



Texas Communities & the 88th Legislative Session

A recap report by United Ways of Texas

Introduction

Texas United Ways believe that state policy can strengthen and further the work of United Ways in their local communities. For this reason, Texas United Ways engage in state-level advocacy, which is critical to creating lasting, systemic change in communities across the state. Together, our statewide network of United Ways is working towards a future where all Texans thrive. The [2023 public policy agenda](#) reflects the collective priorities of Texas United Ways for the 88th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature. Throughout this legislative session, we raised our collective voices as Texas United Ways to bring attention to [Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed \(ALICE\)](#), and a broad range of education, financial stability, health, and nonprofit sector issues that are important to each of our communities. While there were some wins, there were major disappointments this session, and the lessons learned from the 88th Regular session will make our network's future advocacy and policy work even stronger.

This report provides highlights of our network's advocacy efforts, including the engagement of local United Ways, relevant legislation introduced during the 2023 Legislative Session that was tracked by United Ways of Texas (UWT), and information on where our network's priorities landed this session.

**UNITED for a
future where all
Texans thrive.**



Overview of the 88th Session

The 88th Legislature started with a record \$32.7 billion budget surplus providing policymakers a unique opportunity to address critical issues, such as the teacher shortage, maternal mortality, and the state’s struggling foster care system. The state’s top three leaders—Speaker Phelan, Lt. Governor Patrick, and Governor Abbott—released their priorities at the beginning of the session and were aligned on property tax relief, book bans, and pay raises for teachers.

The 140-day biennial session wrapped up on May 29 and state leaders passed a \$321.3 billion budget for the next biennium—reflecting a 23% increase from what was allocated in 2021. The session also ended with no movement on two of Gov. Abbott’s priorities: property tax cuts and school vouchers and the impeachment of Attorney Ken Paxton by the Texas House. Overall, many GOP priorities did not move this session and were caught up in party infighting, multiple scandals in both chambers, and bickering between Senate and House leaders.

As a result, Governor Abbott immediately called a special session only hours after the end of the Regular Session. The Texas House and Senate didn’t agree on how to spend billions from the state’s budget surplus on property tax relief during the first 30-day special session pushing the Governor to call back lawmakers once again to the Capitol for a second special session to hammer out a tax relief plan. A special session on school funding issues and vouchers is also expected later this year.



Advocacy & Impact

United Ways of Texas is a resource, voice, and partner for our Texas United Way members. During this legislative session, United Ways of Texas actively worked to move critical legislation and funding priorities forward on behalf of our network. Local United Ways also worked together to advocate for legislative issues that positively benefit the communities they serve.

1300 +

bills tracked

covering issues of importance for communities across Texas

200 +

cards of support

put in by United Ways of Texas staff for bills being heard in committees

45 +

attendees at UW Capitol Day

with representation from nearly 14 local United Ways

60 +

legislative actions by United Ways

including contacts made to legislative offices, oral and written testimony, local agendas, calls to action, and sign-on letters

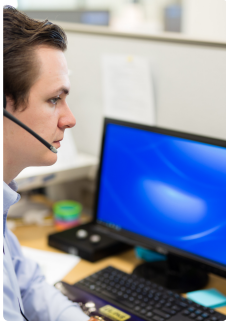
11

statewide collaborative policy groups

with representation from United Ways of Texas

Our Priorities

As a network, we raised our collective voices this session to advocate for the education, financial stability, health, and nonprofit sector needs in each of our communities. Despite the disappointments, Texas United Ways made some progress in several 2023 priority issue areas, including:



NONPROFIT & COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

Our network secured additional investments in 211 Texas—a first in over 14 years—and received bipartisan support on our priority bill, HB 2473 by Bucy aimed at modernizing 211 Texas. Additionally, UWT, in partnership with Texas Rural Funders and Texas 2036, successfully advocated for historic investments in broadband infrastructure and updates to our state’s digital connectivity framework established by HB 5.



EDUCATION

Our network advocated for several key bills to strengthen pathways to college and career, including HB 8, which reforms our state’s community college finance system to align policy and funding incentives with the rapidly changing needs of the workforce and gives economically disadvantaged high school students access to dual credit courses at no charge.



