STATE OF ARKANSAS
House of Representatives

Newsletter From Rep. Diana Gonzales Worthen
District 9

August 15, 2025

Legislative Update

The Arkansas Legislature had a full schedule this week, as the Arkansas Legislative Council (ALC) and its subcommittees met, as well as the House and Senate City, County, and Local Affairs Committees. The ALC approved the recommendations from the Employee Benefits Division for 2026 health insurance rates for state and school employees. Rates will remain unchanged for active employees, while Medicare-eligible retirees in United Healthcare's Medicare Advantage and Health Advantage supplemental plans will see a $6 monthly increase. In response to recent flooding in Texas, the Game and Fish/State Police Subcommittee will conduct a study on Arkansas' emergency flood preparedness. Arkansas State Police Director Col. Mike Hagar also briefed the subcommittee on the recent homicide at Devil's Den State Park.

The Council approved proposed changes to how public school letter grades and performance awards are determined. Under the new rules, grades will be based on:

- **Elementary/Middle Schools:** Proficiency in English, math, and science; individual growth; and growth of the lowest-performing 25%.
- **High Schools:** These measures, plus graduation rate and diplomas of merit/distinction tied to enrollment, enlistment, or employment.

Grades will be assigned relative to the performance of other Arkansas schools, not strictly by raw percentage scores. The House and Senate City, County, and Local Affairs committees met in Rogers this week and reviewed prison capacity needs. The state's inmate population—currently about 20,000—is projected to grow 2% annually, reaching roughly 25,000 by 2035. Members were told the Protect Arkansas Act will require 1,500–2,000 additional beds by 2040.