



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.