



STATE OF ARKANSAS

House of Representatives

NEWSLETTER FROM REP. Deborah Ferguson DISTRICT 63

April 7, 2023

FINAL WEEK OF THE 2023 REGULAR SESSION

In the final week of the 2023 Regular Session, the House passed a criminal justice reform bill, a tax cut, and a budget that increases spending in education and public safety.

The House passed [SB549](#). This bill will reduce the state's top income tax rate from 4.9% to 4.7%. It also reduces the corporate income tax rate from 5.3% to 5.1%. The reductions will be retroactive to January 1, 2023.

The House also passed [SB495](#), the Protect Arkansas Act. This bill makes several felony offenses ineligible for early release from prison. Those offenses include capital murder, murder in the first degree, aggravated robbery, rape, and several crimes against children.

It also classifies several other offenses as restricted release felonies. After January 1, 2025, a person convicted of a restricted release felony would have to serve 85% of their sentence before being eligible for early release.

Restricted release felonies include murder in the second degree, manslaughter, negligent homicide, battery in the first degree, and sexual indecency with a child.

Another bill we passed this week creates the Social Media Safety Act. It requires age verification for use of social media and parental consent for minors.

The House adopted [HJR1006](#). This resolution is a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow lottery proceeds to provide scholarships and grants to Arkansans enrolled in vocational-technical schools and technical institutes. This proposal will now appear on the November 2024 ballot.

And one of the final items of business we address every session is the budget. This year we passed a \$6.2 billion balanced budget.

The biggest increases in funding are directed to the public school fund and the Division of Correction. The budget also includes \$31.7 million for Educational Freedom Accounts.

The House also passed [SB578](#). This bill outlines one-time spending of state surplus funds. It directs \$250 million to educational facilities, \$330 million to correctional facilities, and \$200 million to the state crime lab.

You can review all of the legislation passed during this session and watch recorded committees and House floor proceedings at arkansashouse.org.