
Texas Communities & the 87th 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 [2021 public policy agenda](#) reflects the collective priorities of Texas United Ways for the 87th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature. Throughout this legislative session, we raised our collective voices at Texas United Ways to bring attention to 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 and disappointments, the lessons learned from this legislative 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 2021 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 87th Session

The start to the 87th Legislature in January 2021 was slower than normal given that state leaders were adjusting to conducting business during a pandemic. Lawmakers had critical issues to address this session, including the pandemic recovery, protests and renewed calls for racial justice, the devastating impact of a historic winter storm, and a state budget shortfall. Upon arrival in Austin, the Texas House of Representatives elected a new Speaker, Rep. Dade Phelan, and Governor Abbott announced his emergency priorities, which included election integrity, bail reform, expanding broadband, civil liability for businesses open during the pandemic, and penalties for cities that decreased police funding. State leaders soon settled on pandemic-related protocols that not only affected public access to the capitol building, legislative offices, and committee hearings throughout the legislative session, but also impacted the way advocates could champion issues and made public engagement even more difficult than in prior legislative sessions.

When the legislative session concluded 140 days after it began, over 1,000 bills had passed, including several key conservative priorities. By comparison, during the 86th legislative session, lawmakers passed over 1,400 bills. Multiple pandemic-related policies passed, as well as a few energy grid-related reforms and an important broadband infrastructure bill. Lawmakers also approved a \$248 billion state budget—a decrease of about \$13.5 billion from the last biennium due to federal funding for coronavirus relief. There were divides between the House and Senate on key bills throughout session and tensions between Democrats and Republicans on several priorities including voting and local control issues. This culminated with House Democrats leaving the chamber before a critical midnight voting deadline, denying a quorum to pass a priority bill of state leaders before the end of the legislative session. This, coupled with the failed passage of other priorities of the Lieutenant Governor and the Governor, indicates that lawmakers will be back in Austin for a special session later this year.

The Legislature will return on July 8th for a called special session. In later 2021, they will return to tackle redistricting—the pandemic delayed census data reporting until early fall 2021—and to appropriate federal relief funds. Governor Abbott will set the time and agenda for special sessions.

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.

1600 +

bills tracked

covering issues of importance for communities across Texas

300 +

cards of support

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

90 +

attendees at Virtual Advocacy Days

with representation from nearly 29 local United Ways

70 +

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. Texas United Ways made important gains in several 2021 priority issue areas, including:



NONPROFIT & COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

Our network was a leading voice on digital inclusion policies. We championed a digital inclusion call to action that was signed on to by 180 organizations across the state. As a result of our advocacy efforts, we ensured that HB 5 by Rep. Ashby—the omnibus broadband bill—focused on all barriers to digital connectivity, including affordability, access, and use of technology, and that the budget supported digital inclusion in workforce initiatives.



EDUCATION

Our network championed several key bills to strengthen pathways to college and career, including HB 1247 by Rep. Lozano, directing state agencies to develop a work-based learning strategic framework, and HB 3767 by Rep. Murphy, the Texas Education and Workforce Alignment Act, which has been a priority of United Ways for several years. We also made progress in early childhood education by setting ratios for pre-kindergarten class sizes.



HEALTH

Texas United Ways worked to pass HB 133 by Rep. Rose, extending Medicaid for women from 2 months to 6 months postpartum, and HB 290 by Rep. Cortez (passed as a provision of HB 2658), which allows eligible children to remain enrolled in Medicaid by reducing inaccurate mid-year eligibility reviews.



FINANCIAL STABILITY

Our network's advocacy helped defeat efforts aimed at preempting local payday and auto title lending ordinances and helped ensure passage of the Senior SNAP Bill, SB 224 by Sen. Perry.

