Fund IRL ARKANSAS

Real Opportunities. Stronger Futures.

INVESTING IN ARKANSAS KIDS BEYOND THE SCREEN.

AFTERSCHOOL | SUMMER | MENTORING | SPORTS | YOUTH WELLNESS | OUTDOOR LEARNING

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 20, 2026

Fund IRL Arkansas Launches Statewide Campaign to Invest in Arkansas Kids

Young people, parents and program coordinators shared powerful testimony, calling for meaningful investment of Arkansas' Meta settlement in programs that help children thrive beyond the screen.

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Fund IRL Arkansas launched its statewide campaign Tuesday, Nov. 17, at the Arkansas State University System Office in Little Rock. Young people, parents, program coordinators and community leaders came together to urge Arkansas to invest a portion of its historic $172 million Meta settlement in youth programming, mental health support and community resources.

Arkansas State University System President Dr. Todd Shields welcomed attendees. Coalition leaders Dr. Laveta Wills-Hale, director of the Arkansas Out of School Network, and Sophia Stephenson, executive director of the Arkansas Environmental Education Association, shared Fund IRL Arkansas's vision for expanding opportunities for children and teens across the state. Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin, who led the state's effort to secure the settlement, delivered a special video message while on military duty.

Powerful firsthand testimony from young people, parents and program coordinators was at the center of the kickoff. Their stories underscored the importance of safe places to spend time outside school, trusted adults young people can turn to, and access to mental health support in communities across the state. The coalition is advocating for investments in afterschool and summer programs, mentoring, youth mental health and wellness, outdoor learning, and other community-based resources. It is also calling for wider access in rural and underserved communities, where cost, transportation and limited program availability can make it harder for families to participate.

"The most powerful moments of the kickoff came from the children and parents who told us, in their own words, what these programs mean to them," said Dr. Laveta Wills-Hale, director of the Arkansas Out of School Network and a Fund IRL Arkansas coalition lead. "Seeing a room full of people show up to listen and stand behind those families made this kickoff a success. Now we need to carry their voices into the decisions Arkansas makes about the settlement. This movement is about making sure more young people have a safe place to go, an adult they can count on and support when they need it."

Over 50 organizations have signed on to the coalition as supporters. Fund IRL Arkansas invites young people, families, educators and community organizations to join the coalition and help shape its advocacy priorities at irlarkansas.org.

Fund IRL ARKANSAS

Real Opportunities. Stronger Futures.

INVESTING IN ARKANSAS KIDS BEYOND THE SCREEN.

AFTERSCHOOL | SUMMER | MENTORING | SPORTS | YOUTH WELLNESS | OUTDOOR LEARNING

About Fund IRL Arkansas

Fund IRL Arkansas is a statewide coalition that advocates for investing resources recovered through social media litigation in programs that support the health, development and well-being of Arkansas children and teens. It is part of the national Fund IRL (In Real Life) movement. Coalition partners include the Arkansas Out of School Network, Arkansas State University Childhood Services, the Arkansas Environmental Education Association and the Arkansas Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs.

Media contact

Dr. Laveta Wills-Hale
Director, Arkansas Out of School Network
Coalition Lead, Fund IRL Arkansas
(501) 660-1012
lwillshale@irlarkansas.org