
9 knowledge;

10 (F) Increasing the flow of capital to entities with a
11 public benefit purpose; and

12 (G) Conferring a particular benefit on society or the
13 environment;

14 (9) “Subsidiary” means in relation to a person, an association
15 in which the person owns beneficially or of record fifty percent (50%) or
16 more of the outstanding equity interests; and

17 (10) “Third-party standard” means a recognized standard for
18 defining, reporting, and assessing corporate social and environmental
19 performance that is:

20 (A) Comprehensive in that it assesses the effect of the
21 business and its operations on the interests listed in § 4-36-301(a);

22 (B) Developed by an organization that is independent of
23 the benefit corporation and satisfies the following:

24 (i) Not more than one-third (1/3) of the members of
25 the governing body of the organization are representatives of:

26 (a) An association of businesses operating in
27 a specific industry, the performance of whose members is measured by the
28 standard;

29 (b) Businesses from a specific industry or an
30 association of businesses in that industry; or

31 (c) A business whose performance is assessed
32 against the standard; and

33 (ii) The organization is not materially financed by
34 an association or business described in subdivision (10)(B)(i) of this
35 section;

36 (C) Credible because the standard is developed by a person

1 that both:

2 (i) Has access to necessary expertise to assess
 3 overall corporate social and environmental performance; and

4 (ii) Uses a balanced multistakeholder approach,
 5 including a public comment period of at least thirty (30) days to develop the
 6 standard; and

7 (D) Transparent because the following information is
 8 publicly available:

9 (i) The standard criteria considered if measuring
 10 the overall social and environmental performance of a business;

11 (ii) The relative weighting factor of those
 12 criteria;

13 (iii) The development and revision of the standard:

14 (a) The identity of the directors, officers,
 15 material owners, and the governing body of the organization that developed
 16 and controls revisions to the standard; and

17 (b) The process by which revisions to the
 18 standard and changes to the membership of the governing body are made; and

19 (iv) An accounting of the sources of financial
 20 support for the organization, with sufficient detail to disclose a
 21 relationship that could reasonably be considered to present a potential
 22 conflict of interest.

23 (b) For purposes of the definitions of “independent” and “subsidiary”
 24 in subsection (a) of this section, a percentage of ownership in an entity is
 25 computed as if all outstanding rights to acquire equity interests in the
 26 association had been exercised.

27
 28 4-36-104. Formation of benefit corporations.

29 A benefit corporation shall be formed under the Arkansas Business
 30 Corporation Act, § 4-27-201 et seq., and its articles of incorporation shall
 31 state that it is a benefit corporation.

32
 33 4-36-105. Election of status.

34 (a) An existing business corporation may become a benefit corporation
 35 under this chapter by amending its articles of incorporation so that they
 36 contain, in addition to the requirements of § 4-27-202, a statement that the

1 corporation is a benefit corporation.

2 (b) To be effective, an amendment shall be adopted by at least the
 3 minimum status vote.

4 (c) This section applies if:

5 (1) An association that is not a benefit corporation is:

6 (A) Part of a merger, consolidation, or division; or

7 (B) The exchanging association in a share exchange.

8 (2) The surviving, new, or a resulting association in the
 9 merger, consolidation, division, or share exchange is to be a benefit
 10 corporation.

11 (d) To be effective, a plan of merger, consolidation, division, or
 12 share exchange subject to this section shall be adopted by at least the
 13 minimum status vote as defined in § 4-36-103(a)(7).

14
 15 4-36-106. Termination of status.

16 (a) A benefit corporation may end its benefit corporation status and
 17 not be subject to this chapter by amending its articles of incorporation to
 18 delete the statement in the articles of incorporation required by § 4-36-105
 19 to be stated in the articles of incorporation of a benefit corporation.

20 (b) To be effective, the amendment shall be adopted by at least the
 21 minimum status vote.

22 (c) If a plan would have the effect of terminating the status of a
 23 business corporation as a benefit corporation, to be effective, the plan
 24 shall be adopted by at least the minimum status vote.