Nonprofit & Community Strengthening

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

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

Passed

Nonprofit Capacity, Volunteerism, & Charitable Giving

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

Bridging the Digital Divide

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

Passed

HB 1525 by Rep. Huberty	This bill requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to provide broadband technical support and allows districts to use the Technology Instructional Materials Allotment to cover costs associated with distance learning.
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Key budget riders include three riders in Article VII (TWC) focused on strengthening digital skill building, increasing access to devices, and leveraging unemployment data for targeted skill building training. A rider in Article I provides \$3.75 million to Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) to support digital inclusion and workforce initiatives. For student connectivity, the budget directs \$390 million in federal funds to reimburse schools for technology purchases and \$8 million for schools to support at-home broadband for students.

Other Community Strengthening Priorities

SB 3 by Sen. Schwertner	This bill reforms how Texas manages the power grid, including creating a statewide power outage alert system and changes to how power companies prepare for future storms.
SB 239 by Sen. Powell	This bill requires the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to develop and implement a disease prevention information system for dissemination of immunization information during a declared state of disaster or local state of disaster.
HB 80 by Rep. J. Johnson	This bill bans imposing a fine and costs on defendants in foster care and allows the judge to require community service instead.
HB 3606 by Rep. Leach	This bill requires Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to adopt a policy in which vocational training may be provided to inmates in transfer facilities.

Education

Texas United Ways believe educational opportunities should be available to everyone so that all Texans reach their full potential and to secure a strong Texas workforce for years to come. After significant changes to the school finance system in 2019, as well as a school year with unprecedented challenges from the pandemic, lawmakers made some progress in stabilizing education funding, expanding early childhood opportunities, and strengthening the pathways to college and career for Texas students. Our network successfully championed a key bill to direct the tri-agencies—the Texas Education Agency, Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board—to develop a work-based learning strategic framework. We also supported the Texas Education and Workforce Alignment Act, which requires the tri-agencies to collaborate on state workforce goals and modernize data systems. Building on the early childhood wins from the last legislative session, state lawmakers set important student-teacher ratios for pre-kindergarten and strengthened pre-k partnerships. Lawmakers also supported several policies to improve bilingual education, increase student supports related to social emotional learning, and address student mental health.

Passed

Early Education

SB 2081 by Sen. Menéndez	⋮	This bill requires pre-k programs to have a class size limit of 22.
HB 725 by Rep. Patterson	⋮	This bill ensures pre-k eligibility for children who were in foster care in another state and have moved to Texas.

Closing the Achievement Gap & Ensuring Equity in Education

SB 89 by Sen. Menéndez	⋮	This bill requires school districts to review and assess the impact of COVID-19 on students with disabilities and determine if compensatory education services are appropriate.
SB 462 by Sen. Lucio	⋮	This bill allows transportation allotment dollars to be used to transport a meal or instructional materials during a declared disaster.

Passed

SB 560 by Sen. Lucio	This bill creates a strategic plan for the improvement and expansion of bilingual education.
SB 2066 by Sen. Menéndez	This bill updates the term “student of limited English proficiency” to the asset-based “emergent bilingual student.”
HB 30 by Rep. Talarico	This bill requires the Windham School District to provide an educational program for incarcerated minors that meets requirements for a high school diploma or that prepares people for the high school equivalency exam.
HB 159 by Rep. M. Gonzalez	This bill would add to the requirements for the educator preparation programs as well as staff development related to serving students with developmental, physical, and intellectual disabilities.
HB 1525 by Rep. Huberty	This omnibus education bill makes technical corrections based on the passage of HB 3 in 2019. It also delays the deadline for reading academy attendance to the 2022-2023 school year, requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to establish programs that support schools in implementing intensive supports to overcome the impact of the pandemic on student learning, allows funding for digital inclusion, increases Career & Technical Education (CTE) weights in the funding formula, allows school safety funds to be used on restorative justice practices, establishes a commission on special education funding, and strengthens guidance for pre-k partnerships.
HB 2256 by Rep. Guerra	This bill creates a bilingual special education certification to better serve with disabilities.

Key budget items include fully funding HB 3, the 2019 school finance bill; \$464 million in increases to formula funding based on changes in student weights/allotments; \$664 million for targeted programs to address student learning impacts from COVID-19. The budget also required legislative action to disburse \$16 billion in federal relief dollars, with a special legislative session likely to occur this fall.

