

TEXAS COMMUNITIES AND THE 86TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION: A Recap Report by United Ways of Texas



Opening and Introduction

As the voluntary state association for local United Ways in Texas, United Ways of Texas (UWT) creates lasting change in peoples' lives and in Texas communities by leading and collaborating with a trusted and powerful network of local member United Ways. Together, our network of Texas United Ways is working collaboratively towards a future where all Texans thrive.

Our network of nearly 70 United Ways across Texas play an integral role in championing causes, driving community solutions, and influencing long-term change in the areas of education, health, and financial stability. United Way fights for every person in every community, and Texas United Ways believe advocacy strengthens local efforts and is critical to making lasting, systemic change in communities. **We know that advocacy is all about causes and missions: representing them, elevating them, and fighting for them.**

In addition to engaging the network of Texas United Ways in advocacy, UWT also represents the network in public policy. UWT serves as the unified public policy voice of local United Ways from every corner of Texas and translates the work of our members/our network into opportunities for systemic change.

The [United Ways of Texas 2019 Public Policy Agenda](#) highlights the collective priorities of the state network for the 86th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature. This policy agenda was developed with input by and through conversations with our members. Because of the expertise and engagement of community voices like our members, UWT's policy agenda and advocacy strategies reflect the diverse needs of Texas communities.

This legislative session, there were some big wins for Texas communities and also some disappointments. Most importantly, we are truly proud of and grateful for the advocacy of our Texas United Ways: a network of United Way leaders, board members, donors, volunteers, and partner agencies. This session, we raised our collective voices to bring attention to education, financial stability, health, and the nonprofit sector in each of our communities—and policymakers heard us! **Together, our voices are powerful. Together, we are TEXAS UNITED.**

How to Use the Report

We are happy to provide you, our members, with this 86th Legislative Session Recap Report. Included in the report are highlights of our advocacy efforts, including the engagement of our local United Ways, specific pieces of legislation introduced during the 2019 Legislative Session that we tracked for you, and more information on where our priorities landed this session. We hope you will use this information in your communications with other partners. If you have any questions or would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Overview of the 86th Legislative Session

The 86th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature kicked off on January 8, 2019 and wrapped up 140 days later on May 27th. Top stories heading into this session included the destruction caused by Hurricane Harvey, the tragic school shooting in Santa Fe ISD, and a tough November election cycle for Republicans. After arriving in Austin in January, the Texas House of Representatives elected a new Speaker for the first time since 2009. There was also a renewed call for cooperation by the Speaker, Lieutenant Governor, and Governor, who all pledged to work closely together on priority issues like education and tax reform.

Early in session, Governor Abbott announced his emergency priorities, which included school finance, teacher pay raises, property tax reform, school safety, disaster recovery, and mental health.

Thanks to a strong Texas economy, state budget writers began the legislative session with billions in extra revenue and a record \$15 billion in the state’s Rainy Day Fund. This meant the Legislature could avoid the fights over proposed cuts to health care and higher education that have marked recent sessions. Lawmakers approved a roughly \$250 billion state budget and passed several major policy initiatives including:

- school finance reform that greatly increases per-student funding, expands pre-kindergarten classes, invests in early reading preparedness, provides teacher pay raises, and streamlines the school finance formulas;
- a property tax reform package that requires local voter approval of tax revenue increases by more than 2.5-3.5% from the preceding year;
- a major school safety measure that increases safety training for school employees, availability of mental health resources, and emergency awareness systems; and
- increased investments in the state’s Teacher Retirement System.

Priorities and Successes of Texas United Ways

As a network, we raised our collective voices this session to bring attention to **education, financial stability, health, and the nonprofit sector** in each of our communities. Texas United Ways made significant gains in several 2019 priority issue areas including:



EDUCATION: In a historic move, the Legislature provided funding for full day pre-k, thus ensuring that our youngest Texans have a strong start. Texas United Ways have been strong voices on this issue for many years and this win is an example of what can be accomplished through collective and persistent advocacy.



HEALTH: We worked to pass HB 25 by Representative Gonzalez, ensuring more moms have access to medical transportation for critical prenatal care and postpartum appointments.



FINANCIAL STABILITY: Our network’s advocacy helped defeat efforts aimed at preempting local payday and auto title lending ordinances.



NONPROFIT: With the passage of HB 2325 by Representative Metcalf and the adoption of an Article II budget rider, the 2-1-1 Texas Information and Referral System will see significant upgrades such as texting capability, access to real-time call data, and inter-state call agreements, thereby increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the system.

