



2024 State of the City Address  
*The Honorable Frank Scott, Jr.*  
73<sup>rd</sup> Mayor of the City of Little Rock

Good evening, Little Rock! Thank you to my friends for the warm welcome and introduction. I appreciate Senator Joyce Elliott, Jay Chesshir, Gabe Holmstrom, Warren Stephens, Darrin Williams, Dr. Jermall Wright, Ambassador Giralt, Summer Campbell, and the two-time state champions - Parkview Patriots! Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to collaborate with us as we share our vision for this great city we all call home. Whether you are here with us in person or watching online or on LRTV, welcome. Thank you for joining us today.

Friends, did you know that Forbes named this very site, yes, our very own Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, located right here in MacArthur Park in Downtown Little Rock as the “most inviting” art museum? It’s a jewel for our city, an anchor for downtown; and I’m grateful to Dr. Ramirez and her team for hosting us this evening.

As always, we are also grateful for the leadership and support of the Little Rock Board of Directors. Thank you for being here today to demonstrate our unity and strength.

Unity and strength. If there are two words that best represent the last year in our great city, those words are unity and strength. We have withstood trials and heartbreak together, unified by the enduring spirit of our community, with the grit and determination that make us all **Little Rock proud**.

We came together after the devastating tornado on March 31st – a tornado that destroyed hundreds of structures and impacted about 3,000 of them. You are never ready for such a tragedy, but we were prepared and as a result, no lives were lost. **Thanks be to God.** Still, homes were wiped out. Businesses were shut down. Lives were overturned. The day after the tornado, we met a resident whose home was a complete loss, standing in the six-foot-tall pile of sheet rock and two-by-fours in the spot that had been his living room, Mo Shahed needed help with just one task: removing the rubble to recover the precious memories in his photo albums. In unity, volunteers joined to help him locate those most valuable belongings.

We are so grateful for the more than 4000 volunteers who spent weeks clearing neighborhoods, saving the city nearly 22,000 hours of staff time and almost 700,000 dollars! Thank you volunteers!

We saw unity and strength from the men of Fire Station 9. They literally broke free from their destroyed fire station to rush toward others who needed help.

We saw it from all our first responders – police, fire and MEMS – who were on the scene within seconds.

We saw unity and strength from the volunteers at our Family Assistance Center and our donors to Little Rock Cares – who literally and figuratively stayed on the scene for months.

Because we are united and strong, we are rebuilding more quickly than many would expect. Merchants like Kroger, and restaurants like Eat My Catfish are again neighborhood gathering places. We are investing in the restoration of our parks. And we continue to relax burdensome regulations and waive fees so that homeowners can get back on their feet quickly and neighborhoods can be whole again.

Our strength and unity were also on display last year after suffering the tragic loss of our friend, Bruce T. Moore. At our core, we as Little Rock residents demonstrate empathy, compassion and a resolve to: do better, work harder and accomplish more. Those of you who had the privilege of knowing Bruce, you understand he would expect nothing less of us. Later this month we will honor his legacy with the unveiling of street signs renaming Arch Street from Fourth Street to City Hall as “Bruce T. Moore Way,” so city employees will be reminded of

Bruce's legacy of service above self every time they come to work. Bruce, we appreciate you.

This year I have asked our leaders to take a look inward. Our 2500 employees across 15 departments work hard every single day, but we want to be better. We can and will be better. We will ensure we are delivering real results for you, our residents. We are going to be even more intentional about getting: Results for the Rock. How do we do this? First, we are holding ourselves to new core values. These six tenets are how we go about the city's business in providing services to each of our residents:

**Equity.** We are committed to meeting people where they are, and offering access to opportunity no matter where people live, what they look like, or how much money is in their wallet.

We are **People-Centered, professional, and innovative**, addressing complex challenges to ensure we are a true catalyst for the new South.

We provide **Exceptional Service**. By being receptive and responsive, we enhance the overall experience of dealing with city government.

And, finally, we are **accountable** to you, our residents.

Our department leaders are instilling these values in their respective teams, and you should see it in your interactions with city staff this year.

