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Safe Haven Baby Box Billboard Comes to Benton County

BENTONVILLE – Arkansas Right to Life is continuing a campaign to promote the Safe Haven Law and Safe Haven Baby Boxes across Arkansas with an electronic billboard in Bentonville, said Rose Mimms, executive director of Arkansas Right to Life. The goal of the campaign is to place a billboard in each of Arkansas' 75 counties.

The Bentonville billboard is currently running for four weeks from June 29-July 26. The billboard is located at the intersection of 14th Street and South Walton and has average weekly impressions of more than 27,000.

Mimms said the Arkansas Right to Life Safe Haven Baby Box billboard campaign is funded through donations, adding that the Knights of Columbus organization has been instrumental in providing sponsorship and funding for several billboard locations.

The first Safe Haven Baby Box in Arkansas was dedicated in September 2019 at Fire Station No. 3 in Benton. The first newborn was surrendered at the Benton location on May 24. Other Safe Haven Baby Box locations are in the works, said Mimms, adding that hospitals and law enforcement agencies also serve as surrender locations.

Since the first Safe Haven Baby Box billboard campaign began in Harrison in June 2019, billboards have been placed or will soon be placed in 19 Arkansas counties. In addition to the newest billboard in Bentonville, billboards recently ran in Blytheville and Mena, and Safe Haven Baby Box billboards continue to run in Cleburne, Conway, Faulkner and Searcy counties. Billboards are set to launch in Franklin and Johnson counties beginning July 20.

The Safe Haven Law, enacted in Arkansas in 2001, is designed to protect babies from being hurt or killed from abandonment by parents who are unwilling or unable to provide parenting. Under the law, a parent may give up an infant anonymously at a hospital emergency room or law enforcement agency, but in 2019 the law was amended to include manned fire stations as a surrender location. The amended law sponsored by Arkansas Sen. Cecile Bledsoe and Rep. Rebecca Petty also approved the installation of Safe Haven Baby Boxes at surrender locations.

Mimms said the billboard campaign's purpose is threefold: 1) to educate the general public and parents about the Safe Haven Law, 2) to advise manned fire departments that they are now an

official surrender location and 3) to promote the option of Safe Haven Baby Boxes for parents who want or need total anonymity in the safe surrender of their baby.

Every state has a Safe Haven Law, but provisions vary from state to state, said Mimms. The Arkansas Safe Haven Law allows a parent to bring a child 30 days old or younger to an official surrender location without facing prosecution of endangerment and abandonment of a child. The law does not prohibit prosecution for abuse or neglect of the child that occurred before the child was given up to a medical provider or law enforcement agency.

Once a baby is surrendered, the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is contacted immediately and the child treated medically. DCFS will assume responsibility for the child and place the child with a “forever” family.

The DCFS maintains a website, public service announcements, and materials in both English and Spanish to help educate the public about the Arkansas Safe Haven law.

“Arkansas Right to Life joins the effort with our support of the law to add manned fire departments and the installation of Safe Haven Baby Boxes in Arkansas through our educational billboard campaign,” said Mimms.

Organizations or individuals wishing to support the Safe Haven Baby Box billboard campaign may visit artl.org/donate or mail a tax-deductible gift to Arkansas Right to Life Educational Trust Fund (note Billboard Campaign in check or online), Box 1697, Little Rock, AR 72203-1697.

For more information or questions about the campaign contact Mimms at (501) 663-4237 or email artl4237@att.net.

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Arkansas Right to Life is the state affiliate of the National Right to Life Committee the oldest and largest pro-life organization. For more information visit <https://artl.org/>.