25 (d) A sale, lease, exchange, or other disposition of all or a
 26 substantial part of the assets of a benefit corporation, unless the
 27 transaction is in the usual and regular course of business, shall not be
 28 effective unless the transaction is approved by at least the minimum status
 29 vote.

30
 31 Subchapter 2 – Corporate Purposes

32 4-36-201. Corporate purposes.

33 (a) A benefit corporation shall have a purpose of creating a general
 34 public benefit and it is in addition to its purpose under § 4-36-103(a)(5).

35 (b)(1) The articles of incorporation of a benefit corporation may
 36 identify one (1) or more specific public benefits that it is the purpose of

1 the benefit corporation to pursue in addition to its purposes under § 4-36-
2 103(a)(5) and subsection (a) of this section.

3 (2) The identification of a specific public benefit under this
4 subsection does not limit the obligation of a benefit corporation under
5 subsection (a) of this section.

6 (c) The creation of a general public benefit and a specific public
7 benefit under subsections (a) and (b) of this section is in the best
8 interests of the benefit corporation.

9 (d)(1) A benefit corporation may amend its articles of incorporation
10 to add, amend, or delete the identification of a specific public benefit that
11 it is the purpose of the benefit corporation to pursue.

12 (2) To be effective, the amendment shall be adopted by at least
13 the minimum status vote.

14 (e) A professional corporation that is a benefit corporation does not
15 violate the Arkansas Professional Corporation Act, § 4-29-201 et seq., by
16 having the purpose to pursue a general public benefit or a specific public
17 benefit.

18
19 Subchapter 3 – Accountability

20 4-36-301. Standard of conduct for directors.

21 (a) In discharging the duties of their respective positions and in
22 considering the best interests of the benefit corporation, the board of
23 directors, committees of the board, and individual directors of a benefit
24 corporation:

25 (1) Shall consider the effects of an action or inaction on:

26 (A) The shareholders of the benefit corporation;

27 (B) The employees and work force of the benefit
28 corporation, its subsidiaries, and its suppliers;

29 (C) The interests of customers as beneficiaries of the
30 general public benefit or specific public benefit purposes of the benefit
31 corporation;

32 (D) Community and societal factors, including those of
33 each community in which offices or facilities of the benefit corporation, its
34 subsidiaries, or its suppliers are located;

35 (E) The local and global environment;

36 (F) The short-term and long-term interests of the benefit

1 corporation, including benefits that may accrue to the benefit corporation
2 from its long-term plans and the possibility that these interests may be best
3 served by the continued independence of the benefit corporation; and

4 (G) The ability of the benefit corporation to accomplish
5 its general public benefit purpose and a specific public benefit purpose;

6 (2) May consider other pertinent factors or the interests of a
7 group that they consider appropriate; and

8 (3) Need not give priority to the interests of a particular
9 person or group referred to in subsection (a)(1) or (a)(2) of this section
10 over the interests of a person or group unless the benefit corporation has
11 stated in its articles of incorporation its intention to give priority to
12 certain interests related to its accomplishment of its general public benefit
13 purpose or of a specific public benefit purpose identified in its articles of
14 incorporation.

15 (b) The consideration of interests and factors required by subsection
16 (a) of this section does not constitute a violation of § 4-27-801.

17 (c) A director is not personally liable for monetary damages for:

18 (1) Action taken as a director if the director performed the
19 duties of office in compliance with § 4-27-801; or

20 (2) Failure of the benefit corporation to pursue a general
21 public benefit or a specific public benefit.

22 (d) A director does not have a duty to a person that is a beneficiary
23 of a general public benefit purpose or a specific public benefit purpose of a
24 benefit corporation arising from the status of the person as a beneficiary.

25
26 4-36-302. Benefit director.

27 (a) The board of directors of a benefit corporation shall include a
28 director who:

29 (1) Is designated the benefit director; and

30 (2) Has the powers, duties, rights, and immunities provided in
31 this subchapter in addition to the powers, duties, rights, and immunities of
32 the other directors of the benefit corporation.

