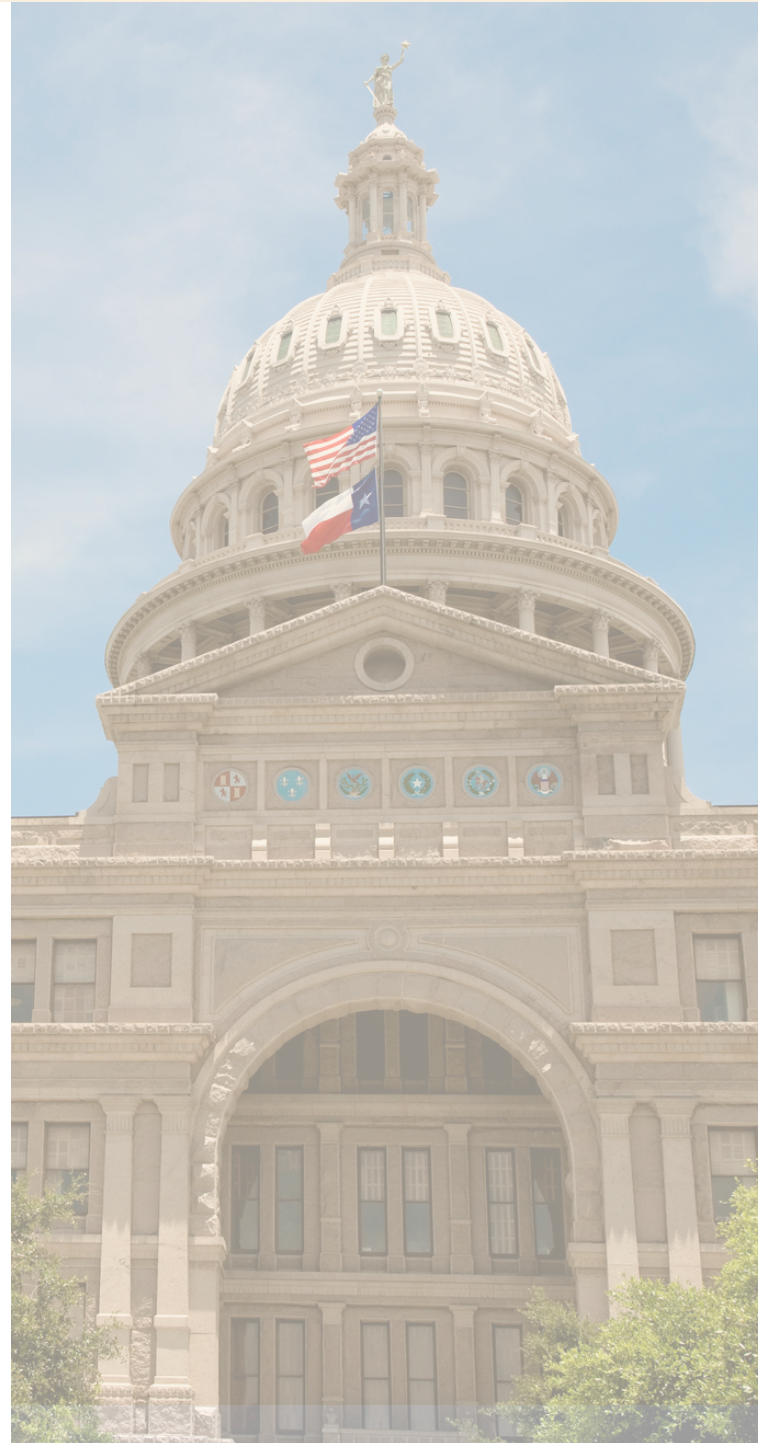# Policy Roadmap
for a Just & Equitable Texas

EVERY TEXAN'S MISSION IS TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC POLICY TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY FOR TEXANS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS.

At Every Texan, equity means that policies, procedures, programs, and the distribution of resources account for the varied histories, challenges, and needs of the people we serve.

In Texas, where the population is majority people of color, racial disparities remain deep and pervasive across indicators. Data shows that public policy advancing racial equity improves life outcomes for *all* Texans. Every Texan is committed to addressing the historic and systemic barriers to racial equity through our policy work.

With these principles in mind, Every Texan's 2023 legislative agenda focuses on six key policy areas where some of the largest disparities for Texans exist: Health Care, Food Security, Education, Worker Power and Supporting Families, Fair Taxation, and Voting Rights. Addressing these policy areas will benefit all Texans, regardless of race, class, gender, immigration status, or any other factor, and create a stronger community, workforce, and economy in Texas.

