



Newsletter From Rep. Matthew J. Shepherd

District 97

March 21, 2025

Week 10 of the 2025 Regular Session

As the 2025 Regular Session of the Arkansas General Assembly enters its 11th week, the House has been advancing legislation designed to address infrastructure, election processes, and public health.

One of the bills to pass this week was **HB1681**, which establishes the *Water and Sewer Treatment Facilities Grant Program*. This initiative creates a \$50 million matching grant system aimed at improving water and sewer infrastructure across the state. With 80% of the funding allocated to "shovel-ready" projects, and the remaining 20% directed towards small towns and rural systems serving fewer than 1,200 customers, the program seeks to ensure that communities have the resources needed to address critical water and sewer needs. The grants will be funded by interest earnings from state funds. Another piece of legislation approved was **SB307**. This bill allows utility companies to implement incremental rate adjustments as they begin construction on investments aimed at increasing the state's generation capacity.

The House also passed several bills regarding the state's election processes. Among them was **HB1574**, which requires paid canvassers for statewide initiative or referendum petitions to be residents of Arkansas. **HB1693** directs the State Board of Election Commissioners to establish rules for duplicating damaged or defective ballots. Additionally, **SB304** passed, allowing voters to cast a ballot after changing their county of residence—provided their updated registration is received by the county clerk before polls close on election day. **HB1713** mandates that the Attorney General cannot certify a proposed ballot title if its reading level exceeds eighth grade, according to the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formula.

In response to growing concerns about the impact of social media on minors, **HB1726** creates the *Arkansas Kids Online Safety Act*. This bill requires technology platforms to take reasonable measures to protect minors from harmful content that could contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and substance abuse.