33 (b)(1) The benefit director is elected and may be removed under § 4-
34 27-803.

35 (2) The benefit director shall be an independent individual.

36 (c) The benefit director may serve concurrently as the benefit officer

1 and the benefit director.

2 (d) The articles of incorporation or bylaws of a benefit corporation
3 may prescribe additional qualifications of the benefit director not
4 inconsistent with this section.

5 (e) The benefit director shall prepare and the benefit corporation
6 shall include in the annual benefit report to shareholders as required by §
7 4-36-401 the opinion of the benefit director on:

8 (1) If the benefit corporation acted under its general public
9 benefit purpose and a specific public benefit purpose in all material
10 respects during the period covered by the report;

11 (2) If the directors complied with § 4-36-301(a) and the
12 officers complied with § 4-36-303(a); and

13 (3) If the benefit corporation or its directors or officers
14 failed to comply with this section, including a description of the ways in
15 which the benefit corporation or its directors or officers failed to comply.

16 (f) The action or inaction of an individual in the capacity of a
17 benefit director is an action or inaction of that individual in the capacity
18 of a director of the benefit corporation.

19 (g) Regardless of whether the bylaws of a benefit corporation include
20 a provision eliminating or limiting the personal liability of directors
21 authorized by § 4-26-811, a benefit director shall not be personally liable
22 for an act or omission in the capacity of a benefit director unless the act
23 or omission constitutes self dealing, willful misconduct, or a knowing
24 violation of law.

25 (h) The benefit director of a professional corporation does not need
26 to be independent.

27
28 4-36-303. Standard of conduct for officers.

29 (a) An officer of a benefit corporation shall consider the interests
30 and factors described in § 4-36-301 if:

31 (1) The officer has discretion to act with respect to a matter;
32 and

33 (2) It reasonably appears to the officer that the matter may
34 have a material effect on the creation by the benefit corporation of a
35 general public benefit or a specific public benefit identified in the
36 articles of incorporation of the benefit corporation.

1 (b) The consideration of interests and factors described in subsection
2 (a) of this section shall not constitute a violation of § 4-27-841.

3 (c) An officer is not personally liable for monetary damages for:

4 (1) An action or omission as an officer if the officer performed
5 the duties of the position in compliance with § 4-27-841 and this section; or

6 (2) Failure of the benefit corporation to pursue a general
7 public benefit or a specific public benefit.

8 (d) An officer does not have a duty to a person that is a beneficiary
9 of a general public benefit purpose or a specific public benefit purpose of a
10 benefit corporation arising from the status of the person as a beneficiary.

11
12 4-36-304. Benefit officer.

13 (a) A benefit corporation may have an officer designated as the
14 benefit officer.

15 (b) A benefit officer shall have:

16 (1) The powers and duties relating to the purpose of the
17 corporation to pursue a general public benefit or a specific public benefit
18 provided:

19 (A) By the bylaws; or

20 (B) Absent controlling provisions in the bylaws, by
21 resolutions or orders of the board of directors; and

22 (2) The duty to prepare the benefit report required by § 4-36-
23 401.

24
25 4-36-305. Right of action.

26 (a) Except in a benefit enforcement proceeding, a person may not bring
27 an action or assert a claim against a benefit corporation or its directors or
28 officers with respect to:

29 (1) Failure to pursue a general public benefit or a specific
30 public benefit stated in its articles of incorporation; or

31 (2) Violation of a duty or standard of conduct under this
32 chapter.

33 (b) A benefit corporation shall not be liable for monetary damages
34 under this chapter for the failure of the benefit corporation to pursue a
35 general public benefit or a specific public benefit.

