

A Look Back

at the

84TH

Legislative Session

As we reflect on the legislative session that ended on June 1, we recall our early optimism that lawmakers would put aside their differences and focus on what all Texans believe in. We all want Texas to be the best state for hard-working people and their families. We all want a future for our children and grandchildren that gives every Texan the chance to compete and succeed.

Our state began 2015 with critically underfunded schools, more than 1 million low-income U.S. citizen adults without health insurance, and imprudent tax giveaways that let big businesses avoid paying their fair share. So there was much work to be done.

However, as this summary shows, the 84th Regular Session of the Texas State Legislature leaves behind a disappointing record for expanding economic opportunity, ensuring health and wellness, and investing in Texas.

Instead of tackling these top priorities for Texas, the high-profile debates in the Capitol focused on guns, tax cuts, and bias against same-sex couples and immigrants. Budget discussions seemed largely based

on a locker-room style contest about who could invest less in our state's future, diverting funding streams, and creating spending caps.

And yet, there have been some rays of hope amid all the cloudy judgment. We are deeply grateful to the committed leaders and partners who helped fight for progress on Pre-K, services for Texans with mental illness, career pathways for college students, and protection from surprise medical billing.

The legislature may be adjourned, but there won't be much down time here at CPPP. This summary is just the beginning of our post-session analysis of the real implications decisions made at the Capitol will have for working families. And we will continue to push for new policies at the state and local levels that expand opportunity and enable Texans of all backgrounds to reach their full potential.




Ensuring Health and Wellness

Hospitals, businesses, taxpayers, and 1 million low-income uninsured Texans largely lost out this session due to a lack of state leadership, with legislators again failing to close the health insurance Coverage Gap. However, Texas made important progress to ensure that more people will have some protection from expensive bills from visits to in-network hospitals and that low-income Texans struggling to provide a healthy diet for their families will face fewer obstacles. Legislators from both parties also recognized that treating mental illness primarily in jails and prisons makes no sense, so they expanded eligibility for mental health services after incarceration.



Our Vision: All Texans have meaningful access to affordable health care, and no Texan remains uninsured.

<i>Our Objectives</i>	<i>Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain or improve support for Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Advance a Texas approach to closing the Coverage Gap. Maintain or improve resources for, and improve access to, subsidized family planning services; improve provider capacity and coordination among these programs. Maintain or improve capacity for mental health and substance abuse services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young Texans placed in youth correctional facilities will now have Medicaid and CHIP benefits reinstated upon their release. A bad bill died that would have put seriously ill undocumented immigrant children lower than U.S. citizen kids on a special health care needs waiting list.
	<p><i>Other Progress Made</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No major cuts were made to Medicaid or CHIP in the state budget, and struggling rural hospitals received some help. Lawmakers increased funding for family planning programs newly consolidated under one agency. Lawmakers extended the timeline for a plan to consolidate all five health and human services agencies into a single agency. Floor debates and committee hearings like the House hearing on the Texas Medicaid 1115 waiver renewal raised awareness of our health care challenges.
	<p><i>Missed Opportunities and New Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lawmakers failed to adopt a “Texas solution” for the 1 million Texans stuck in the Coverage Gap. The latest Medicaid “cost containment” tactics and failure to fund primary care rates could reduce access to care. Inadequate uncompensated care payments to hospitals, along with the lingering Coverage Gap, may add challenges to Texas’ Medicaid 1115 renewal request. The reorganization of health and human services agencies may divert resources from services for needy Texans.

Ensuring Health and Wellness



Our Vision: Consumer protections for health coverage in Texas ensure access, quality, and financial protection.

<i>Our Objectives</i>	<i>Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase resources for ombudsman and consumer assistance capacity for Medicaid Managed Care enrollees. • End surprise emergency medical billing, and remove consumers from the middle of emergency care billing disputes between insurers and out-of-network providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lawmakers increased consumer supports for individuals enrolled in Medicaid Managed Care and adopted stronger standards and supports for network adequacy. • The Legislature made progress to limit surprise medical billing, yet Texans still risk getting stuck with expensive bills from in-network hospitals. • Increased transparency will help people shopping for health insurance get accurate information about covered medications and in-network doctors.
	<p><i>Missed Opportunities and New Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The final budget failed to add new local consumer support staff for Medicaid Managed Care. • Lawmakers passed a “scarlet letter” bill that puts a label on insurance ID cards of Texans who purchase insurance through the Marketplace, opening the door to discrimination.



Our Vision: All Texans with a lived experience of mental illness are able to maintain continuity of care.