HEALTH

UWT joined the Governor and other partners in the signing of HB 12 by Rep. Rose and Sen. Kolkhorst, legislation that extends Medicaid insurance from two months to one year after pregnancy. Our network was also instrumental in securing an additional \$65 million for Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) programs across our state that are designed and proven to reduce child maltreatment, strengthen families, and support positive youth development.



FINANCIAL STABILITY

We championed HB 4846 by Rep. Davis aiming to strengthen transportation access for individuals with disabilities and those engaged in workforce education and training. This bill passed the House with unanimous support. In partnership with other anti-hunger advocates, we successfully advocated for the passage of HB 1287 by Rep. Guillen and HB 1743 by Rep. Leach which will prevent hunger for Texans experiencing food insecurity. In partnership with other fair lending advocates, we also stopped harmful bills that would have expanded predatory lending in Texas.

NONPROFIT & COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

Strong communities and an adequately resourced and supported nonprofit sector are critical to ensuring an equitable and thriving Texas. Because of this, our policy agenda under this impact area is expansive and includes many important priorities, such as state investments, digital connectivity, criminal justice reform, voter engagement, equity and inclusion, disaster response and resiliency, and overall support of the nonprofit sector.

Budget and spending decisions by state leaders affect all Texans and these decisions can have immediate and serious consequences for the people nonprofits serve and the communities in which they operate. While the Legislature provided significant investments in many key areas that support communities, such as state employee salary increases, rate increases for home health workers, the state's energy grid, broadband, and water infrastructure, the state budget for the next biennium does not address long-standing community needs in many critical impact areas that have been neglected, such as education and healthcare.

Our network's advocacy also helped to secure additional investments—a \$3.6 million increase—for our state's 211 Texas network and helped garner additional champions for 211 through our leadership and advocacy on HB 2473 by Rep. Bucy. This priority bill aimed to deliver much-needed technology updates to the 2-1-1 call system, allowing Texas to maximize and leverage the system's functionalities and capabilities and better support Texans in need, including pregnant women and young families. HB 2473 was endorsed by the bipartisan, bicameral IT Caucus and passed the Texas House with overwhelming bipartisan support. Additionally, we continued our leadership and advocacy on digital connectivity efforts this session and we're proud to see Texas lawmakers pass legislation allocating \$1.5 billion to broadband expansion in Texas—marking the biggest investment for broadband development in state history.

Passed

Digital Inclusion

SB 1238 by Sen. Nichols increases the speed threshold for an area to be considered “served” and brings state statute in compliance with federal guidelines, which includes the preference for fiber deployment, updates how broadband access is defined, and adopts standards for what constitutes served, underserved, and unserved areas.

HB 9/HJR 125 by Rep. Ashby creates an infrastructure fund to expand connectivity and makes historic investments in broadband if approved by voters in November.

Passed

Diversity Equity & Inclusion

SB 17 by Sen. Creighton bans diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and other practices from all Texas public colleges and universities.

Nonprofit Capacity, Volunteerism, & Charitable Giving

SB 643 by Sen. Zaffirini amends current laws around charitable bingo, including the number of annual temporary bingo licenses and increasing the prize values, and more.

HB 53 by Rep. Thompson, E. exempts registration fees from a vehicle used by a nonprofit disaster relief organization exclusively for emergencies, training, equipment maintenance, transportation of disaster relief supplies, or other activities related to disaster relief.

HB 242 by Rep. Howard encourages the donations of certain menstrual products by protecting donations made for charitable purposes.

HB 456 by Rep. Craddick exempts royalty interests owned by a charitable organization from property taxes.

HB 541 by Rep. Longoria expands the range of local nonprofits eligible to receive a donation from a criminal defendant as the fulfillment of court-imposed probation conditions.

HB 1024 by Rep. Thompson, S. increases the amount of property that may be offered or awarded at a charitable raffle from \$250,000 to \$1,000,000.

HB 3599 by Rep. Thierry exempts food banks from fuel taxes and registrations for their fleets.

Disaster Response, Recovery, & Resiliency

HB 3222 by Rep. Guillen gives political subdivisions affected by natural disasters more time to apply for recovery loans by extending the budget submission deadline from 15 days to 30 days.