Advocacy in Action

This legislative session, UWT actively worked to move critical legislation and funding priorities forward on behalf of our network of Texas United Ways. We serve as:

A Resource	A Voice	A Partner
630+ bills tracked covering issues of importance for Texas communities	200+ cards of support put in by UWT staff for bills being heard in committees	Participated in 6+ coalition sign-on letters, calls to actions, or agendas to move key bills and funding items forward
8 one pagers on priority issues written by UWT highlighting priority issues	10+ targeted letters/comments submitted by UWT to key committees and leadership on priority bills and issues	10 statewide collaborative policy groups with representation from UWT
20+ opportunities for action shared with our network	50+ contacts made to legislative offices during the 2019 legislative session	8+ press conferences, policy briefings, and other events attended with partners

Local Texas United Ways also joined together to advocate for legislative issues of critical importance to the communities they serve throughout the state. During the interim, UWT worked tirelessly to prepare and empower our network to engage in public policy advocacy. Because of our efforts, more local United Way voices were heard at the Texas Legislature and more meaningful engagement was seen from members already participating in advocacy this legislative session.



Texas United Ways’ Community Day at the Capitol: This year, we had almost 100 attendees from nearly 20 Texas United Ways here in Austin walking the halls of the Capitol, making visits, and advocating for their communities’ needs at our biannual Capitol Day. There were more diverse voices attending this year’s Capitol Day with nearly 30 volunteer/donors attending. Additionally, UWT added Digital Advocacy to this year’s Capitol Day allowing those who could not attend to raise their voice on important community issues along with their network peers.

2019 Texas United Ways Advocacy Actions:

Knowledge	Action	Collaboration
6 local United Ways developed advocacy agendas	20+ contacts made to lawmakers and staff in response to action alerts	1 collective agenda of West Texas United Ways developed
10 visits to legislative offices outside of Capitol Day to share community priorities	5+ other advocacy actions, such as writing of op-eds, speaking at policy briefings and providing testimony at hearings	10+ other advocacy events attended at Texas Capitol, such as Child Abuse Prevention Day, Pre-K Day, and local Chamber Days

Public Policy Priorities in Education, Financial Stability, Health, & the Nonprofit Sector

EDUCATION



Texas United Ways believe educational opportunities should be available to everyone to ensure that all Texans reach their full potential and secure a strong Texas workforce for years to come. School finance reform was a top priority for lawmakers this legislative session. The Governor signed a major school finance reform bill (HB 3) which will ensure more Texas students have a strong start and a path to reach the academic and developmental milestones that are critical to success in college, career, and life. Overall, this historic legislation increases investments in public schools, teachers, and supports low-income students and early education.

Early Education

After many legislative sessions of advocating for increased investments in early childhood, significant progress was finally made during the 86th Legislative Session. HB 3 provides full-day pre-k funding for eligible children and supports early learning as well as other early literacy strategies. Most notably, HB 3 requires all school districts to develop an early childhood math and literacy plan to improve third grade math and reading proficiency. United Ways have been strong voices on early learning for many years at both the state and local levels. Thanks to the tireless advocacy of our network, important gains were made for Texas children and families.

Childcare Safety and Quality

Following reports on the lack of oversight and dangers in licensed and unlicensed Texas child care facilities, childcare safety and quality was a priority for lawmakers this session. Important bills adopted by the Legislature include HB 680 by Rep. Deshotel improving early education quality, transparency, and coordination through the Texas Workforce Commission and local workforce development boards, SB 708 by Sen. Zaffirini requiring data on child safety from licensed daycares, and SB 952 by Sen. Watson establishing nutrition, physical activity, and screen time standards for certain childcare facilities and homes. All of these bills were supported by UWT.

Pathways to Higher Education and Workforce

This legislative session, we supported efforts to align and link K-12 and post-secondary systems that prepare students for a successful transition into the workforce. Two of our priority bills passed this session: **SB 502 by Sen. Seliger** requiring certain universities to issue reports on the transferability of credits and **SB 25 by Sen. West** making it easier for students to transfer college course credits to four-year colleges and universities. With an increased focus on improving outcomes for students engaging in dual credit programs, lawmakers supported the passage of **SB 1276 by Sen. Powell**. This bill requires increased collaboration and alignment of dual credit agreements made between school districts and institutions of higher education. Additionally, HB 3—the school finance reform bill— extends CTE funding to seventh grade, provides a \$50 increase per student for P-TECH and New Tech, and aims to accelerate student achievement via College, Career & Military Readiness (CCMR) outcomes bonuses.

Passed: UWT Priority Education Bills

Quality, Affordable Childcare

HB 680 by Rep. Deshotel improves and prioritizes early education quality, transparency, and coordination through the Texas Workforce Commission and local workforce development boards.

SB 708 by Sen. Zaffirini requires collection of childcare data within licensed daycares, including information on caregiver-child ratios, class sizes, and child safety concerns.

SB 952 by Sen. Watson establishes minimum standards for nutrition, physical activity, and screen time enacted by childcare facilities as well as registered family homes. These regulations are derived from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Child and Adult Food Care program.