To ensure RESULTS, we are dedicated to making Little Rock a safer city. As always, public safety is our number one priority. More than 60 % of the city's budget goes toward protecting our city's residents, and we are proud of our positive results in 2023 using our holistic crime reduction strategy.

Last year, our homicide rate fell 22% – a remarkable turnaround from two years ago when I asked the Board to declare a public health emergency because of violent crime. This is a testament to our holistic approach and the great work of the men and women of our police department. I appreciate our Fleet Director working with LRPD to implement a single-use fleet by 2026 where each officer will have his or her own patrol car. This effort aims to prolong vehicle lifespan, improve fuel efficiency, and most importantly - increase police presence in various communities throughout the city.

Our 911 Emergency Communications Department also made significant improvements in 2023. We strengthened the department by hiring 29 new talented employees, filling dire vacancies and improved our call answer rate from 64% to nearly 92%. These are results.

In 2023, our Fire Department acquired several new vehicles that reduced fuel consumption for more eco-friendly operations, incorporated new body cameras for better safety and accountability, increased community ties with more events and engagement, and acquired land to begin development on Fire Station #25, a much needed resource in growing West Little Rock. We are proud of everything we were able to accomplish in 2023.

Still, we must do more. In our ongoing efforts to combat crime and enhance public safety, I have asked our team to explore how to better use our civil abatement procedures as a PROACTIVE measure of crime reduction. We will use our civil authority to target and cite the businesses that have become hotbeds for crime. We believe this will produce needed results towards crime reduction in our city. LRPD also employs innovative, state-of-the-art technology to stand in the gap, protecting residents and improving officer safety. Nearly 3,000 cameras are integrated or registered with our Real Time Crime Center, leading to more arrests and convictions based on video evidence. Tonight, we also launch our new "Eyes on the Rock" initiative for businesses and nonprofits who work with our Real Time Crime Center. We will provide signage and support to those who partner with us to deliver results for The Rock through crime reduction. Additionally, we will deepen our relationship with Entergy Arkansas to expedite street light replacement in high-crime areas. We know that improved street lighting is an effective crime reduction strategy, and we will be more intentional with our approach this year. We will also unveil Neighborhood Pulse – a project through our Department of Community Programs – that will connect residents with city departments and nonprofit partners to breathe new life into our neighborhoods through community gardens, new recreational areas, murals, and innovative lighting installations. For instance, why can't we bring back HoopFest? We want our residents to take pride in their neighborhoods, and we will foster that admiration to uplift our city. Stay tuned for more on Neighborhood Pulse in Quarter 2 of this year.

We also ensure RESULTS for the Rock by striving to be a SMART city. This work is led by our Chief Data Officer, who has worked closely with our friends at Bloomberg to create a citywide data strategy, ensuring we become a more transparent government that makes data-driven decisions.

We are committed to holding ourselves accountable to performance metrics that show our residents exactly how your city is working for you. Accordingly, I am excited to announce ROCKfolio: Little Rock's progress portfolio for our citywide data strategy. As part of ROCKfolio, you can find Little Rock's City Wallet at [www.data.littlerock.gov](http://www.data.littlerock.gov). City Wallet is our very own open checkbook showing city employee salaries and contracts - transparency at work. This is a promise made and a promise kept. Go check it out online today!

In addition to City Wallet, I am excited to announce ROCKreview: Little Rock's Progress Report. This inaugural report measures our success in delivering results for you. You'll see where we stand on our promises and progress made. Yet another way to be accountable, clear and transparent to our residents. You can expect our first ROCK review progress report later this summer.

Speaking of innovation...

I have challenged our Chief Information Officer to explore ways to utilize technology like artificial intelligence to improve community engagement and resident experience in a productive and responsible manner by 2025. This is how we deliver even more results for the Rock this year. To deliver these results for residents, we must have a STRONG employee base.

While I have the privilege and honor of being the Chief Servant Leader of the city, 2500 team members carry out the critical work of city government. And we are committed to recruiting and retaining top talent to deliver quality services each and every day.