Passed

School Climate & Student Well-being

SB 123 by Sen. Johnson	This bill requires integrating personal skills alongside positive character traits in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), with a focus on self-management, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making skills.
SB 179 by Sen. Lucio	This bill ensures school counselors spend more of their work time on supporting students and addressing student mental health needs.
SB 279 by Sen. Hinojosa	This bill requires that the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline & Crisis Text Line numbers be printed on student IDs for grades 6 and up, including higher education.
SB 2050 by Sen. Menéndez	This bill requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to adopt minimum standards for a school district's policy concerning bullying and to strengthen local district policy.
HB 2287 by Rep. S. Thompson	This bill allows the Collaborative Task Force on Public School Mental Health Services to request data from local entities and increases the amount of data that the task force reports on.

Pathways to College & Career

SB 165 by Sen. Blanco	This bill prohibits classes dropped because of COVID-19 in-person limitations from counting toward the dropped course limits.
SB 369 by Sen. Kolthorst	This bill clarifies the parental opt-out option regarding the requirement to submit a financial aid application as a condition of high school graduation.
SB 788 by Sen. Creighton	This bill requires the tri-agencies to create a model data-sharing agreement for student data between secondary and post-secondary institutions.

Passed

SB 959 by Sen. Zaffirini	This bill prohibits classes dropped because of COVID-19 in-person limitations from counting toward the dropped course limits.
SB 1019 by Sen. Zaffirini	This bill clarifies the parental opt-out option regarding the requirement to submit a financial aid application as a condition of high school graduation.
SB 1102 by Sen. Creighton	This bill requires the tri-agencies to create a model data-sharing agreement for student data between secondary and post-secondary institutions.
SB 1230 by Sen. Taylor	This bill requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to make recommendations on how the student success-based funding can incorporate completion of shorter-term continuing workforce education programs.
SB 1277 by Sen. West	This bill requires the THECB to report student loan data and that it be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, sex, degree, type, and enrollment status in its annual financial aid report.
SB 1531 by Sen. West	This bill creates the Texas Reskilling and Upskilling through Education (TRUE) initiative aimed at strengthening workforce education.
SB 1615 by Sen. Bettencourt	This bill establishes the Texas Commission on Community College Finance.
HB 33 by Rep. Dominguez	This bill ensures students in dual credit courses receive academic advising.
HB 1247 by Rep. Lozano	This bill amends current law relating to formula funding and increases tuition rates for excess undergraduate credit hours at public institutions of higher education.
HB 1799 by Rep. Button	This bill expands the adult high school diploma charter school program.

Passed

HB 3767 by Rep. Murphy



This bill, also known as the “Texas Education and Workforce Alignment Act”, requires TEA, THECB, and TWC to collaborate on state workforce goals, designate career pathways, and modernize data systems.

Key budget items include \$486 million to fund higher education enrollment growth and \$110 million in additional higher education financial aid.

Health

Texas United Ways fight for the health and well-being of their communities while also recognizing that persistent disparities in health outcomes exist—outcomes that have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This legislative session, our network elevated critical community health issues, including access to health coverage and care, maternal and child health, mental and behavioral health, and social determinants of health. The legislature expanded access to telehealth, provided new moms a few more months of Medicaid coverage, reduced inefficiencies that mistakenly kick kids off Medicaid, and increased investments in mental health and substance use services. However, lawmakers also cut funding to the Health and Human Service Commission’s (HHSC) Eligibility and Enrollment division, which is responsible for helping individuals sign up for benefits, such as Medicaid. Additionally, the legislature failed to expand health coverage for low-wage workers, chose not to provide a full year of Medicaid coverage to new moms despite it being a recommendation of the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Taskforce, did not increase investments in prevention and early intervention programs like Family Connects that are priorities to many United Ways, and did not support the reestablishment of a state health equity office to address health inequities in Texas.