Early Education

HB 55 by Rep. Gonzalez passed as an amendment to HB 3 and directs the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to collect data on pre-k.

SB 1679 by Sen. West provides automatic pre-k eligibility for four-year olds who participated in three-year-old pre-k, thus eliminating an unnecessary burden on families wishing to re-enroll their child in four-year-old pre-k.

Pathways to College and Career

SB 25 by Sen. West improves the transfer of community college credits to four-year institutions thereby supporting the academic progress and timely graduation of students in public higher education. The bill clarifies degree programs, develops a recommended course sequence for a certificate or degree program, and provides information and resources on certain transferrable credits.

SB 502 by Sen. Seliger requires certain universities to issue reports on the transferability of credits. Reports must include information on the specific course, where the course credit was received, and why the credit will not be granted to a student upon transferring. The bill also requires junior colleges to report on courses that have been taken by students and which students transferred to certain universities or earned an associate's degree.

SB 504 by Sen. Seliger allows postsecondary education and career counseling academies to include information on social-emotional learning, as well as behavioral issues, for school counselors and other advisors.

SB 1276 by Sen. Powell strengthens transparency and partnerships of dual credit programs.

Passed: Other Relevant Education Bills

HB 1051 by Rep. VanDeaver establishes an adult high school diploma and industry certification charter school program for students 18 years old or older who did not receive a high school diploma.

HB 3808 by Rep. Walle establishes a variety of higher education initiatives for students, such as learning and workforce opportunities to ensure timely graduation and attainment of marketable skills.

SB 1441 by Sen. Zaffirini relates to a study by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board comparing postsecondary educational outcomes for university students with a high school diploma and those with a high school equivalency certificate.



Texas United Ways fight for the health and wellbeing of their communities. This legislative session, our network elevated critical community health issues including access to medical transportation, maternal health, child abuse prevention, and behavioral health. However, despite our network's collective advocacy and the opportunities present this session, lawmakers failed to address the systemic barriers to health equity and further burdened communities with significant health challenges in the future.

Health Coverage

Texas has the highest uninsured rate in the country and the Legislature did nothing to increase health care coverage for children, moms, or adults this session. **HB 565 by Rep. Coleman** and several other bills were filed this session to expand Medicaid in Texas. However, none of these bills made it out of committee. Our priority bill, **HB 342 Rep. Cortez—the Children's Health Coverage Bill**—also did not pass. This bill would have greatly improved children's health insurance rates in Texas by eliminating administrative barriers that boot kids off Medicaid. However, lawmakers and the Health & Human Services Commission (HHSC) are committed to fixing this problem during the interim—an example of what can happen when we raise our collective voices on critical issues.

Maternal Health

Communities are stronger when moms and babies are healthy and thriving. Unfortunately, too many Texas women experience significant health issues during and after pregnancy; and some groups of Texas women face increased risks of maternal morbidity and mortality. The Legislature failed to pass **HB 744 by Rep. Rose** extending Medicaid coverage for new moms from two months to 12 months postpartum—a recommendation by the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Taskforce to address preventable causes of maternal death. However, important gains were made such as the \$7 million allocated for health initiatives to address maternal mortality and morbidity. **Also, UWT's championed bill, HB 25 by Rep. Gonzalez was signed by the Governor** and will ensure that more Texas moms have transportation to prenatal care and postpartum appointments.

Behavioral Health

Texas communities face significant challenges in meeting the mental health and substance use needs of individuals and families. UWT worked closely with advocates to advance behavioral health policy this session. Unfortunately, very little was done to support adults struggling with behavioral health issues or to provide communities the resources needed to ensure a continuum of care. Although several bills introduced this session focused on increasing mental health awareness, evaluating statewide gaps, and expanding highly utilized community-based services, the majority —and related budget items—did not receive adequate support by the Legislature. For example, HHSC requested \$50 million to improve treatment rates for substance abuse services; the Legislature only provided \$5 million. Similarly, efforts to increase peer-support services, recovery housing, and coverage of substance use services fell short of passing either chamber. However, **HB 3285 by Rep. Sheffield made it to the Governor's desk** and aims to develop initiatives to prevent opioid addiction, misuse, and abuse. The budget also includes important investments in substance use treatment and recovery, including the continuation of funding for recovery-focused clubhouses at \$1.7 million and a \$23.6 million block grant to reduce substance abuse services waitlists for pregnant women and women with dependent children.