HB 3223 by Rep. Guillen requires chairs of each of the state's disaster district committees to be appointed based on the declared disaster and phase of disaster response by National Incident Management System guidelines removing the requirement for the public safety director of the Department of Public Safety to appoint a commanding officer from the Texas Highway Patrol to serve as chair of each of the state's disaster district committees.

HB 3323 by Rep. Goodwin establishes the Food System Security and Resiliency Planning Council (council) and grant program to address food system, resiliency, and planning in Texas.

Passed

Civic Engagement & Strengthening Democracy

SB 477 by Sen. Zaffirini supports voting access for Texans with disabilities.

HB 357 by Rep. Bucy provides necessary improvements to the state's ballot-by-mail tracking system.

HB 1243 by Rep. Hefner raises the penalty for illegal voting from a Class A misdemeanor to a state jail felony for an attempt to illegally vote and a second-degree felony for illegal voting.

HB 1299 by Rep. Noble requires an ink-on-paper signature on a mail-in ballot's carrier envelope.

HB 2127 by Rep. Burrows bars cities and counties from creating local ordinances that go further than what's allowed under broad swaths of state law – including labor, natural resources, and finance.

Key Budget Items: *\$1.5 billion to the Texas Broadband Infrastructure Fund, subject to voter approval; \$1 billion investment in the newly created Texas Water Fund, subject to voter approval; \$1.2 billion for flood and hurricane resiliency; \$1.8 billion to pay for a 5% increase in annual state employee salaries; and \$3.6 million increase for 2-1-1 Texas to support call centers and technology upgrades.*

EDUCATION

Higher education was a priority for lawmakers this legislative session and several bills passed that will ensure more Texans have the knowledge and skills to obtain quality, family-sustaining wage jobs and that our state has a strong Texas workforce for years to come. HB 8 creates a new model for funding community colleges based on performance and increases college affordability and capacity. This historic and bipartisan legislation, along with \$683 million more in the state budget for community colleges, will drive transformative changes to better address our state's workforce and postsecondary completion challenges.

Contentious higher education bills, such as SB 17 were also signed into law by the Governor. This legislation bans diversity, equity, and inclusion offices and practices in Texas colleges and universities, including staff-mandated diversity training and statements describing an institution's commitment to diversity. These efforts may impact our state's higher education and workforce goals, as outlined in [Building a Talent Strong Texas](#).

There were some big disappointments in our network's Pre-K-12 priorities, including early learning, per-student funding, bilingual education, teacher support, and student health and wellbeing. Of note, the Legislature rolled back years of work on improving pre-k quality with the passage of HB 2729, legislation that reduces qualifications for pre-k teachers serving in partnerships with private childcare providers. Also, the issue of school vouchers impacted the progress of many important bills and funding priorities. Due to the lack of movement on school vouchers—a priority issue for both Governor Abbott and Lt. Gov Patrick, special sessions on vouchers and school funding are expected later this year.

Passed

Early Education & Out of School Time

HB 1615 by Rep. Button formally establishes pre-k partnerships between childcare providers and local school districts and adds a representative of the childcare workforce to Local Workforce Development Boards.

HB 1905 by Rep. Talarico allows a school district to provide school safety training courses at no cost to employees of accredited private schools located in the district, child-care facilities, or other organizations providing out-of-school-time care.

HB 2729 by Rep. Harris eliminates education and certification requirements for pre-k teachers participating in pre-k partnerships.

Passed

Closing the Achievement Gap & Ensuring Equity

SB 2124 by Sen. Creighton requires school districts and charter schools to automatically enroll fifth graders who score in the top 40% on the state standardized math test in advanced math in sixth grade. Families can opt their children out of the advanced class if they choose.

HB 567 by Rep. Bowers prohibits any student dress or grooming policy adopted by a school district or public institution of higher education from discriminating against a hair texture or protective hairstyle commonly or historically associated with race.

School Climate & Student Health and Wellbeing

SB 133 by Sen. West prohibits peace officers and school security personnel from restraining or using a chemical irritant spray on a student who is ten years old or younger unless the student poses a serious risk of harm to themselves or another person.