Passed

Health Coverage

SB 1059 by Sen. Paxton	This bill requires the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to create an auto-renewal process for Medicaid for young people formerly in foster care, preventing any disruption in services, treatment, or medication after leaving foster care.
HB 133 by Rep. Rose	This bill extends Medicaid for women from 2 months to 6 months postpartum.
HB 290 by Rep. Cortez (passed as a provision of HB 2658)	This bill allows eligible children to remain enrolled in Medicaid insurance by reducing inaccurate mid-year eligibility reviews.
HB 1664 by Rep. White	This bill requires that Medicaid coverage be reinstated for a child in a juvenile facility during an inpatient stay at a medical facility.

Passed

Access to Care

SB 40 by Sen. Zaffirini

This bill authorizes health professionals regulated by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR), including speech-language pathologists and dyslexia therapists, to practice via telehealth.

SB 73 by Sen. Miles

This bill aims to reduce barriers to local health departments participating in the state Medicaid program by establishing a separate provider type for local health departments for billing purposes.

SB 672 by Sen. Buckingham

The bill makes collaborative care a Medicaid reimbursable service.

HB 4 by Rep. Price

This bill expands and makes permanent some pandemic-related telehealth and telemedicine changes, including reimbursement for audio-only behavioral health services.

HB 18 by Rep. Oliverson

This bill creates a state program to offer many prescription drugs at discounted rates to uninsured Texans.

HB 1307 by Rep. Gonzalez

This bill ensures that incarcerated pregnant women receive the health care services they need.

HB 1616 by Rep. Bonnen

The bill enacts the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact, which streamlines the licensing process for physicians seeking to practice in multiple states.

Key budget items include level funding for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) funding for toddlers with disabilities and a budget rider directing the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to identify unexpended Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) funding to establish a Health Services Initiative that can support CHIP outreach, enrollment, and prevention programs, including Family Connects.

Passed

Mental Health and Behavioral Health

SB 64 by Sen. Nelson	This bill requires the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) to develop a peer support network for law enforcement officers.
SB 454 by Sen. Kolkhorst	This bill directs the continuation of the local mental health authority (LMHA) regional planning groups, which are focused on strengthening the delivery of mental health services to Texans and makes the planning process permanent.
SB 640 by Sen. Menéndez	This bill requires a study on the technological readiness and interoperability of behavioral health facilities' behavioral health technology to ensure providers can adequately provide critical care to patients.
SB 642 by Sen. West	This bill requires the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to adopt clear procedures and guidance for families at risk of relinquishing their parental rights to access mental health services for a child with severe emotional disturbance.
HB 2595 by Rep. Price	This bill strengthens mental health parity in Texas by requiring the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) to create an online portal for complaints by health plan enrollees regarding mental health parity. TDI must also develop additional educational materials and training on parity law for mental health conditions. Additionally, the bill designates October as Mental Health Condition and Substance Use Disorder Parity Awareness Month.
HB 3088 by Rep. Coleman	This bill improves access to grant funding for counties helping veterans and individuals experiencing mental illness, homelessness, and substance use disorders.
HB 3121 by Rep. Turner	This bill creates a voluntary certification for long-term inpatient psychiatric facilities for youth.

Passed

HB 3821 by Rep. Hunter

This bill requires the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) and the Health and Human Services Committee (HHSC) to work together in the administration of mental health programs for veterans.

HB 4074 by Rep. Hunter

This bill requires the Statewide Behavioral Health Coordinating Council (SBHCC) to create a subcommittee focused on suicide prevention and use data-informed suicide prevention strategies.

Key budget items include \$8.4 billion in behavioral health funding across 25 state agencies, including a \$10 million increase in funding for the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium.

Prevention and Early Intervention, Child Welfare, & Victim Support

SB 225 by Sen. Paxton

This bill expands the searchable childcare database and increases transparency of violations and deficiencies of home-based childcare providers.

SB 263 by Rep. Menéndez

This bill provides financial support for grandparents and other kinship caregivers who are informally caring for a child at risk of entering foster care.