The Legislature also adopted UWT priority budget items and legislation providing communities with more support across several mental health areas, including prevention and crisis intervention. The budget includes \$25 million for community mental health hospitals to increase adult inpatient psychiatric beds, additional funding for Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHAs) to provide more outpatient treatment services (\$23.4 million for adults and \$4 million for children), and \$4 million in funding to expand crisis intervention services for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disorders (IDD). Additionally, \$25 million was allocated for a mental health grant to reduce recidivism, arrest, and incarceration for people struggling with mental health issues. Other bills related to mental health first aid training for veterans, Texas suicide data and prevention recommendations, and strategies to address the mental health workforce shortage in Texas also passed this session and were supported by UWT. Overall, we are disappointed that the Legislature failed to pass more bills that would have strengthened mental health prevention and intervention efforts in Texas. Examples include bills to fund extensive research on child and adolescent behavioral health, create a statewide strategic plan to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and expand substance abuse treatment services provided by recovery community organizations.

School Behavioral Health

Governor Abbott identified school safety as a priority item for the 86th legislative session. Significant progress was made in this area as evidenced **by the signing of SB 11 by Sen. Taylor**, which aims to foster safe and supportive school climates via multi-tiered systems of support for students, trauma-informed school policies, suicide prevention strategies, and school hardening provisions. **SB 10 by Sen. Nelson, which failed to pass both chambers, was amended to SB 11** and with it came \$99 million in funding for child behavioral health initiatives aimed at increasing access to community behavioral health services and expanding the community-based psychiatric workforce. Other significant gains include efforts to increase student mental health awareness, leverage local mental health authorities as school resources, develop a comprehensive suicide prevention plan, provide child maltreatment and abuse prevention training to staff, and develop inventories of community behavioral health resources.

This legislative session, Texas United Ways advocated for solutions focused on keeping all students healthy, safe, and in school. Unfortunately, the Legislature missed an important opportunity to increase funding to support student behavioral health. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) requested \$54 million for the Safe and Healthy Schools Initiative (SHSI). Instead of funding this request, the Legislature provided \$100 million for school hardening measures from the Rainy Day Fund. While disappointing, the budget does include \$60 million for Communities in Schools (CIS), \$4.6 million per HB 19 by Price for the placement of mental health professionals in education resource centers, and \$5 million for the Texas Tech Telemedicine Wellness Intervention Triage and Referral (TWITR) Program.

Passed: UWT Priority Health Bills

Child Health, Prevention, and Early Intervention

HB 53 by Rep. Minjarez expands the transitional living services program for foster youth to increase positive outcomes for youth as they age out of the foster care system.

HB 72 by Rep. White allows children and youth adopted from foster care to remain on STAR Health Medicaid.

HB 123 by Rep. White makes it easier for foster and homeless youth to obtain personal identification documents.

HB 475 by Rep. Howard ensures pregnant and parenting youth in foster care receive parenting education and services to help provide safe environments for their children.

HB 1884 by Rep. Minjarez improves the permanency care assistance program information provided to relatives or designated caregivers of children in the conservatorship of the state.

HB 2229 by Rep. Johnson, Jarvis requires the reporting of certain information concerning juvenile offenders in the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) who have been in foster care.

SB 195 by Sen. Perry improves the collection of data relating to the effects of alcohol and controlled substances on children's health.

SB 355 by Sen. West requires the development of a strategic plan to ensure Texas foster care prevention services meet the requirements of the Family First Act (federal), which provides services to families who are at risk of entering the foster care system.

SB 748 by Sen. Kolkhorst creates a newborn screening preservation account to provide funding for newborn tests and related equipment.

SB 821 by Sen. Nelson creates child advocacy centers (CACs) in counties without them and adopts a multidisciplinary team working protocol for all CACs to ensure efficient operation of centers across the state.

Maternal Health

HB 253 by Rep. Farrar creates a strategic plan to address postpartum depression by increasing access to postpartum depression services.

HB 650 by Rep. White creates specific standards for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) regarding the treatment and care of pregnant women by correctional officers.

HB 1651 by Rep. Gonzalez, Mary prohibits the shackling of pregnant women in county jails and establishing obstetrics and gynecological service delivery.

SB 436 by Sen. Nelson creates statewide initiatives to improve maternal and newborn health for women with opioid use disorder; includes improvements in screening, referral, and access to treatment and promotion of best-practices for health care providers.

SB 750 by Sen. Kolkhorst promotes a comprehensive plan to develop, improve, and implement best practices for maternal care, including addressing opioid use disorder, postpartum depression, ensuring continuity of care, improving the Healthy Texas Women's (HTW) program, and improving maternal & neonatal residency programs.

SB 2132 by Sen. Powell/HB 1641 by Rep. Button notifies pregnant women on Medicaid of their auto-enrollment in the Healthy Texas Women's (HTW) program to ensure optimal service utilization and continuity of care.

Medical Transportation

HB 25 by Rep. Gonzalez, Mary creates a pilot program that allows moms on Medicaid to travel with their children to their prenatal and postpartum appointments when using the Medical Transportation Program (MTP).

HB 1576 by Rep. Phelan allows rideshare companies to provide non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) to Medicaid recipients under the Medical Transportation Program (MTP). Rides will be scheduled by the healthcare plans.