SB 629 by Sen. Menendez requires each public school district to adopt a policy regarding the maintenance, administration, and disposal of opioid antagonists for schools serving students in grades 6 through 12.

SB 763 by Sen. Hefner allows school districts to employ or allow volunteer chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors.

HB 3 by Rep. Burrows requires school district employees to complete Mental Health First Aid training and to have armed personnel at all campuses during school hours. This legislation also gives districts additional funding per campus and student for security funding and increases penalties for districts not found in compliance with security requirements.

HB 473 by Rep. Hull requires a school's threat assessment and safe and supportive school team to notify the parent or person in parental relation to the student before conducting a threat assessment of a student.

HB 3991 by Rep. Isaac designates the first Friday in April as the Texas Fruit and Vegetable Day in public schools to promote awareness of the health benefits of fruits and vegetables and to encourage students to consume more fruits and vegetables.

Teacher and Education Professional Support

HB 4363 by Rep. Kuempel establishes the Future Texas Teachers Scholarship Program with the purpose of recruiting, preparing, and retaining a talented and diverse workforce of career teachers to be leaders in their field and providing assistance for tuition, mandatory fees, and other usual and customary costs of attendance at an eligible institution. The bill was not funded in the budget.

Passed

Pathways to College & Career

SB 68 by Sen. Zaffirini permits a school district to excuse a student who is a junior or senior in high school from school for a “career investigation day” that involves visiting a professional at their workplace to determine the student’s interest in pursuing a career in the professional’s field.

SB 459 by Sen. Paxton allows early registration for parenting students at public institutions of higher education.

SB 1887 by Sen. West continues state efforts to strengthen credit transfer.

SB 2032 by Sen. Creighton allows entities to create adult charter schools like the Goodwill Excel Center pilot.

SB 2139 by Sen. Parker establishes the Opportunity High School Diploma Program to provide adults the opportunity to earn a high school diploma through a public community college, while simultaneously pursuing a postsecondary degree or certificate.

SB 2294 by Sen. Creighton expands the types of institutions of higher education eligible to participate in the Texas First Early High School Completion Program and the Texas First Scholarship Program.

SB 2158 by Sen. King establishes an adult education pilot program for certain inmates of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). The program would be a partnership between the Goodwill Excel Center and the Windham school district.

HB 8 by Rep. Van Deaver establishes a new funding model for community colleges in Texas, creates a new scholarship program, increases access to dual credit courses, and expands access to higher education opportunities across the state.

HB 1361 by Rep. Morales Shaw designates liaison officers to assist students who are parents at public institutions of higher education.

HB 1590 by Rep. Burns establishes the Texas Leadership Scholars Program for high-achieving students with financial needs. The program is to be administered by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB).

Passed

HB 1602 by Rep. Guillen requires the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to establish performance criteria for adult education and literacy programs and prioritize awarding funds to those that meet certain criteria.

HB 1755 by Rep. Button provides grants to educational institutions and nonprofits engaged in administering performance-based workforce training programs.

HB 2209 by Rep. Lozano establishes the Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) program to incentivize and support rural college and career pathway partnerships with colleges and business sectors to provide more opportunities to rural and underserved students and promote economic development in rural areas.

HB 2920 by Rep. Paul requires Texas Education Agency (TEA) to make certain information available to public and private school students regarding postsecondary education and career opportunities.

Other Education

SB 798 by Sen. Middleton removes the statutory requirement that candidates for certification as a school counselor have experience as a classroom teacher.

HB 1416 by Rep. Bell makes changes to the laws governing accelerated instruction and supplemental instruction for students who do not perform satisfactorily on certain assessments.

HB 3803 by Rep. Cunningham allows parents and guardians to have their children repeat a grade up to grade 8 instead of grade 3.

HB 900 by Rep. Patterson prohibits school libraries from possessing or acquiring any material that is “rated sexually explicit material by the selling library material vendor” or deemed to be “harmful material” as codified in Texas Penal Code.

Key Budget Items for Higher Education/Workforce: \$3 billion for the proposed re-designated Texas University Fund; \$1.5 billion in grants for low-income higher education students; \$650 million for implementation of community college finance reform through HB 8; \$7.5 million for pre-apprenticeship programs; and \$12.5 million in GR for the Skills Development Fund.