SB 452 by Sen. West

This bill would update statutory provisions relating to prevention and early intervention (PEI) services.

SB 476 by Sen. Nelson

This bill establishes county-level adult sexual assault response teams.

SB 904 by Sen. Perry

This bill requires certain attorneys to complete a training program on trauma-informed care and the impact of trauma on children in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

SB 910 by Sen. Schwertner

This bill requires the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to study and develop options for the integration of qualifying family prevention services into the state's community-based care (CBC) foster care model.

SB 957 by Sen. Zaffirini

This bill eliminates the requirement that victims must cooperate with law enforcement at the scene of a crime or while in the hospital to access funding through the Crimes Victims Compensation (CVC) program.

Passed

SB 1575 by Sen. Kolkhorst

This bill seeks to align Texas with the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) and improve foster care placements for children in foster care with high needs.

SB 1896 by Sen. Kolkhorst

This bill makes changes to the community-based care (CBC) model regarding quality assurance of foster care placements, the expansion of CBC services, contracting practices, and the implementation of federal provisions, among other revisions to CBC.

HB 2633 by Rep. A. Johnson

This bill establishes a grant program to support victims of trafficking, including providing more support for housing and treatment programs.

HB 2706 by Rep. Howard

The bill expands services and care to sexual assault victims.

Key budget items include level funding for home and community-based child abuse prevention programs, increased funding for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), additional funding through federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds for enhanced family violence services, and \$164.2 million in additional funds for Child Protective Services to maintain caseloads.

Other Health & Wellbeing

SB 25 by Sen. Kolkhorst

This bill allows long-term care residents to appoint one essential caregiver who cannot be prohibited from in-person visitation.

SB 248 by Sen. Johnson

This bill aims to curb e-cigarette use, especially among youth, by requiring electronic cigarette retailers to obtain permits to sell these products.

SB 271 by Sen. Perry

This bill enhances the requirements for criminal history checks of applicants seeking employment in licensed assisted living facilities.

HB 2831 by Rep. White

This bill establishes a permanent advisory committee that will advise the Texas Commission on Jail Standards (TCJS) and make recommendations in relation to the confinement of individuals with intellectual developmental disabilities (IDD) in county jails.

Financial Stability

Texas United Ways believe that we are all better off when our neighbors have a roof over their heads, food on the table, and reliable transportation to get to work. Unfortunately, now more than ever, too many Texans are struggling to make ends meet. As a result of the devastating impact of the pandemic on Texas communities—especially Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE), women, and people of color—our United Way network advocated for policies that would address barriers to financial stability and workforce opportunities: childcare, housing affordability and stability, transportation, and strategies to strengthen the financial health of all Texans. Fortunately, there was significant movement around strengthening childcare this session, and several bills focused on making it easier for Texans to access safety net programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) made it further in the legislative process than in years past. However, lawmakers failed to make progress on housing affordability and stability for low-income Texans, access to quality, affordable transportation, and on key workforce initiatives—including education and training programs that would both help more Texans gain the skills needed for family-sustaining wage jobs and help employers meet their workforce needs.

Passed

Childcare

SB 1555 by Zaffirini	This bill ensures federal funds that support childcare are equitably distributed to programs serving infants and toddlers.
HB 619 by Rep. S. Thompson	This bill requires the development of a strategic plan to support the childcare workforce.
HB 1792 by Rep. Button	This bill strengthens Texas Rising Star by consolidating the certification process and ensures the monitoring of programs is fair, consistent, and reliable across the state.
HB 2607 by Rep. Talarico	This bill ensures that childcare subsidy providers participate in Texas Rising Star through a phased approach. It ensures that public funds go to programs that commit to safe and quality care.

Passed

Housing and Transportation

HB 707 Rep. Moody

This bill requires a study on expanding recovery housing in this state.

HB 531 by Rep. Walle

This bill requires flooding disclosures for rental property owners.

HB 1558 by Rep. Button

This bill would require the state's ranking system to grant bonus points to properties that provide a leasing preference to low-income veterans and that are located no more than 2 miles from a veteran's hospital.

