

featured

Students, leaders rally at Capitol

By Log Cabin Democrat

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Dozens of college students, faculty, state officials and advocates gather on the Capitol steps Monday for the Save AR Students 2021 Fall Kickoff Rally.

Submitted photos

Dozens of college students, faculty, state officials, and advocates gathered on the Capitol steps Monday for the Save AR Students 2021 Fall Kickoff Rally. Speakers including Arkansas Surgeon General Dr. Gregory Bledsoe, Attorney General Leslie Rutledge, and State Drug Director Kirk Lane addressed ways to end substance misuse for the college students of Arkansas.

The rally kicked off the Fall 2021 Save AR Students week in Arkansas, which engages college students, their families, collegiate faculty and administration, and all Arkansans to learn how to prevent substance misuse in the collegiate communities.

Speakers at the rally brought attention to the opioid epidemic in Arkansas, the added strain that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought, and the need for Arkansans to come together to help people struggling with addiction.

Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Cindy Gillespie thanked students for working to bring attention to the dangers of substance misuse.

“Unless we do something about addiction, the future of Arkansas isn’t going to look that good,” Gillespie said. “And I think it’s really amazing that you are taking this on and taking it on now. I see it every day at DHS: There is no greater equalizer, unfortunately, than addiction. It really doesn’t care. It doesn’t care what your race is, it doesn’t care what your income is, it doesn’t care if you’re in college or not, it doesn’t care what you sacrificed to get to where you are. Addiction hits, and when it hits, your life changes.”

Lane, meanwhile, told the crowd the event is aimed at “empowering students to be today’s leaders, today’s role models and tomorrow’s community and state leaders.” The mission is important, he stressed, because the problem is significant.

“Arkansas is struggling with the rising statistics concerning substance use disorder,” Lane said. “The stress of COVID, the surge in illicit fentanyl and increased normalization of drug use is fueling overdose and overdose deaths in our state. It’s safe to say with illicit fentanyl now in our streets throughout Arkansas and our country, that any drug use could be your last. (It) could be a fatal drug use.”

The event was sponsored by the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health Services (DAABHS) which, along with state partners represented at the rally, provides education and treatment options for Arkansans with addiction.

Speakers at the Save AR Students Rally included:

Dr. Gregory H. Bledsoe, Surgeon General

Leslie Rutledge, Attorney General

Cindy Gillespie, Department of Human Services Secretary

Johnny Key, Department of Education Secretary

Kirk Lane, State Drug Director

Jay Hill, DHS Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health Services Director

Tenesha Barnes, DAABHS Prevention, Substance Abuse Prevention Director

Steven Gray, DAABHS Prevention, Substance Abuse Collegiate Program Coordinator

Kyle Brewer, NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, Peer Specialist Program Manager

Dr. Cheryl D. Jackson-Golden – Assistant to Director & Assistant Professor of Addiction Studies Program

Anthony Tidwell – Regional Prevention Provider

Learn more about the Save AR Students campaign and participating partners statewide at human.services.arkansas.gov/divisions-shared-services/aging-adult-behavioral-health-services/save-ar-students.

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