

# Click it or Ticket campaign reminds drivers to buckle up to save lives

As the Memorial Day holiday nears, Arkansas State Police are reminding motorists to buckle up. Arkansas state and local enforcement officers are joining the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in the national Click It or Ticket high-visibility seat belt enforcement effort. This campaign begins Monday, May 20, and will continue through June 2.

"We want seat belt use to be an automatic habit for drivers and passengers alike," said Arkansas Public Safety Secretary Col. Mike Hagar. "It's not just a safe thing to do — it's the law. During the Click It or Ticket campaign, the law enforcement community will be working to ensure the message gets out to drivers and passengers. Injuries and lost lives can be prevented

by simply wearing a seat belt." In 2023, the seat belt use rate in Arkansas was 79.7%, which is below the national seat belt use rate of 91.9%.

The other 20.3% of Arkansas motorists still need to be reminded that seat belts save lives, said Hagar.

Participating law enforcement agencies will be taking a no-excuses approach to seat belt law enforcement, writing citations day and night, according to the press release from State Police.

NHTSA data from 2022 shows that nationally a higher number of unrestrained passenger vehicle occupant fatalities occur at night (6,252) than during the day (4,949). Seat belt use also differs among females and males. Men make up the majority of those killed in traffic crashes. Of the males killed in crashes in 2022,

more than half (54%) were unrestrained. For females killed in crashes, 41% were not buckled up.

"No matter who you are, the type of vehicle you're driving, or the type of road you're driving on, the best way to stay safe in case of a crash is to wear your seat belt," said Hagar. "Unfortunately, many families are suffering because their loved ones refused to follow this simple step. Remember to buckle up: Click It, Don't Risk It. Seat Belts Save Lives."

For more information on the Click It or Ticket seat belt enforcement mobilization, visit [NHTSA.gov/ClickIt](https://www.nhtsa.gov/ClickIt) or call the Arkansas Highway Safety Office at 501-618-8127, and go to <https://www.tzdarkansas.org/> to learn about Arkansas' Toward Zero Deaths campaign to eliminate preventable traffic fatalities.



## Librarian's Log by Arlisa Harris, Librarian Forrest City Public Library



Today, I am going to give you some information about something you have been paying for for years that may just shock you when you find out you are being ripped off.

E-Rate is a program designed to help American schools and libraries access affordable telecommunications and Internet services by offering significant discounts. This initiative is financed through the universal service fee levied on companies that offer interstate and international telecommunications, such as landline providers. The program is overseen by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) under the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), following its establishment by the Telecommunications Act of 1996. All telecommunications providers involved in interstate services, including local and long-distance telephone companies and mobile carriers, must contribute to the Universal Service Fund, with these costs typically passed on to consumers.

Navigating the application process for E-Rate discounts has always been challenging, reminiscent of meticulous procedures like those required for passport applications—errors or omissions can delay or even nullify funding requests. In response to these challenges, and to my great relief, the Arkansas State Library created a role for a Manager of E-Rate Services in 2010, hiring Amber Gregory to aid libraries in streamlining their applications for broadband enhancements. She has been a godsend in terms of keeping me abreast of new requirements and procedures that change almost yearly.

E-Rate funding encompasses two categories: Category One for broadband connectivity, including Wi-Fi on school buses and various forms of leased fiber, and Category Two for the internal infrastructure like switches and wiring necessary to deliver Internet services to facilities.

Historically, discounts have been generous, linked to local student eligibility for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). For instance, the Forrest City School District often qualified for the maximum discount due to the high percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunches. The process involves a competitive bidding system where, after a mandatory waiting period, the most cost-effective proposals are selected. This entire procedure typically spans from mid-January through the end of March each funding year.

However, the system is not without its flaws. There have

been many instances of overcharging by providers—a form of exploitation made possible by the structure of the federal program, despite FCC discouragement.

