

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.*