Community Behavioral Health

HB 1070 by Rep. Price requires the collection of more complete data on the mental health first aid training program, including expenditures, available trainers, and trainees by categories.

HB 2813 by Rep. Price permanently establishes the statewide behavioral health coordinating council.

HB 3285 by Rep. Sheffield promotes programs and initiatives to prevent opioid addiction, misuse, and abuse.

HB 3980 by Rep. Hunter requires the State Behavioral Health Coordinating Council to prepare a report and make recommendations regarding Texas suicide rates and prevention efforts.

HB 4429 by Rep. Blanco includes mental health first aid in the Texas Veterans Mental Health program to increase awareness of mental health signs & symptoms and treatment.

SB 72 by Sen. Nelson establishes the statewide human trafficking prevention coordination council.

SB 633 by Sen. Kolkhorst increases the capacity of Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHAs) in rural areas via inter-LMHA collaboration and regional capacity development to secure successful contracts.

SB 1636 by Sen. Zaffirini requires the Health Professions Council to include strategies to address the mental health workforce shortage in Texas in their annual report.

Safe and Supportive Schools

HB 18 by Rep. Price provides schools with student mental health supports via evidence-based programs, mental health training for staff, addition of mental health to the health curriculum, and increased access to community-based mental health services.

HB 19 by Rep. Price designates a mental health professional employed by a Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) to each education service center (ESC) to provide training and support regarding behavioral health issues.

HB 111 by Rep. Gonzalez, Mary requires training for public school employees on the prevention of sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and other maltreatment of children with disabilities.

HB 403 by Rep. Thompson, Senfronia requires school board members and superintendents to complete training on identifying and reporting potential victims of sexual abuse, human trafficking, and other child maltreatment.

HB 906 by Rep. Thompson, Senfronia creates a task force to study the effectiveness of school mental health services.

HB 2184 by Rep. Allen ensures effective transition planning for students returning to a standard public school setting from certain disciplinary placements.

HB 3012 by Rep. Talarico requires school districts to provide students placed in in-school or out-of-school suspension an alternative means of receiving all course work missed due to the suspension.

SB 11 by Sen. Taylor aims to foster safe and supportive school climates via multi-tiered systems of support for students, trauma-informed school policies, suicide prevention strategies, and school hardening provisions

FINANCIAL STABILITY



Our network believes that we must pair workforce development with strategies for community-wide financial literacy to assist families move beyond living day-to-day and offer a means for long-term economic security.

We're all better off when our neighbors have a roof over their heads, food on the table and reliable transportation to get to work. This session, Texas United Ways actively advocated for policies that support the financial stability of all Texans. Overall, there were some big wins in this area and we saw incredible advocacy by our network of community voices.

Safety Net

This session, UWT supported bills making it easier for our most vulnerable Texans to access SNAP, TANF, and other safety net programs; we also pushed back against attempts to restrict access to these critical programs. Along with other advocates, **we pushed back against HB 285 by Rep. Springer** and were successful in our advocacy efforts. If passed, this bill would have increased hunger in Texas by prohibiting state officials from ever providing SNAP time limit waivers to disadvantaged Texans including: former foster youth, victims of natural disasters, those living in areas of high unemployment, and those living in areas with limited state employment and training resources (ex. rural communities). We were disappointed **that SB 1445 by Sen. Perry/HB 3931 by Rep. Meza**, which simplifies the certification and recertification requirements for older adults (ages 60 and older) receiving SNAP, did not pass this session.

Housing

Housing is a critical issue affecting all Texas communities. This session, lawmakers failed to invest in affordable, quality housing, including transitional and supportive housing. While no additional funding was provided for affordable housing, for the first time **the state budget includes dedicated funding to address youth homelessness.** Specifically, these funds direct the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDCHA) to use \$1.5 million per fiscal year (\$3 million total for the biennium) to assist communities in providing services to unaccompanied homeless youth and homeless young adults. We are concerned by the passage of SB 1414 by Sen. Hancock which gives landlords leeway to charge tenants unreasonable fees and makes it harder for tenants to challenge unreasonable late fees in court.

Fair Lending

This session, our network of Texas United Ways helped protect and strengthen fair lending in our state. There were multiple bills filed to preempt city ordinances, including the existing local payday and auto title loan ordinances which many United Ways worked hard to put into place. However, because of our network's advocacy, those efforts stalled and some priority bills strengthening fair lending and consumer protections passed instead. **Our priority bill, SB 1949 by Sen. Watson providing oversight of online lending by the Office of Consumer Credit Commission (OCCC), was amended to Rep. Paddie's OCCC sunset bill (HB 1442),** which was signed by the Governor.