For example, if a library receives an inflated bid that still represents the lowest offer, they might feel compelled to accept it to maintain affordable service levels and most companies highly inflate their charges. This is the nefarious side to this funding that is probably not talked about, but I think it should not surprise anyone. With any federal program, there is room for fraud.

Would it surprise you to know that Internet providers overcharge libraries and schools up to times more than what they normally charge for the same service?

For example, Company A bids \$1500 for monthly fiber Internet for services but their normal charge is \$300 for same service to businesses. Since we would receive a 90% discount and pay \$150 per month, we would of course view it as a cost savings for us.

What I stated above is not hypothetical! We were in contract with Company A for two years and they bragged to a third party that they made enough money off us to pay one or two employee salaries. Company A's profit was made possible, in part, by you and I paying the universal service fee on our phone or cell phone bill. Although the FCC strongly discourages companies/vendors from price gauging, this practice has been the norm for years.

So why deal with Company A? Well, if a library only received two bids and one is from Company A and the other bid does not meet the specifications or cost more, then the only choice is Company A.

Don't get me wrong — we had no real complaints about Company A's reliability and service. I had come to accept that these inflated bids still afforded us lower technology costs in the end even though I questioned why USAC allows it. I figured that in the end, USAC was trying to ensure that all libraries and schools receive services that they can afford, and companies were taking advantage of our needs to make a profit. One would say, good ole American capitalism!

When I was going through bids for funding year 2024/2025 in February of this year, I came across a bid that made me think it was erroneous because it was so low.

As I previously stated, I have applied for E-Rate, on behalf of the library, for 13 years.

Every year, unless I accept a two-year bid, which I have only done twice, I go through the two-

month or longer process. I was surprised this year to receive a larger than normal number of companies bidding on our request. But one bid stood out.

I will call them Company B. Company B's bid amount was the lowest I have ever seen! It was so low that I called the company and asked them if it was a typo. Their representative said NO.

Still not believing what I was hearing, I restated that it is my understanding that your quote for 250/250 MBPS (megabits per second) is less than \$200 before applying our 90% discount. The representative chuckled, said yes and again stated it is the rate they charge all businesses for the same service. Well, paint me green and call me a pickle!

Company B was the only vendor of the seven bid proposals I received whose price was as it should be. The other bids ranged from \$650 to \$2199. When these companies price gouge by charging up to 10 times the amount that would normally be charged for the same business services they are would be providing to a business, it is the taxpayers who are taking the hit. No surprise there though, it's what you would expect when the fox is guarding the henhouse.

I can only hope that more companies do the same as Company B. But as my mother used to say, spit in one hand and hope in the other and see which one fills up faster.

It is not an overstatement to say that E-Rate funding is a really, really big deal to libraries and schools. From 2008 and 2012 to 2024, we have requested discounts in the amount of \$115,408.61 and USAC has "committed" or funded \$103,602.28. That represents a tremendous savings to our library and helps keep our budget in the black.

I want to emphasize that this article is not intended as a rant bashing USAC or telecommunication companies. We are grateful to receive this funding and we depend on it to help us stretch our already over-stretched budget. We are also grateful that not only do companies participate in the E-Rate process, but the number of viable companies participating has increased, especially in our small rural town.

E-Rate has been crucial in bridging the digital divide, especially in rural areas, and the number of providers participating has grown. Acknowledging the importance of this program, especially on occasions like World Telecommunications Day, emphasizes the ongoing need to ensure fair and broad access to digital resources for educational institutions and libraries across the nation.

## Run for Wall motorcyclists stopping in FC

Participants in this year's Run for the Wall motorcycle ride will make another stop in Forrest City this year.

The riders are scheduled to arrive at Ridgewood Baptist Church in Forrest City about 5:30 p.m., on Saturday, May 18.

Run for the Wall was established in 1989 as veterans banded together to travel by motorcycle to cross the country to visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C.

Local organizer Larry Jones said he hopes to see a large turnout of people lining Highway 1, north of Interstate 40, to welcome the riders to Forrest City.