Key Budget Items for K-12: \$142 million to extend the Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHAT) telehealth program to all school districts; \$5 million to implement mental health programs in community-based out-of-school time (OST) and invest in statewide intermediary infrastructure to support OST programs and professional; \$500 million for curriculum; and \$300 million for school safety measures.

HEALTH

This legislative session, our network elevated critical community health issues, including maternal and child health, prevention and early intervention (PEI), mental and behavioral health, and social determinants of health. After many years of advocacy, the Legislature finally passed legislation that allows moms on Medicaid to keep their health coverage for 12 months after giving birth. HB 12 was signed by the Governor and will help combat our state's high maternal mortality and morbidity rates.

Unfortunately, the legislature failed to expand health coverage for low-wage workers, did not pass HB 1599, a priority bill that would have helped eligible but uninsured children enroll in health coverage through Medicaid and CHIP, and only partially funded the Health and Human Services Commission's (HHSC) budget request to support critical workforce needs of eligibility staff responsible for helping Texans sign up for benefits, such as Medicaid.

Passed

Health Coverage & Access to Care

SB 14 by Sen. Campbell bans all forms of gender-affirming care for minors, particularly puberty blockers.

SB 2193 by Sen. LaMantia establishes a pilot program to provide access to primary health services at federally qualified health centers to uninsured working Texans at small businesses.

HB 12 by Rep. Rose extends post-partum Medicaid coverage to 12 months.

HB 44 by Rep. Swanson prohibits Medicaid and CHIP providers from declining to serve a potential patient because of refusal or failure to obtain certain immunizations or vaccines and allows HHSC to deny reimbursement for and disenroll providers who violate this new statute.

HB 113 by Rep. Ortega would expand the use of Community Health Workers in Medicaid-managed care.

HB 400 by Rep. Klick establishes grant programs to support residency training programs in psychiatric specialty fields and recruitment, training, and retention programs in behavioral health fields.

HB 617 by Rep. Darby establishes a pilot project to provide emergency telemedicine medical services and telehealth services in rural areas.

HB 915 by Rep. Craddick establishes a 24-hour toll-free workplace violence hotline and requires employers to post information about the hotline.

Passed

HB 1455 by Rep. Anchia makes spouses and dependents of exonerees also eligible to receive the same health benefits afforded to employees of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ).

HB 1575 by Rep. Hull requires HHSC to adopt standardized screening questions to identify and aggregate data on the nonmedical health-related needs of pregnant women enrolled in Medicaid and the Alternatives to Abortion program.

HB 2727 by Rep. Price allows Medicaid reimbursement for home telemonitoring services for certain high-risk pregnancies, which can help a doctor and patient monitor blood pressure and other health measures while at home.

Pharmaceutical Costs and Prescription Access

HB 916 by Ordaz requires health insurers that cover contraception to provide a year's supply of the medication at once.

HB 999 by Rep. Price requires health plans to apply rebates and copay assistance to reduce prescription drug cost-sharing for their beneficiaries.

HB 25 by Rep. Talarico creates a program to import prescription drugs from Canadian suppliers.

Mental Health & Behavioral Health

SB 26 by Sen. Kolkhorst creates an innovation grant to expand access to mental health services for children and families, develops a Quality Incentive Payment Program for local mental health providers, and requires audits for Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHAs) and Local Behavioral Health Authorities (LBHAs).

SB 63 by Zaffirini requires HHSC to create an instruction guide for families and caregivers of veterans with mental health conditions.

SB 532 by Sen. West reduces the years required for a person to participate in the Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals and requires public universities to share information about mental health services on campus.

SB 1319 by Sen. Huffman requires local health authorities to report overdose information to an entity that maps overdoses.

SB 1677 by Sen. Schwertner provides for counties under 250,000 the opportunity to apply for Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) assistance for jail-based competency restoration, jail diversion, mental health services, and adolescent behavioral health services.

Passed

HB 671 by Rep. Gonzalez creates a statewide veteran suicide prevention campaign and establishes a website to instruct veterans about safely storing firearms.