Workforce

There were many bills filed this session focused on helping more Texans gain employment by eliminating barriers to occupational licensing and advancing work-based learning in our state. The Governor signed two bills supported by UWT that will remove barriers to employment: **HB 218 by Rep. Krause/SB 37 by Sen. Zaffirini—the Removing Barriers to Work Act**—ensures student loan default will not cost Texas workers their occupational license, and HB 1342 by Rep. Leach eliminates barriers to occupational licensing for formerly incarcerated individuals. **Unfortunately, UWT's priority bill HB 3818 by Rep. Lozano did not pass.** This bill would have established a work-based learning task force to develop strategies to increase work-based learning opportunities, such as apprenticeships and internships.

Passed: UWT Priority Financial Stability Bills

Safety Net

SB 1834 by Sen. Alvarado/HB 3541 by Rep. Rose creates a SNAP pilot program to incentivize the purchase of fruits and vegetables while also drawing down federal dollars.

Housing

HB 1973 by Rep. Button relates to scoring letters of support on tax credits.

SB 289 by Sen. Lucio allows local governments to establish disaster recovery plans, procedures for state review of those plans, and regulations for a disaster recovery task force and disaster recovery housing.

SB 493 by Sen. Alvarado allows the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) to allocate housing tax credits to more than one development (under 2 miles from each other) in a single community under certain conditions.

SB 1943 by Sen. Watson helps homeowners who inherit property without a will or deed by clarifying that heir property owners are eligible for homestead exemptions and setting out provisions relating to this eligibility.

Fair Lending

HB 996 by Rep. Collier bans debt collectors from using the threat of litigation against consumers for expired debts, effectively ending the process of reviving debt.

HB 1442 by Rep. Paddie continues the OCCC and updates licensing and administrative provisions by: clarifying license term, renewal, and expiration terms for licensees and registrants, and specifying procedures for processing consumer complaints, and appealing the denial of debt cancellation agreements.

Workforce

HB 696 by Rep. Blanco codifies two programs currently operated by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)—Operation Welcome Home and Texas Veterans Leadership Program (TVLP)—and authorizes TWC to award grants to state, local, or private entities that help veterans transition into the civilian workforce.

HB 700 by Rep. Guillen removes administrative barriers that delay the response to industry and workforce training needs for public community and technical colleges, community-based organizations, local workforce development boards, and the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service.

HB 918 by Rep. White requires the Texas Criminal Justice Department (TCJD) to provide individuals exiting the justice system with documents needed for employment, including birth certificates, social security cards, job training and work records, resumes, and other documentation.

[HB 1342](#) by Rep. Leach eliminates barriers to occupational licensing for formerly incarcerated individuals.

[SB 37](#) by Sen. Zaffirini/[HB 218](#) by Rep. Krause ensures student loan default will not cost Texas workers their occupational license.

Passed: Other Relevant Financial Stability Bills

[HB 1483](#) by Rep. Frank creates a pilot program allowing an incremental reduction of SNAP & TANF benefits, coupled with intensive case management services, to help recipients achieve long-term self-sufficiency and independence from public benefits.

[HB 2784](#) by Rep. Phelan establishes the Texas Industrial Workforce Apprenticeship Grant Program to address the state's immediate industrial workforce needs resulting from both the impact of Hurricane Harvey and overall workforce shortages.

NONPROFIT SECTOR



Nonprofits play a key role in our state's economy and quality of life. A healthy nonprofit network is central to making Texas communities better places to live, work, and visit. This session, UWT focused its advocacy efforts on continued support for the nonprofit sector, including the State Employee Charitable Campaign, the state 2-1-1 network, and disaster relief responses. There were some big wins, some disappointments, and many bills tracked by UWT related to issues faced by nonprofits such as tax exemptions, public disclosures, resource development, and lobbying.

The State Budget

The state budget is critically important to local communities and this session, UWT advocated for a 2020-2021 budget that builds a stronger Texas. The \$250 billion two-year budget approved by lawmakers provides significant funding for school finance and property tax reform. However, many critical areas, such as health and human services were not adequately funded. The Health and Human Services (HHS) program budget only increased by 1% from the last two-year cycle. Medicaid—the federal-state health insurance program for individuals with disabilities and low-income people—may face a \$900 million cut in the next biennium. With this, nonprofits may face additional challenges in meeting the health needs of all Texans in their communities. **Although nonprofits are part of the solution for a vibrant economy, they alone cannot deliver all of the essential services that communities rely upon.** Therefore, it is crucial that lawmakers understand how their funding decisions impact Texans and local communities.

Disaster Response and Recovery

Following the devastating impact of Hurricane Harvey, lawmakers focused on disaster response and recovery, and quickly moved related bills through the legislative process. The Governor signed **HB 3668 by Rep. Walle providing grants to nonprofit food banks** to build capacity for more efficient disaster response. Additional funding for food banks responding to disasters is also included in the budget. Disaster recovery housing was also identified as a priority. Notable bills that passed include **SB 289 by Sen. Lucio** which establishes a disaster recovery housing planning process administered by the General Land Office and in conjunction with Texas A&M University for local governments.