<i>Our Objectives</i>	<i>Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a pilot program that uses peer support specialists to provide services to inmates transitioning from a correctional setting into a Community Mental Health Center. • Expand and leverage current continuity of care and case management programs to improve the re-entry process for inmates with mental illness as they are released from local jails. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Legislature established a Peer Support Re-Entry Pilot program to smooth the transition from incarceration into a Community Mental Health Center. • Lawmakers created a new mental health director position at the Department of State Health Services. • A new law expands eligibility for individuals with high clinical needs, regardless of a specific diagnosis, to obtain services following incarceration.
	<p><i>Other Progress Made</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state budget increased funding for mental health and substance abuse services.
	<p><i>Missed Opportunities and New Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lawmakers failed to pass legislation that would reinstate Medicaid benefits to adults upon release from a county jail.

Ensuring Health and Wellness



Our Vision: All Texans can afford a healthy diet, and food insecurity is a thing of the past.

<i>Our Objectives</i>	<i>Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove the asset test from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Oppose efforts to restrict SNAP purchases. Remove the lifetime ban on drug felons receiving SNAP benefits. Remove barriers to the implementation of Community Eligibility, a program that makes it easier for public school students to get free meals at school. Create a reward program for schools doing an exemplary job of feeding children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lawmakers lifted a lifetime ban on drug felons receiving SNAP benefits. Bills to deny SNAP benefits were blocked.
	<p><i>Other Progress Made</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lawmakers became more aware of how asset tests for SNAP and other programs keep families from moving out of poverty.
	<p><i>Missed Opportunities and New Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals that would have created a program to reward schools that feed more kids failed to receive hearings in either chamber.



Our Vision: Ensure all Texans are informed about, and have access to, the programs for which they qualify.

<i>Our Objectives</i>	<i>Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove unintended barriers to enrollment in benefit programs resulting from state laws that have not been updated to sync with current federal law. Support adequate staffing and investments in Texas benefit eligibility systems. Remove the asset test from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A proposal died that would have disqualified children from TANF by placing strict new work requirements on their parents.
	<p><i>Other Progress Made</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lawmakers from both parties supported efforts to improve access to benefits for families in kinship care situations.
	<p><i>Missed Opportunities and New Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lawmakers failed to remove the vehicle limit test for grandparents to receive assistance from the one-time TANF payment.

Expanding Economic Opportunity

Lawmakers this session took the first steps toward addressing one of the biggest challenges facing the Texas economy: the lack of career and college readiness. By increasing the quality of some existing Pre-Kindergarten programs, making it easier for Texans to save for college, and strengthening the pipeline across our educational and workforce systems, state leaders acknowledged the importance of preparing Texans for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Unfortunately, investments to support quality education from Pre-K through college still fell short of fulfilling the promise of a Texas that offers everyone the chance to compete and succeed in life.



Our Vision: All Texas students enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Our Objectives

- Establish Pre-Kindergarten as a full-day program for currently eligible students.
- Identify and remove barriers for Pre-K, Head Start and child care facilities to collaborate.
- Improve quality standards such as class size limits, student-teacher ratios, and health screenings.

Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked

- Lawmakers added incremental funding for Pre-K, which is a good first step toward helping all children start school ready to learn.

Missed Opportunities and New Challenges

- Lawmakers fell short of our obligation to ensure all eligible children have access to high-quality Pre-K.



Our Vision: All Texas students and families have the opportunity to acquire financial skills and assets.

Our Objectives

- Enable schools and school districts to adopt College Savings Accounts (CSAs) and exempt CSAs from resource limits for public benefit program eligibility.
- Support payday and auto title lending reform.
- Expand grantmaking to support household financial education and savings by having more financial services businesses contribute to the Texas Financial Education Endowment.

Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked

- Lawmakers passed legislation that will help expand access to college savings accounts through public schools.
- Lawmakers passed legislation that will expand access to mainstream banking services by encouraging the establishment of banks in under-served areas.
- Lawmakers made it easier for people with disabilities to save money without affecting their eligibility for Medicaid.

Other Progress Made

- A bill passed to incentivize savings accounts, though it was ultimately vetoed by the governor.


Missed Opportunities and New Challenges

- The legislature took a step back in its willingness to support payday and auto title lending reform this session; none of the filed bills were passed.

Expanding Economic Opportunity



Our Vision: More Texans, especially economically disadvantaged students, make it through the educational pipeline to achieve a credential or degree.