HB 1357 by Rep. Holland permanently allows our state Medicaid program to provide reimbursement for medication-assisted opioid or substance abuse treatment.

HB 2059 by Rep. Price expands the eligibility of individuals who can participate in the state's mental health first aid training program, including youth, first responders, and military service members and veterans who want to participate.

HB 2100 by Rep. Price extends eligibility for loan repayment assistance to mental health professionals who provide services to patients in a state hospital or individuals receiving community-based mental health services from a local mental health authority (LMHA).

Prevention & Early Intervention

SB 24 by Kolkhorst moves Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) to HHSC and codifies the "Alternatives to Abortion (A2A)" program renaming it the "Texas Pregnancy and Parenting Support Network".

SB 222 by Sen. Nichols grants paid parental leave for state employees.

HB 63 by Rep. Swanson eliminates anonymous reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Child Protection and Juvenile Justice

SB1447 by Sen. Miles requires the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to develop an improved training program to increase the quality of investigations.

SB 1727 by Senator Schwertner continues the functions of the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) for two more years, setting up another Sunset review for the next legislative session in 2025, and making additional juvenile justice policy changes.

SB 1930 by Sen. Kolkhorst requires Judges, Guardians ad Litem, and Attorneys ad Litem to review placements in residential settings.

SB 2120 by Sen. Zaffirini requires the Texas Indigent Defense Commission to provide legal representation and services to indigent parents or children named in a suit filed by DFPS.

SB 1849 by Sen. Kolkhorst creates a single search engine that links the "do not hire" registries of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD), the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Passed

HB 968 by Rep. Gates provides a parent or caregiver accused of abuse or neglect the option to voluntarily remove themselves from the home instead of the child's removal.

HB 1087 by Rep. Hull requires DFPS to include affidavits describing reasonable efforts made to prevent child removal in filed petitions and prohibits courts from terminating parental rights at the end of the trial if reasonable efforts are lacking.

HB 1819 by Rep. Cook abolishes a local government's ability to enact a curfew ordinance that targets youth.

HB 3186 by Rep. Leach makes diversion strategies more effective by providing for the referral of youth charged with fine-only offenses to diversion strategies.

HB 3765 by Rep. Bucy requires the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to maintain and distribute a supply of luggage for use when transporting the personal belongings of children in foster care and to maintain a record of each time a trash bag instead of luggage.

HB 4233 by Rep. Zweiner provides training and guidance for runaway prevention for foster and adoptive parents of children and youth aged ten and older.

Family Violence, Victim Support & Human Trafficking

SB 49 by Sen. Zaffirini ensures that victims' compensation covers relocation costs for all survivors, increases the cap on the amount a survivor receives, and expands eligibility to household members of victims.

SB 855 by Sen. Alvarado requires certain judges to receive training on family violence.

SB 2429 by Sen. Hancock establishes new training requirements and procedures for investigating missing child cases.

HB 2313 by Rep. Thompson requires rideshare companies to annually provide their drivers with digital human trafficking awareness and prevention training materials.

HB 2660 by Rep. Oliverson requires law enforcement agencies to send missing person reports electronically no later than 48 hours after receiving the initial report and to each municipal and county law enforcement agency within 200 miles.

Passed

Other Health & Wellbeing

SB 29 by Sen. Birdwell prohibits governmental entity implementation or enforcement of a vaccine mandate, mask requirement, or private business or school closure to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

SB 490 by Sen. Hughes requires that a medical provider send an itemized bill before attempting to collect any money from the patient.

SB 2476 by Sen. Zaffirini adds ambulances to Texas' surprise billing standards.

HB 852 by Rep. Thierry expands and amends the composition of the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee.

HB 568 by Rep. Bowers requires peace officers to receive specialized training on communication with persons with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

HB 59 by Rep. Goodwin requires childcare organizations to obtain a written notice from parents stating whether their children can swim and to place and fasten a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket on children who cannot swim and are likely to enter a body of water during an activity organized by the childcare organization.

