

# Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders repeals emergency COVID-19 measures

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Former Trump White House Press Secretary and Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed an executive order to repeal COVID-19 executive orders issued at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 on January 13, cementing the re-opening campaign accelerated under the Democratic administration of Joe Biden.

The action repealed an executive order to establish a steering committee to implement the Arkansas Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, which went into effect March 30, 2020; the Governor's Medical Advisory Committee for Post-Peak COVID-19 Response (April 13, 2020), Governor's COVID-19 Testing Advisory Group (April 21, 2020), the Governor's Technical Advisory Board (May 26, 2020), and the Governor's COVID-19 Winter Task Force (November 13, 2020).

Sanders called the executive orders "obsolete," saying the state government has "prioritized COVID-19 disproportionately," claiming the orders "allowed other health concerns like addiction, cancer screenings, diabetes, and mental health to worsen."

Parroting the position of the Democratic Party administration in Washington, she said, "As Governor, I will always put the health, safety, and well-being of Arkansans first. President Biden declared the 'pandemic is over' during an appearance on '60 minutes' last year," Sanders said.

Sanders went on to say that it is time for Arkansas and the United States "to get back to normal" all the while millions continue to get infected and tens of thousands are dying every week around the globe. Nearly 12,800 people have died due to COVID-19 in Arkansas since the beginning of the pandemic.

As of January 20, the Arkansas Department of Health

(ADH) has reported 4,669 active cases in the state. However, with COVID-19 prevention measures, no matter how small, either stagnating or being slashed, cases of the potentially deadly infection are undoubtedly far, far higher.

Moreover, on January 11, Sanders announced her support for the "Constitutionality" on the state ban on mask mandates in a news release. "I promised that when I was elected, Arkansas would not have mask or COVID-19 vaccine mandates and we would not shut down churches and schools, because we believe in personal freedom and responsibility," in other words, wanton infection and murder. Sanders continues, "Arkansans need to talk with their medical professionals, with their doctors, and make the decisions that are best for their family and their kids."

Sanders ordered that the ADH establish a process of prioritization of other public health challenges over the most glaring: the flu, RSV, and COVID-19.

Arkansas COVID-19 cases increased by nearly 2,500 over the past week, according to the ADH website update on January 17. The increase is down from the 3,600 new cases reported over the previous seven-day period. As of January 16, total COVID-19 hospitalizations in the state number 326, according to YCharts.com. State officials also announced at least 30 new deaths over the past week. Over that same week, 24 patients were reported to be on ventilators statewide, up 5 from the previous week.

The new cases bring the total cumulative count of COVID infections in Arkansas to more than 994,000. This is virtually one-third of the population of Arkansas, which numbers 3.01 million people, according to a 2021 United States Census Bureau report. As more people become infected with COVID-19, particularly the latest variant, XBB.1.5, the

already-stressed and understaffed hospitals in the state will crumble beneath the weight of so many cases.

In a report recently published by Global Data, commissioned by the Arkansas Hospital Association (AHA), the shortage of health care workers in myriad specialties is expected to worsen amid a deepening social and economic crisis. Moreover, the crisis is exacerbated due to a shortfall of 9,000 registered nurses in Arkansas, which could require a decade to resolve. By 2035, a shortfall estimated between 240 to 580 respiratory therapists is expected as well. There is a shortage of other specialists projected to worsen at the same time: phlebotomists, physician assistants, clinical laboratory technicians and emergency service techs are also among the fields impacted by longer hours, falling wages, and a lack of necessary resources.

In response, the AHA is drawing up a blueprint to stabilize and grow Arkansas's health care workforce. "Hospitals in Arkansas faced workforce challenges even before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the situation is now alarming," said Bo Ryall, president and CEO of the AHA.

"The plain facts presented by this report offer us a starting point to begin to address the need—more urgent by the month—to build up our pipeline of health care professionals," Ryall continued. "This problem will not be solved quickly or by hospitals alone, but we owe to the coming generations to take aggressive action to meet this challenge."

The AHA concluded, "These projected shortfalls pose a significant threat to the health and wellness of our communities and, frankly, to the stability of our state. We must not take our excellent health care workforce for granted."

But this is precisely what Governor Sanders and the Biden administration have done. Amid plummeting wages, soaring interest rates, and the ever-mutating coronavirus, the expansion of the health care workforce cannot be achieved under capitalism.



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