2-1-1 Texas Information and Referral System

2-1-1 Texas plays a critical role in disaster response as a communication tool for impacted individuals. Thanks to the advocacy of our network, 2-1-1 will see significant upgrades and improvements which will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the system overall. An adopted budget rider and provisions of HB 2325 by Rep. Metcalf—**both championed by UWT—require technological improvements to 2-1-1, transparent access to real-time 2-1-1 data, and the use of inter-state agreements to rotate 2-1-1 calls during times of disaster.** UWT believes these changes to 2-1-1 are a significant step forward. Not only do these changes bring efficiencies, transparencies, and best practices to our state's Information and Referral System, but they also recognize that other 2-1-1 systems across the country can inform additional improvements to the Texas system in the future.

Passed: UWT Priority Nonprofit Bills

Disaster Response and Recovery

HB 2335 by Rep. Walle improves the disaster SNAP (D-SNAP) application process by requiring the Health & Human Services Commission (HHSC) to coordinate with county judges to evaluate, develop, and maintain a list of potential sites for a more rapid deployment of benefits after a natural disaster.

HB 3668 by Rep. Walle/**SB 2334** by Sen. Creighton provides grants to nonprofit food banks to build capacity for more efficient disaster response. These grants will help maintain food storage and inventory, coordinate food distribution and purchasing, and acquire equipment for food and disaster operation.

SB 289 by Sen. Lucio establishes a disaster recovery housing planning process administered by the General Land Office and in conjunction with Texas A&M University for local governments (“RAPIDO”).

SB 981 by Sen. Kolkhorst improves the application process for disaster SNAP (D-SNAP) benefits by creating a directory with points of contact for the program, improving communication between HHSC and local government officials, and providing a list of potential sites for in-person applications.

2-1-1 Texas Information and Referral System

HB 2325 by Rep. Metcalf ensures more coordinated disaster-related and safety communications between government entities and the community. The bill also makes improvements to the 2-1-1 system, including use of texting, adoption of interstate agreements, and better data collection and sharing.

Passed: Other Relevant Nonprofit Bills

HB 5 by Rep. Phelan develops a debris management plan to create a model contract for debris removal services and establishes study on debris removal and disaster recovery efforts.

SB 6 by Sen. Kolkhorst improves disaster response expertise & protocols at the local level by requiring the Texas Division of Emergency Management to establish guides for local officials on both disaster response and recovery, as well as how to manage debris removal. Also, the bill creates a disaster recovery loan program for communities that suffered significant infrastructure damage.

HB 2633 by Rep. Morrison amends current law relating to the consumption, possession, or sale of an alcoholic beverage at a performing arts facility leased to a nonprofit organization by a school district.

HB 2684 by Rep. Metcalf exempts the sale of a taxable item from a sales and use tax if the seller or retailer was a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the sale took place at a county fair, and the purchaser was a person attending or participating in the fair.

HB 3044 by Rep. Klick allows corporations to make political expenditures—including partially or fully matching contributions to 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations—towards the establishment or administration of general-purpose committees.

SB 1969 by Sen. Hancock extends the current law for “defective corporate acts” to nonprofits, allowing a nonprofit to retroactively validate actions taken by the nonprofit that might otherwise be void because of some sort of existing corporate defect (ex. improperly elected board member, etc.).

Closing and Looking Ahead: Big Wins, With More to Do

Together, our Texas United Way network of leaders, board members, donors, volunteers, and partner agencies ensured lawmakers lifted up the education, health, and financial stability of Texas communities this legislative session. There were some big wins, but also some disappointments this year. Overall, we are thrilled that because of the powerful advocacy of our network many of our collective priorities moved forward. **Many thanks to all the United Ways who actively engaged in advocacy this year. Community voices are critical to building a stronger Texas and together, collective voices can drive powerful change for the community, region, and state.**

Lawmakers are now back home, but UWT continues to represent our network of local United Ways—elevating the priorities of diverse Texas communities and partnering with our members to solve their community challenges through policy change and systems-level impact. There is still a lot of work ahead, and the passage of key bills and budget items is just the first step in ensuring transformative change. UWT will actively engage in the implementation of key bills passed this session to ensure all Texas communities are supported. The rule-making process—where state agencies develop guidelines to show how they will implement state and federal law—is another opportunity for UWT to represent Texas communities, thus ensuring the successful implementation of policy changes.

During the year and a half in between legislative sessions (known as the interim), the Texas Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the House of Representatives appoint Interim Committees to study important issues (interim charges) that help guide future legislative priorities. UWT will engage in this process and keep the network informed of interim advocacy opportunities, such as opportunities to testify at interim committee hearings.