Key Budget Items for Coverage and Access: *additional \$113 million to support the increased workload of eligibility workers due to the unwinding of continuous Medicaid coverage; \$10 million for mobile units to offer Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC); \$178.2 million for rural hospitals; and \$1.95 billion to raise the base wage for home healthcare workers.*

Key Budget Items for Mental & Behavioral Health: *\$280 million for the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium; \$26 million increase for the Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals; \$302 million for mental health community hospitals; \$8 million increase for youth mobile crisis outreach; \$15 million to expand access to mental health services for children and families statewide; \$18 million for opioid overdose reversal medication, as well as substance use disorder treatment and education; and \$2.7 billion to build or renovate state mental health hospitals and community facilities.*

Key Budget Items for Child Welfare & Family Strengthening: *additional funding for "rate modernization" to provide a 12-20 percent pay increase to foster care providers; \$7 million in general revenue to support kinship caregivers; \$63 million increase for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI); \$140 million for Abortion (A2A) program; and an additional \$65 million for Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) programs.*

FINANCIAL STABILITY

Despite the increasing number of Texans struggling with the rising cost of food and other expenses due to inflation, including ALICE, lawmakers failed to make progress on housing affordability and stability for low-income Texans, access to quality, affordable transportation, childcare investments, and other issues impacting the financial stability. The Legislature failed to move childcare priorities forward. They did not approve a \$2.3 billion childcare funding proposal pushed by advocates, including many of our Texas United Ways, or provide any additional state funding—above federal funding draw-down requirements—to support childcare.

Fortunately, after many years of advocacy by our network and anti-hunger partners, lawmakers passed important laws that will prevent hunger for Texans experiencing food insecurity. HB 1287 modernizes the SNAP Vehicle Asset Test by applying an inflationary adjustment to the current limits and HB 1743 supports people exiting the criminal justice system by allowing eligible individuals to apply for SNAP before their release so that they have access to food upon release. These bills were signed by the Governor and they will take effect Sept. 1, 2023.

Passed

Childcare Sector

SB 1145 by Sen. West allows municipalities or counties to exempt licensed childcare facilities from property taxes collected by that taxing entity if at least 20% of their students receive subsidies.

SB 1327 by Sen. Blanco allows new directors to begin serving while giving them a 12-month grace period to complete the necessary education requirements.

Safety Net & Basic Needs

HB 1287 by Rep. Guillen makes a one-time inflationary adjustment to the Vehicle Asset Test to better reflect today's car values, increasing limits from \$15,000 to \$22,500 for the first car and from \$4,650 to \$8,700 for additional vehicles.

HB 1743 by Rep. Leach allows certain individuals exiting the criminal justice system to apply for SNAP before their release.

SB 379 by Sen. Huffman exempts diapers, maternity clothes, baby wipes, and menstrual products from sales tax.

Passed

Housing and Transportation

HB 299 by Rep. Murr establishes accredited recovery housing in Texas.

HB 1193 by Rep. Turner prohibits an HOA from restricting a property owner from renting to a person based on their method of payment, such as Section 8.

HB 2071 by Rep. Jetton increases accountability and standards of public facility corporations (PFC)-owned developments that receive tax breaks.

Fair Lending & Financial Health

SB 1379 by Sen. Parker establishes a Foster Youth Financial Pilot to assist foster youth in achieving financial security as they transition to independent living post foster care.

Other Barriers to Financial Stability

SB 347 by Sen. Zaffirini and HB 842 by Rep. Patterson establishes a fixed 90-day period during which a disqualification or suspension of a person's driver's license is extended because of the person being convicted of driving while their license is invalid providing persons with old citations the opportunity to escape from a never-ending cycle of license suspensions.

HB 842 by Rep. Patterson prohibits the extension of the period of a driver's license suspension for certain driving while license invalid convictions.

Key Budget Items: \$400,000 each fiscal year for the operation of a transitional housing pilot program; \$6 million for Nutrition Incentives Programs that match SNAP participants' purchases at farmer's markets as well as \$10.2 million increase in funding for the Surplus Agricultural Products Grant; and \$48.9 million to non-profits or local governments to provide direct services to Texas veterans and their families.

