



NICK CARTWRIGHT

State Senate, District 18

Prior to running for office, Nick Cartwright has worked as a policy associate for Community Farm Alliance, a community organizer, and a city councilmember and served as the chair of the Democratic Party for White County.

What is the biggest issue facing the state of Arkansas and how would you address this problem if elected?

Basic needs are not being met and that is the biggest issue Arkansas faces. I define basic needs as the things needed by an individual family or person to survive and have a chance to thrive. For me basic needs encompass: housing, clean water and air, healthcare, food access, good paying jobs, and an excellent education. If elected, I would work in each of these basic need areas to ensure we are investing in public programs to truly get at the root of these problems and address them with equitable solutions. This will require fixing our tax structures to benefit the poor and working class people in our state – not corporations and the wealthy. After that, we can create or build up already existing programs to meet people's basic needs in every single zip code.

What would be your top 3 priorities for utilizing the surplus budget in Arkansas, if you had full power over the surplus?

If I had full power, I would use the budget surplus for these top priorities: 1) excellently funding public schools (including teacher and staff pay raises), 2) investing in rural communities (jobs, broadband, public services), and 3) tackle the climate crisis (help for Arkansas farmers and young farmers program, ramp up solar investments, and public transportation investments).

How do you define public safety and what changes would you make to keep all communities safe?

Public safety is the approach we take as a society and government to keep everyone in a community safe, comfortable, and alive. We should live in communities where we truly strive for safety in our communities and seek solutions for that instead of fighting against symptoms we can never defeat. We need to overhaul our criminal justice system everywhere but especially at the state and local levels. We need to stop the attacks on marginalized communities and lift everyone up with opportunity and ensuring their basic needs are met.

What (if any) changes do you believe are needed to the criminal legal system in Arkansas?

Aside from the answers in the things below, I think the main changes I would like to see are: The death penalty abolished; legalized marijuana and expunging of any past records/releasing current prisoners for anything related to marijuana; more court capacity to ensure everyone is treated fairly and equally under the law; end cash bail practices; focus more on community-building, meeting needs, and mutual aid than patrols and typical traditional police practices. And I would like to see the eviction process change to not being made a criminal offense.

The Arkansas Public Defenders Commission has been underfunded for many years. Would you support increasing funding to help bring the department in line with American Bar Association recommendations which cap caseloads at 150 felony cases per attorney? Why or why not?

Yes. Everyone deserves legal representation and this is a program that should never be underfunded considering it is a right to have an attorney. It would also mean that caseloads can be reduced and special attention given to each person during their hearings. Your fate should not be determined ahead of time because you can't afford the "best" lawyers. We need to ensure public defenders have everything they need to help our communities families navigate a complex legal system.

It has become common knowledge across the state of Arkansas that those facing health conditions concerning addiction and mental health are located at an increasing rate in the state prisons and local county jails. What solutions do you feel should be explored in this area?

We need to explore a public place that is not prison or jail - but more of a rehabilitation-style program for those who struggle with addiction and mental health which led to committing a crime or being arrested. We need more attention on social workers and health professionals working for cities or counties (and the state) so that police aren't the ones called to situations better handled by professionals in their field. We need better police training if they are the ones called out to know how to handle those with these conditions so that they aren't just arresting people for the wrong reasons. Finally, we need more fair judges who understand situations like these and aren't just looking to "punish" people - as if that solves anything.

Research indicates that juveniles that encounter the justice system in their youth will have a higher likelihood of entanglement with the adult criminal justice system. What strategies do you support to decrease this likelihood?

We can start by not having police in schools where many of these encounters happen. But we need to get to the root of the problem which is: excellently funding public schools and communities so that there are youth programs and activities going on and accessible; ensuring families and anyone looking after a kid have their basic needs met and resources to successfully raise children; programs to help intervene in situations with youth entanglements before they become illegal/caught; ending the war on drugs; and a fair justice system that doesn't treat youth and juveniles like adults when their brains aren't fully formed.

Neuroscience research has indicated that the human brain is not fully formed until approximately age 25, meaning that impulse control and long-term thinking can be impaired. Would you consider reclassifying how Arkansas young adults are treated in the adult system? Are there specific adjustments that should/could be made?

Yes. I would be open to looking at raising the age to young people being considered as adults when it comes to committing a crime. I think there should be a different focus on young adults (and really with anyone) toward rehab in a way that doesn't harm their life but sets them on a better path after intervention.

Do you think we have a “parole problem” and how would you address it?

No. I think we have too many people in prison and we need to seriously think about how we “punish” people, if that is working (it's not), and especially re-thinking non-violent crimes. We need to make our communities safer and help people who are put in these positions, not look to keep them in a cage to just make us feel safe when it doesn't actually work.

The Arkansas Department of Corrections identified reducing solitary confinement —a practice labeled torture under international law— as a major objective in their 2021-2022 Strategic Plan, however the number of people held in isolation continues to grow. Do you agree with the need to reduce solitary confinement in our state? Why or why not?

Yes! It is torture, doesn't work, and is extremely cruel. We need to treat people like humans -- it needs to be abolished in this state and country.