Other Barriers to Workforce & Financial Stability

SB 50 by Sen. Zaffirini

This bill seeks to improve and increase competitive integrated employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) served by the state's Medicaid waiver programs.

SB 181 by Sen. Johnson

This bill revises laws automatically suspending a person's driver's license upon conviction of certain drug offenses to ensure certain discretion. The bill also amends the educational program for people with a suspended license.

SB 224 by Sen. Perry

This bill simplifies the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application and recertification process for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

SB 337 by Sen. Powell

This bill establishes a grant program to facilitate the participation of certain veterans and military personnel in apprenticeship training programs.

SB 798 by Sen. Nelson

This bill establishes an alternative, no-cost process for obtaining a birth certificate and state-issued ID for a victim of dating violence, a victim of family violence, or a child of a victim of dating or family violence.

HB 700 by Rep. J. Johnson

This bill requires the development of a plan to ensure eligible foster children receive college credit for completing the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program.

Passed

HB 757 by Rep. Dutton

• This bill prohibits deferred adjudications which resulted in a deferral and dismissal— subject to certain conditions—from being used to deny, suspend, or revoke professional or occupational licenses or certificates of an individual otherwise entitled to or qualified for the license or certificate.

HB 1301 by Rep. Guillen

• This bill expands the purpose of a colonia self-help center to include assistance to low-income and very low-income individuals to improve living conditions as well as help colonia residents develop professional skills and achieve financial literacy.

HB 2352 by Rep. Parker

• This bill would expand the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's (TDCJ) educational and vocational training pilot program to include inmates released on early parole as authorized by the bill. At least two sites would have to be identified for the program and the program cap of four sites would remain.

HB 4544 by Rep. Swanson

• This bill aims to help youth being released or discharged from the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) supervision get personal identification certificates.

Key budget items include \$8 million for employer and community-based partnerships to support an employment program at the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) as well as funding to maintain 2020-21 funding levels for Texans Feeding Texans Programs, which includes \$19.7 million for the Home Delivered Meals program and \$10.2 million for the Surplus Agricultural Products Grant Program.

Passed

Financial Health & Consumer Protections

SB 1063 by Sen. Alvarado	This bill establishes courses in personal financial literacy and economics for high school students in public schools.
SB 2038 by Sen. Menendez	This bill requires freestanding emergency rooms to disclose the prices charged for testing or vaccination for an infectious disease based on a declared state of disaster and any related facility fees or supply costs. The bill also prohibits a freestanding ER from price gouging during a declared state of disaster.
HB 3529 by Rep. Meyer	This bill expands the ability of survivors of financial abuse, including victims of domestic violence and elder financial abuse, to seek remedies and protection.
HB 3774 by Rep. Leach	The bill includes language requiring court rules to establish a clear process for people whose bank accounts are seized or frozen by debt collectors with a court judgment. It allows people to know who is taking their money, understand their rights, and take action to protect money that is exempt from debt collection or should not otherwise be taken.
HB 4477 by Rep. S. Thompson	This bill gives Adult Protective Services (APS) additional tools to address elder financial exploitation.

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 87th Regular Session was one of the most unusual and difficult legislative sessions that advocates have experienced in a long time. Despite this, our network was successful in advancing several important issues thanks to the incredible advocacy of local United Ways and their own 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.

In addition to the wins and losses experienced this legislative session, Texas United Ways are walking away with some new partnerships and relationships that will ultimately strengthen our work going forward. We now serve on the Digital Texas Coalition—a statewide coalition of advocates, employers, and non-profit organizations working to improve digital connectivity — worked closely with the Texas Library Association on budget priorities related to workforce and digital inclusion, and actively engaged the Prenatal to Three (PN-3) Collaborative and its partners on 211 priorities.

Lawmakers are now back home, but they will return soon for a special legislative session to address important issues such as redistricting and federal COVID-19 funding. 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 key bills passed this legislative session 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 own 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 an 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 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.

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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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