This past fall, a cohort of city officials attended the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Program to improve our orientation and onboarding process. We believe that keeping employees for at least one year significantly increases the likelihood that they will stay long-term, which builds institutional knowledge and improves outcomes for residents. Accordingly, I've challenged our Chief People Officer to shepherd these improvements so that our employees, from public safety to public works and from finance to the zoo, not only know but **FEEL** they are important to the work we do at the City of Little Rock. We must connect purpose to performance, and we expect significant improvements towards that this year.

To remain competitive in the market and to keep our employees happy, we are constantly looking for ways to offer more benefits to our team members. This is why I'm excited to announce the new on-demand pay benefit that will be offered to our employees later this quarter.

This benefit from Rain, which is no cost to the city, allows employees to access their earned wages before payday. Now, our employees may access those wages they've already earned as a way to offer more flexibility to those who need it. We will also continue to explore innovative ideas like new PTO strategies and paid parental leave to make strategic decisions for our employees by next year. Hear me well - the City of Little Rock will become an employer of choice in the region by not just creating jobs, but offering attractive, fulfilling careers for our future public servants. Not only do we strive to be an employer of choice in the city, we are a city of choice for employers.

A top executive at Elopak, the sustainable packaging company that just announced its first US location at the Little Rock Port, said, "Little Rock is a small city with the biggest dreams." Despite being the smallest site they considered, Little Rock thought BIG and acted BIG. THAT is the Little Rock I am proud to serve everyday. We have convention-goers who constantly rave about the hospitality, cleanliness and, yes, even the safety, of our City, and they come back again and again, thanks to the work of our good friend Gina Gemberling and the team at Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau. Even Forbes has ranked Little Rock as one of the top 10 places in the country for young professionals. You should be proud to live in this great city and excited about the progress we are making together.

For instance, late last year, longtime corporate citizen Dassault announced plans for 800 new jobs here. Top Golf is a major attraction that employs 300 more. Westrock, Elopak, Sig Sauer, and Fiocchi all added new jobs in recent months. Aldi is another job creator and quality-of-life builder to expect in 2024. Last year, our excellence translated into tangible results not just for our city, but for the entire state of Arkansas. Did you know that 59% of the state's job creation came from the Little Rock region? 59%! Within the city limits alone, **974** jobs were created, underscoring Little Rock's substantial impact on Arkansas' economic landscape. The Little Rock area accounting for over half of all jobs announced in Arkansas last year is a testament to the workhorses at the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce led by our good friend Jay Chessir. Thank you, team.

Beyond job creation, we are also making strides towards equitable economics in our city for the self-employed and entrepreneurs lifting themselves up by their bootstraps and lifting our community with them.

I'm looking forward to using our Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion's Minority-owned business map where residents, entities, and companies alike can patronize these small businesses in our city. Whether a caterer, consultant, or construction company, you'll be able to visit the City of Little Rock's website to identify a minority-owned business to further grow our economy. Be on the lookout for this map by the end of March.

I'm also excited to announce a new strategic focus within our BUILD Academy and Emprende small business incubator programs this year. We are directing our focus towards sectors that align closely with municipal contracting needs so that we and other public entities can be more intentional about our efforts to support diverse suppliers, knowing this will result in a stronger and more prosperous Little Rock for all.

A key quality-of-life component that we will never forget in my administration is education. You elected me to support our schools and foster meaningful educational opportunities for our children, from cradle to career. And we are doing just that. In our ongoing work to build upon our community schools model and improve literacy in Little Rock, we remain steadfast in working with our partners at the Little Rock School District to implement targeted programs, foster community partnerships, and encourage active participation. Last year, we successfully invested in literacy for our youngest residents through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, increasing participation from 58% to 79% of children in our city under age 5. These significant results coupled with more engaging summer literacy programs for our city's students will reap tremendous benefits in Little Rock for years to come. Our education initiatives don't stop with elementary school. No, education is intertwined with workforce development to ensure students in our city possess the necessary skills to find and thrive in a career right here in Little Rock.

With that, I am thrilled to announce Little Rock Career Climb - a transformative expansion of our Summer Youth Employment program. Our vision extends beyond the summer months, as our Department of Community Programs will work with the Little Rock Regional Chamber, Little Rock School District, and UA- Pulaski Tech to establish a year-round apprenticeship program starting in 2025. This move is about creating opportunities and nurturing a lifelong learning culture by building our city's workforce intentionally and strategically.

