
Nonprofit & Community Strengthening

Strengthening communities is the heart of United Way's work. Texas United Ways know that strong communities and an adequately resourced and supported nonprofit sector are critical to ensuring an equitable and thriving Texas. That is why our network's policy agenda intentionally expanded this session to include important priorities related to criminal justice, equity and inclusion, disaster response and resiliency, and support of the nonprofit sector.

This legislative session, policymakers made progress in several key community strengthening areas. Our network's advocacy for meaningful digital connectivity and inclusion policies ensured that the newly created state broadband office and state broadband plan widened their scope to focus on affordability, access, and use of technology. Unfortunately, there were also missed opportunities to strengthen and support important community resources, such as improvements to 211 Texas. Although our network advocated for budget efforts to bring technology upgrades to 211 Texas, to expand local and state partnership opportunities, and to bring efficiency and innovation to our state's information and referral system, these were ultimately not included in the budget. Similarly, while legislative champions supported efforts to increase data transparency in state contracting, as well as policies to build the infrastructure and capacity of the nonprofit sector, these priorities did not make it through the legislative process. Communities across the state need stable nonprofit organizations to grow and thrive. Texas United Ways know this firsthand and will continue to advocate for a stronger, well-resourced nonprofit sector.

Passed

Nonprofit Capacity, Volunteerism, & Charitable Giving

SB 44 by Sen. Zaffirini : This bill allows state employees to take paid leave to volunteer with Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) during times of disaster.

Bridging the Digital Divide

HB 5 by Rep. Ashby : This bill creates a state broadband office (based in the Comptroller's office), state broadband plan, and grant program to improve broadband infrastructure and address digital access and use in communities across the state. The bill also requires nonprofit representation on the Broadband Development Council and Board of Advisors from organizations that support digital inclusion.

Passed

HB 1525 by Rep. Huberty : This bill requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to provide broadband technical support and allows districts to use the Technology Instructional Materials Allotment to cover costs associated with distance learning.

Key budget riders include three riders in Article VII (TWC) focused on strengthening digital skill building, increasing access to devices, and leveraging unemployment data for targeted skill building training. A rider in Article I provides \$3.75 million to Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) to support digital inclusion and workforce initiatives. For student connectivity, the budget directs \$390 million in federal funds to reimburse schools for technology purchases and \$8 million for schools to support at-home broadband for students.

Other Community Strengthening Priorities

SB 3 by Sen. Schwertner : This bill reforms how Texas manages the power grid, including creating a statewide power outage alert system and changes to how power companies prepare for future storms.

SB 239 by Sen. Powell : This bill requires the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to develop and implement a disease prevention information system for dissemination of immunization information during a declared state of disaster or local state of disaster.

HB 80 by Rep. J. Johnson : This bill bans imposing a fine and costs on defendants in foster care and allows the judge to require community service instead.

HB 3606 by Rep. Leach : This bill requires Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to adopt a policy in which vocational training may be provided to inmates in transfer facilities.