36 (c) A benefit enforcement proceeding may begin and be maintained only:

- 1 (1) Directly by the benefit corporation; or
2 (2) Derivatively by:
3 (A) A shareholder;
4 (B) A director;
5 (C) A person or group of persons that owns beneficially or
6 of record five percent (5%) or more of the equity interest in an entity of
7 which the benefit corporation is a subsidiary; or
8 (D) Other persons as named in the articles of
9 incorporation or bylaws of the benefit corporation.

10
11 Subchapter 4 – Transparency

12 4-36-401. Annual benefit report.

13 (a) A benefit corporation shall prepare an annual benefit report
14 including:

15 (1) A narrative description of:

16 (A) The ways in which the benefit corporation pursued the
17 general public benefit during the year and the extent to which the general
18 public benefit was pursued;

19 (B) Both:

20 (i) The ways in which the benefit corporation
21 pursued a specific public benefit that the articles of incorporation state is
22 the purpose of the benefit corporation to pursue; and

23 (ii) The extent to which that specific public
24 benefit was pursued;

25 (C) Circumstances that have hindered the creation by the
26 benefit corporation of a general public benefit or a specific public benefit;
27 and

28 (D) The process and rationale for selecting or changing
29 the third-party standard used to prepare the benefit report;

30 (2) An assessment of the overall social and environmental
31 performance of the benefit corporation against a third-party standard:

32 (A) Applied consistently with an application of that
33 standard in earlier benefit reports;

34 (B) Accompanied by an explanation of the reasons for an
35 inconsistent application; or

36 (C) The assessment does not need to be performed, audited,

1 or certified by a third-party standards provider;

2 (3) The name of the benefit director and the benefit officer and
3 the address to which correspondence to each of them may be directed;

4 (4) The compensation paid by the benefit corporation during the
5 year to each director working in the capacity of a director;

6 (5) The name of each person that owns five percent (5%) or more
7 of the outstanding shares of the benefit corporation, either:

8 (A) Beneficially, to the extent known to the benefit
9 corporation without independent investigation; or

10 (B) Of record;

11 (6) The statement of the benefit director described in § 4-36-
12 302; and

13 (7) A statement of the connection between the organization that
14 established the third-party standard or its directors, officers, or a holder
15 of five percent (5%) or more of the governance interests in the organization,
16 and the benefit corporation or its directors, officers, or a holder of five
17 percent (5%) or more of the outstanding shares of the benefit corporation,
18 including a financial or governance relationship that may materially affect
19 the credibility of the use of the third-party standard.

20 (b) A benefit corporation shall send a benefit report to each
21 shareholder annually:

22 (1) Within one hundred twenty (120) days after the end of the
23 fiscal year of the benefit corporation; or

24 (2) When the benefit corporation delivers the annual report to
25 its shareholders.

26 (c)(1) A benefit corporation shall post all of its benefit reports on
27 the public part of its Internet website.

28 (2) The compensation paid to a director and a financial or
29 proprietary informationist included in the benefit reports may be omitted
30 from the benefit reports as posted.

31 (d)(1) If a benefit corporation does not have a website, the benefit
32 corporation shall provide a copy of its most recent benefit report, without
33 charge, to a person who requests a copy.

34 (2) The compensation paid to directors and financial or
35 proprietary informationist included in the benefit report may be omitted from
36 the copy of the benefit report provided.

1 (e)(1) Concurrently with the delivery of the benefit report to
2 shareholders under subsection (b) of this section, the benefit corporation
3 shall deliver a copy of the benefit report to the Secretary of State for
4 filing.

5 (2) The compensation paid to directors and financial or
6 proprietary informationist included in the benefit report may be omitted from
7 the benefit report as delivered to the Secretary of State.

8 (3)(A) The Secretary of State shall charge a fee of seventy
9 dollars (\$70.00) for filing a benefit report.

10 (B) A benefit corporation may change from year to year the
11 standard it uses under subsection (a) of this section for assessing its
12 performance.

13 (C) If a benefit corporation uses the same standard for
14 assessing its performance in more than one (1) year, the standard is applied
15 consistently or the benefit corporation shall provide an explanation of the
16 reasons for an inconsistent use of the standard.

17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36