We will uplift those interns professionally and personally by partnering with HOPE Credit Union to offer much-needed financial literacy training and bank

accounts, thanks to a grant from the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund. These are real results for our residents! Please spread the word: Little Rock youth ages 16 to 21 can apply online for our summer youth employment program now! I have asked our Chief Education Officer to convene local financial institutions to identify ways to support college savings plans for our families in Little Rock to save and invest in their young students' futures. I look forward to the practical results that will come from the convening this spring.

To be clear, financial management and stewardship are important for City Hall, too. I am proud of the balanced budget our City Board continues to pass each year, despite multiple crises we've had to navigate. We continue to identify ways to cut costs and invest back in our residents. Just this past Tuesday, the City Board voted to proceed with a solar development project that will green City operations while reducing electricity costs. We will harness the power of solar energy to provide approximately 70 percent of the electricity for City operations. We anticipate that this project will lower our electricity costs by \$1 million dollars annually and \$27 million over 20 years. This is what you call RESULTS for the ROCK!

Addressing food insecurity and ensuring that all our residents have access to nutritious food options is another urgent matter that demands our attention. That is why I established a Food Desert Task Force last year charged with finding solutions to tackle food insecurity in our city. After extensive task force meetings, research, and community engagement, the task force unanimously recommended implementing a mobile grocery store. I extend my gratitude to Vice Mayor Kathy Webb and to the dedicated community members who contributed their time and efforts to this task force. We are on track to issue a bid for the mobile grocery store this quarter and look to have it up and running by the end of this year. Let me be clear - more work must be done to eradicate food deserts in our city yes, with actual brick and mortar grocery stores, but we are encouraged by our progress with this innovative solution.

Our homeless village, slated to open by late summer, is another way we are delivering tangible results for the ROCK. But there is more for us to do for our unsheltered residents. Accordingly, I am happy to launch our Holistic Housing Initiative. Through this initiative, we are committed to making housing accessible and affordable for our community's diverse needs, ensuring every resident has a place to call home. As a part of the Holistic Housing Initiative, we will soon hire the City's first Chief Homeless Officer to address this important issue in our city. But we won't stop there. As we work towards functional zero, or essentially no homelessness in our city, we know that we must increase permanent supportive



housing units. I will ask our Chief Homeless Officer to work with our city's landlords to create a vacant property registry to identify available units for unsheltered individuals. We expect this collaboration to make a significant impact on reducing homelessness in our city. And while we are talking about housing.

I am sick and tired of landlords not holding up their end of the deal with tenants in our city. It breaks my heart that residents of our great city are paying rent but still have no running water, their places are infested with roaches, and sick from black mold. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! I appreciate City Director Antwan Phillips who has stepped up to introduce a city ordinance to give our code enforcement more authority to address these uninhabitable living conditions. We will do whatever is in our power to restore dignity and integrity to living in Little Rock.

In 2024, we will continue to get results for our often overlooked and underappreciated neighborhoods – those that enrich our city in more ways than we know, and have been the fabric of this city for generations. I have challenged our Planning Director with identifying ways for our city to experience more strategic growth in areas far too often underserved. We've seen the amazing transformation next door in the Pettaway neighborhood. We will identify ways to spur similar growth in other targeted communities so that current residents in **ALL** neighborhoods can carry the sense of identity and pride we are seeing downtown. Despite that, last year we continued to deliver positive results in various neighborhoods as we replaced 15,400 linear feet of sidewalks. We will build on this by implementing a 'sidewalk equity' plan as part of our infrastructure strategy – investing in sidewalks and safe routes to school and work in neighborhoods that need them most. We will also explore a strategic partnership with our friends at Rock Region Metro to fund better sidewalks that foster public transit use in our City. More RESULTS for the ROCK in 2024.