"We are expecting riders to arrive around 5:30 p.m., on Saturday," said Jones. "The plan is to have the flags up like the Forrest City Fire Department has done in the past. It would be great if we could get a lot of people to come out and line up along Highway 1, just north of the interstate, to welcome these riders into our town. Right now, the last time I checked, there were 288 riders that had signed up to ride. Whether they will all be here in Forrest City I don't know because riders join up as the event makes its way across the country."

According to Jones, the group is always told that this is one of the riders' favorite stops along the route to the memorial.



Brodie Johnson • Times-Herald

**Lee Academy graduate Avery Collins receives the P.E.O. Sisterhood Scholastic Talent Accomplishment Recognition Scholarship. Robin Jayroe presents the award to Collins. Collins plans to attend the University of South Carolina after her recent graduation from Lee Academy.**

## Court sides with CFPB, spurning attack

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a conservative-led attack that could have undermined the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

The justices ruled 7-2 that the way the CFPB is funded does not violate the Constitution, reversing a lower court and drawing praise from consumers. Justice Clarence Thomas wrote the majority opinion, splitting with his frequent allies, Justices Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch, who

dissented.

The CFPB was created after the 2008 financial crisis to regulate mortgages, car loans and other consumer finance. The case was brought by payday lenders who object to a bureau rule that limits their ability to withdraw funds directly from borrowers' bank accounts. It's among several major challenges to federal regulatory agencies on the docket this term for a court that has for more than a decade been open to limits on their operations.

## WORK

(Continued from Page 1) experiences related to urban forestry and conservation. Participants will have the opportunity to develop essential skills, gain practical knowledge and contribute to local environmental initiatives," said Williams.

Those interested in seeking employment through the program may apply at [bit.ly/4adrsBy](https://bit.ly/4adrsBy). Williams said participants will be selected through an interview process.

Williams also noted that in order for the program to be as successful as organizers are hoping it will be the students hired will need projects to complete.

He encourages any non-profit groups that would like to recommend projects to submit those at [bit.ly/minconproject](https://bit.ly/minconproject).

"We want to work with entities that have projects but don't have the labor to do the work, such as beautification projects and green spaces. This is an opportunity to get those things done," said Williams. "Forestry is more than

just planting trees. We can make a lot of different things fit into this such as creating food access or restoration of habitats. For example, if a courthouse wanted some different things done on the grounds we could make it fit into those definitions of urban and community forest management."

Williams said the program does not allow for work to be done at private residences, but encourages churches, school districts, government entities and non-commercial organizations to submit project ideas for consideration.

The application period for teenagers to participate will remain open through May 24, with the project application portion remaining open through the end of the month.

Williams said the current plan is for the teenagers selected for participation to begin work on June 10 and continue for eight to 10 weeks.

"If we do 10 weeks, that will take us all the way up to the start of the next school year, so it may

be an eight-week program, but we have funding for 10 weeks," said Williams. "We will also have professional development every two weeks for four hours each time to teach financial literacy and resumé building, among other things."

Williams is hoping the summer program will lead into a fall program in which teenagers who attend school only a half a day will be able to participate.

"The fall program will continue to provide youth with opportunities for further skill development, leadership training and community engagement activities focused on urban forestry and conservation," said Williams.

The fall program has space for 85 students across the four-county area.

"This is a pilot federal program in our area. It's a five-year program but we've received funding for one year. If we're able to be successful, we could receive funding for four more years and keep the program going," added Williams.



Brodie Johnson • Times-Herald

**Triple B Dumpsters of Moro recently cut the ribbon for their new business that serves areas throughout the Delta. The ribbon cutting was hosted by the Forrest City Area Chamber of Commerce. Pictured, from left, are: Shelia Lieblong, Emma Higgins, Alice Williford, Katie Story, Kaylee Buth, Triple B Owner Beau Briggs, Maggie Hoskins and Cedric Williams.**

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