<i>Our Objectives</i>	<i>Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance existing programs for need-based aid directed at two-year and four-year public college students. Expand adult education and other job training. Defend the Texas Dream Act. Improve programmatic approaches to adult education, SNAP employment and training, the Jobs and Education for Texans grant program, and skills development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efforts to repeal in-state tuition for non-citizen resident students were blocked in the Senate. Lawmakers approved measures to provide students with meaningful work experience by moving state-sponsored work-study positions off-campus. Legislators passed bills strengthening the transition between community colleges and four-year institutions.
	<p><i>Other Progress Made</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efforts to re-regulate college tuition stalled, which provides time to build awareness for higher financial aid investments as part of any limits on tuition increases.
	<p><i>Missed Opportunities and New Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The legislature did not sufficiently increase funding for financial aid programs to address Texas' college affordability challenges. Texas Education Opportunity Grants, which support need-based aid at community and technical colleges, were cut by \$8 million or approximately 8 percent. The Legislature cut funding to new students for the B-On-Time Loan program and the Top 10 Percent Scholarship Program, effectively ending these programs.



Our Vision: More Texans earn a living wage.

<i>Our Objectives</i>	<i>Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support efforts to raise the minimum wage, including allowing cities to set base wages higher than the federal minimum wage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded drug testing of unemployment insurance recipients stalled in the House and did not become law.
	<p><i>Other Progress Made</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several minimum wage bills received a committee hearing. While ultimately defeated, a joint resolution to refer an increase in the minimum wage to voters in the fall received a debate on the House floor and a record vote.
	<p><i>Missed Opportunities and New Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A bill that would have allowed Dallas County to set a minimum wage for contract workers paid by the county did not make it out of committee.

Investing In Texas

The 2016-17 budget passed this session fails to keep pace with projected population and inflation growth. This means that public schools, higher education, health care, and other state-supported services will continue to be strained by increases in students, clients, and costs. Instead of prioritizing the investments needed to ensure our future prosperity, lawmakers passed more than \$4 billion in tax and fee cuts. These revenue cuts don't just reduce our ability to invest today in our public schools, universities, and health care systems; tax cuts make it that much harder for future legislators to address the needs of our rapidly growing state.



Our Vision: Texas has a state and local revenue system capable of funding necessary public services.

Our Objectives

- Prevent arbitrary tightening of the constitutional limits on spending.
- Ensure that appraisals judge all property at full market value.
- Enact progressive property tax exemptions.
- Require a periodic review of existing tax exemptions and preferences, and eliminate tax giveaways that are ineffective, outdated, or unnecessary.
- Enable investment of a certain portion of the "Rainy Day Fund."
- Reform economic development subsidies to improve transparency and accountability.

Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked

- Lawmakers left the constitutional spending growth limit alone and did not enact additional statutory spending limits.
- Current law concerning appraisal caps and local-government revenue caps was left unchanged. Small improvements were made in the appraisal appeal process and lawsuit procedures.
- A proposal to invest a portion of the "Rainy Day Fund," protecting state reserves from erosion by inflation, was signed into law.

Other Progress Made

- The Senate unanimously passed a proposed change to allow cities, counties, and other local governments to offer a flat-dollar (rather than a percentage) homestead exemption, but time ran out before it could receive a House vote.
- A House proposal to review existing tax exemptions and eliminate ineffective giveaways was approved by a committee but did not receive a floor vote.
- The governor vetoed legislation to expand Ch. 313 business property tax breaks, one of the state's largest tax giveaways.

Missed Opportunities and New Challenges

- The 25 percent franchise tax reduction for businesses and \$10,000 increase in the school property tax homestead exemption will barely benefit most Texans.
- Lawmakers are sending a constitutional amendment to voters to dedicate a portion of general sales and motor vehicle sales taxes to highways, reducing funding for the rest of the state's programs by billions each year.



Investing In Texas



Our Vision: Texas funds its public schools at a level adequate to meet the needs of all students.

Our Objectives

- Require a review of school finance formulas, particularly those affecting low-income students.
- Include inflation adjustments in school finance formulas.
- Increase the base level of funding that supports public schools in Texas.

Good Bills Passed or Bad Bills Blocked

- A House school finance reform proposal, which would have worsened inequity between the highest and lowest property-wealth districts, did not receive a floor vote.

Other Progress Made

- The Senate passed a proposal to study the additional funding needed to educate English language learners, though it did not receive consideration in the House.

Missed Opportunities and New Challenges

- Legislators failed to confront the major challenges of our school funding system.
- While the per-pupil Basic Allotment within the school funding formula was slightly increased, the increase disappears by 2017 once adjusted for inflation.



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