As many of you know, last year, we visited every ward to talk to voters about a potential sales tax measure focused on the four Ps: Public Safety, Parks, Public Infrastructure and the Port. We listened. And we learned. We listened when you said you wanted safer streets. We listened when you said you wanted better, stronger infrastructure in our city. We listened when you said you wanted more recreational options. We are committed to showing you RESULTS for the Rock. But we all know, MORE results require MORE capital. Our aspirations can only go as far as our money does, and status quo doesn't get us very far. There was a clear consensus that 2023 would not be the right time to ask for a tax. So here we are, a year later, and the time is now.

Why a sales tax? 1 - Because our revenue sources are limited. And 2 - when it comes to results, we must capitalize on this renewed energy and vibrancy in our city. Lastly, the cities experiencing the progress and prosperity we want to see in Little Rock have leveraged sales tax initiatives to spark their growth. Look no farther than our neighbors in Oklahoma City. Since they first enacted their MAPS sales tax in the 90s, they've experienced phenomenal growth, a downtown resurgence and even have landed a professional sports franchise. It's time for us to act now. It's time to bolster our already-strong public safety spending with new technology and replacements to aging police and fire fleets. We made huge strides in crime reduction last year, but it will take new investments in technology and innovative solutions to keep numbers down and keep residents safe. It's time to play "catch up" on our infrastructure needs so that our kids learn to ride bikes on safe sidewalks, drive on safe streets, and play in yards that don't flood every time it rains. It's time to land that super site at the Port of Little Rock – geographically and logistically one of the most ideal locations in all of the United States – where road, river, rail and runway meet. Many of those new jobs I mentioned earlier are at the Port – where the City of Little Rock has invested 30 million dollars for land acquisition and infrastructure since 2019. From that, we have generated approximately 831 million dollars in capital investment for our community. Those are RESULTS for the Rock. It's time to provide new recreational opportunities for our children and give a reason for young families to call Little Rock home. Let's invest in a youth sports complex that attracts families, generates economic impact and is a show place for our athletes of the future. Chris Johnson, a Little Rock resident with a son who plays basketball, soccer and golf, has hoped for years that this City would aspire to, at the very least, keep up with the surrounding communities and create a place for youth to play and flourish right here in the heart of this community. Chris, thank you for recognizing our potential and expecting great results for our children in the Rock. It's time to create an experience at War Memorial Park that represents the life of Little Rock, a true Central Park where diverse and important neighborhoods meet. It's TIME, friends, to bring those ROBUST RESULTS TO LITTLE ROCK!

In a few short weeks, we expect to have thousands of visitors in our city – many at the Zoo and at War Memorial Park to witness the solar eclipse. After that, there won't be another total eclipse in North America until August 2045. Our city, YES, LITTLE ROCK is the only major city where you will be able to see both this year's and 2045's eclipse. This is historic! And while this is great, Little Rock is awesome for more reasons than just the eclipse. We are **truly** a great place to live, work, play and raise a family.

When we invest in our community – and truly commit to achieving real results for the Rock – we are even better. I ask you to join us in creating a new, resurgent, innovative Little Rock. We need YOU to be a partner in our progress. At the same time, I have challenged our team, and I challenge all our residents to dream bigger and do MORE. Subscribe to our platforms to keep you informed. Show up to city events! In order for us to deliver more results for the ROCK, we need you, our residents, to engage with your city government. We will re-launch ROCK Academy, this spring to give residents an inside look at how the City operates. Be on the lookout for applications going live THIS MONTH.

We are also launching iCREATE, our effort to support and promote creatives and creative institutions in our city. This year, we will tap into the immense talent of this community and promote Little Rock as a hub for creativity and innovation. Stay tuned for more on iCreate later this year. Little Rock, we are the hub of government, health care, finance, logistics, dining, arts, and culture for the State and the region. We are Arkansas's CAPITAL city. **Let's act like it.** We need pride in our hearts and swagger in our steps. As we work towards MORE results for the ROCK, let's raise our standards and cultivate a sense of pride and progress within ourselves. Let us join together because we know division and disunity stifle transformation. Little Rock, we are united and strong. You have public servants in City Hall, in our police and fire stations, at our neighborhood resource centers and across the community who go to work each and every day to get results **for you.** Join us. Invest in the work. And **TOGETHER let's bring results to the Rock.**

God bless you, and God bless the City of Little Rock.