
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.