Given the missed opportunities this session and the challenges still facing Texas communities, UWT will urge state leaders to study various issues, including:

- **The state of the nonprofit sector in Texas**, including challenges faced by Texas nonprofits in addressing community needs such as contracting barriers and ways to strengthen the nonprofit sector;
- **Adult education and family literacy in Texas**, including challenges and opportunities to implement a multi-sector approach to ensuring both parents and children have the skills, tools, and confidence needed to thrive;
- **Two-generation strategies** to align existing programs and funding toward outcomes that improve the health, well-being and economic security of families;
- **Lack of state investment in quality, affordable housing**, including supportive and transitional housing;
- **Work-based learning in Texas**, including ways to incentivize employers to offer internships, externships, job shadowing, and apprenticeships; and
- **Best practices and innovative models** for connecting Texans with community, health, and disaster service providers through the use of 2-1-1.

Advocacy Beyond the Texas Capitol

Texas United Ways give voice to community challenges and solutions at both the state and local level. The opportunity to engage in state legislative advocacy happens only 140 days every two years, and the legislative session is just one (and often a slower) way to drive systemic change. **Local level advocacy matters! Many issues can actually result in bigger, more lasting change if addressed at the community level.** Local governments are responsible for many policies that impact the daily lives of Texans. Moreover, state-level lawmakers often get ideas for legislative proposals from what's working in local communities. Good ideas from one community today could result in statewide changes in the future. **As conveners, connectors, and drivers of change in their communities, United Ways can elevate critical issues and drive solutions forward by actively engaging in community level advocacy.**

Remember, advocacy is:

- Raising awareness about how issues manifest in our communities
- Reminding decision-makers of our shared values and beliefs
- Sharing tested solutions to community challenges
- Helping leaders understand the impact of their decisions
- Rallying others to action
- Transforming our communities for the future

Why Advocacy

We believe local United Ways are uniquely positioned to be the advocacy voice for their community. The impact work of United Way is authentically connected to community needs, and resource mobilization efforts involve stakeholders in taking direct action for community solutions. **As leaders and activators, United Ways need to speak up on the issues important to their communities, be champions for change, and actively involve other stakeholders and community leaders in their advocacy efforts.** Advocacy is an essential tool for further advancing impact initiatives and accelerating both donor and individual engagement. Additionally, United Ways should engage donors and champions around advocacy as it gives these stakeholders an opportunity to see a long-term return on their investments.

Take Action Today for a Stronger Texas Tomorrow

United Ways across Texas engage in advocacy in many different ways and at many different levels. The interim is a great time to determine how your United Way plans to engage in advocacy; we invite **every United Way to have this conversation on advocacy engagement in the future. This is the first and most critical step towards engaging in systems-level change.** It is important to establish guidelines around your United Way's advocacy work as well as an agenda so that your local network of leadership staff, board members, and volunteers all have consistent definitions and expectations of advocacy engagement. Many of our local United Ways have already developed their own advocacy agendas and we encourage more United Ways to establish mission-driven advocacy priorities in order to achieve systemic changes at all levels.

New to United Way advocacy? Here are some ways to engage with your elected officials and other leadership now to drive systemic changes in your community:

- Work with UWT staff to schedule an advocacy training for local UW leadership, staff, & partner agencies to determine local & state advocacy priorities, goals, and strategies.
- Thank your elected officials for their hard work and dedication.
- Invite your elected officials to upcoming United Way board/staff/partner meetings for briefings.
- Hold Town Hall briefings on community issues and invite elected officials to speak.
- Discuss with your board how your priorities can be moved at the local level.
- Use social media to educate the public, lawmakers, and elected officials about issue(s) important to your United Way.
- Visit with elected officials and their staff in district.
- Draft your own advocacy agenda highlighting your community's priorities.

Already actively engaged in advocacy? Here are some suggestions for successfully moving your community priorities forward with city and county leadership:

- Share stories, data, and resources with elected officials to illustrate the implications of their decisions.
- Get the city council and/or county commissioner's court to issue a proclamation for your cause.
- Engage in the city/county budget process to advance awareness about the issues you care about.
- Write an op-ed or letter to the editor to share your expertise on a priority issue.
- Organize a rally, town hall, or press conference to build public awareness about an issue.
- Call your elected officials' offices to weigh in on a legislative issue.
- Draft a sign-on letter to express views on an issue and ask coalition members to sign on.
- Submit comments or feedback on proposals being developed.

We're here to assist.

United Ways of Texas is ready to help our members in their advocacy efforts. Contact us if you have any questions about this report or need additional support.



United Ways of Texas

512-641-1149

Adrianna Cuellar Rojas, President and CEO

adrianna.cuellar@uwtexas.org

Ashley R. Harris, Director of Policy and Community Engagement

ashley.harris@uwtexas.org

Nataly Saucedo, Mental Health Policy Fellow

nataly.sauceda@uwtexas.org