Closing

United Ways understand that community voices are critical to building a stronger Texas and that together, our collective voices can drive powerful changes for our respective communities, regions, and ultimately for our state. The 88th Regular Session was challenging and ended with much uncertainty. Despite this, our network was successful in advancing some important issues thanks to the incredible advocacy of local United Ways and their networks. Together, our Texas United Way network of leaders, board members, donors, volunteers, and partner agencies raised their voices to bring attention to education, financial stability, health, and the nonprofit sector.

Lawmakers are already back in a second special session to address property tax relief and are expected to meet again later this year to address public education funding and school vouchers. Texas United Ways will continue to elevate the priorities of their communities and will partner with others to solve community challenges through policy change and systems-level impact.

The passage of key bills and budget items is just the first step in ensuring transformative change. United Ways of Texas will actively engage in the implementation of new legislation to ensure that all Texas communities are supported. We will share opportunities for input in rulemaking related to the bills passed with our network and will also soon start work on raising issues for interim legislative charges.



Take Action

Now is a great time to determine how your United Way plans to engage in advocacy and policy in the future. We invite every Texas United Way to have a strategic conversation on engaging in advocacy and policy with their leadership. This is the first and most critical step toward engaging in systems-level change. It is important to establish guidelines around your United Way's advocacy work and local policy agenda so that your local network of leadership staff, board members, and volunteers have consistent guidelines, parameters, and expectations regarding advocacy engagement. Many of our local United Ways have already developed their advocacy agendas, with some having partnered on regional agendas. We encourage more local United Ways in our state to establish mission-driven advocacy priorities to achieve systemic changes at all levels and look forward to supporting each of you throughout that process.

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

- Work with UWT staff to schedule advocacy training for local United Way leadership, staff, and partner agencies to determine local and state advocacy priorities, goals, and strategies.
- Work with UWT staff to help your United Way develop strategies for local engagement that you and your United Way will feel comfortable with as you start to engage in advocacy and policy.
- Thank your elected officials for their hard work and dedication.
- Invite your elected officials to upcoming United Way board, staff, or partner meetings for briefings.
- Hold Town Hall briefings on community issues and invite elected officials to speak. UWT staff can help your United Way craft an event agenda and develop questions for the event that will tie your community priorities to state-level policy opportunities as well as to priorities that are relevant to your elected officials.
- Discuss with your board how your priorities can be moved at the local level. Work with your board and other key United Way volunteers to map out their relationships with elected officials from your community.
- Use social media to build awareness and to educate your community, lawmakers, and elected officials about issues important to your United Way.
- Visit with elected officials and their staff in their district offices; get to know them, their priorities, and their respective stories of why they serve your community.
- Draft your own advocacy agenda highlighting your community's priorities. UWT staff can provide assistance as needed.

Take Action

Already actively engaged in advocacy? Here are some suggestions to strengthen your policy and advocacy work, and 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. Specifically, use your local [ALICE data](#) or [211 data](#) to help your elected officials see your United Way as a resource and expert on your community.
- Engage in local advocacy. This includes getting the city council and/or county commissioner's court to issue a proclamation for your cause or engaging in the city/county budget process to advance awareness about the issues you care about.
- Raise public awareness about your United Way's priority issues through social media or by writing an op-ed or letter to the editor.
- Do a relationship mapping exercise with your board, affinity groups, or volunteers to better understand their relationships with your elected officials. Determine ways in which you can leverage their relationships on behalf of your United Way priorities.
- Work with your United Way volunteers and affinity groups to determine their priorities. Women United and Young Professional affinity groups are often strong volunteer groups to engage in advocacy.
- Create a public policy task force to guide your work. This can include existing or new volunteers, partner agency experts, and board members with experience in public affairs or existing relationships with elected officials.



About

United Ways of Texas:

As the voluntary state association for local United Ways in Texas, United Ways of Texas (UWT) creates lasting change in people's 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.

uwtexas.org

ALICE:

Asset Limited, Income Constrained (ALICE) is a population of Texans that are employed and yet struggle to afford the basic necessities of housing, food, health care, childcare, technology, and transportation. The Texas ALICE Report provides county-by-county level data and analysis of how many households are unable to make ends meet. The report includes measures, based on present-day income levels and expenses that show how many Texas workers are struggling financially, and why.

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A recap report by United Ways of Texas