❤️ HEALTH CARE:

EVERY TEXAN HAS AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY HEALTH CARE ACCESS

Texans deserve quality health care for our loved ones and ourselves, regardless of race, gender, religion, or where we call home. Currently, Texas has the worst insured rate in the nation. Millions of Texans do not have access to affordable health care, which, in turn, has damaging effects on our economy. In the best interest of the health and well-being of Texas families, the Texas Legislature must provide access to affordable, high-quality health care through comprehensive insurance and top-tier medical providers. In the face of inflation and the continued impact of COVID-19, Texas legislators must work across differences to ensure that state budget investments in health and human services help all Texans meet basic needs. Improving access to affordable health care will provide Texans with greater economic security and produce better health outcomes for the state.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Expand Medicaid** for low-income adults and extend coverage for new mothers for a full year postpartum.

- **Increase low salaries** for eligibility staff, streamline enrollment to end harmful delays in health and food benefits, and prevent gaps in health coverage when temporary COVID-19 pandemic eligibility rules end.

- **Restore grants** for outreach and local enrollment assistance to help Texans access support resources for health care, food, and basic needs.

- **Establish a legislative directive** for robust agency-led outreach to the mixed-immigration-status families of one in four Texas children, to reach those who are eligible but not enrolled in Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP.

- **Increase funding for family planning** and oppose limits on access to birth control.

- **Eliminate civil and criminal penalties for abortion** and other types of reproductive health care.

🍏 FOOD SECURITY:

EVERY TEXAN HAS ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD, AND NO TEXAN GOES HUNGRY

No matter our race, income, or zip code, no Texan should go hungry. 1.8 million Texas children live in households where access to food is limited, and 4 million Texans experience food insecurity, a number that has been rising in recent years. Hunger harms children, adults, seniors, and families of all races and ethnicities. Studies show that hunger curbs productivity, slows economic growth, and places unnecessary burdens on our health and education systems. Texas must address the disparities in our food security systems to ensure that Texans from all walks of life do not struggle to get or keep food benefits. Lawmakers must remove barriers to food assistance and benefit programs and fund state outreach to help connect Texans with critical resources.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Modernize the vehicle ownership limits** of the SNAP program.

- **Increase access to SNAP** for low-income college students.

- **Ensure children retain access to SNAP** by extending enrollment to a year.

- **Allow people approaching release from incarceration to pre-apply** for SNAP benefits.

📖 EDUCATION:

EVERY TEXAN HAS ACCESS TO A HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION

Regardless of where we come from, what we look like, or where we live, every Texan deserves access to an accurate, honest, fully-funded public education and affordable higher education opportunities. Our state relies on our public K-12 schools and higher education institutions to develop an informed democracy, cultivate a talented workforce, and promote a shared identity that leads to collective prosperity. Our schools are allowing large disparities to exist between student groups. While only 52% of Texas students are at or above grade level in reading, scores are disproportionately lower for Black and brown students. In addition, Texas has the second-highest student loan debt. Debt impacts the way people determine if postsecondary education is both accessible and affordable. As our labor market demands an increasingly educated and specialized populace, more and more Texans from low-income, systematically marginalized communities are seeking higher education, but ever-increasing tuition rates and cost of living make this life goal unsustainable for many. To fulfill our promise to the next generation of Texans and support our growing workforce, policymakers must work together to ensure sufficient opportunity and support for all Texans to get a quality, academically sound education, at every level, despite zip code or background.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Establish long-term funding** that counts every child and a sustainable revenue model that supports public schools.

- **Increase funding for pre-k,** low-income students, and emergent bilingual students.

- **Protect against programs** that take crucial funding from public schools.

- **Ensure immigrant children and young adults** continue to have access to public and higher education.

- **Ensure all students** have access to culturally relevant, academically sound curriculum and properly trained teachers.

- **Remove barriers to attaining postsecondary degrees** and fund support programs for students.

✊ WORKER POWER AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES:
EVERY TEXAN CAN PARTICIPATE FULLY IN OUR ECONOMY

Everyone – no matter our race, gender, or where we come from – deserves dignity, humanity, and the opportunity to pursue our dreams. We can make Texas a state that values and strengthens all families. This means ensuring the dignity of Texans to have jobs that support thriving individuals and families. Families across the state are struggling to make ends meet with little reinforcement from the state government. Decades of failed Texas leadership mean stagnant wages and deadly working conditions. It means the dismantling of the social safety net for families and individuals who need it the most, such as teachers whose real average wage has decreased by 4% in the last ten years. Together, we can make Texas a state that honors hard work and respects everyone's humanity by expanding working people's ability to achieve racial, gender, and economic justice through organizing, collective bargaining, and state and local policies that protect workers' rights. All Texas workers, no matter their legal status, deserve safe and productive jobs that lead to growth for themselves, their families, and for every Texan.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Increase the minimum wage** and protect workers from wage theft.

- **Allow local governments to require paid parental, medical, family, and sick leave** and set their own minimum wage requirements.

- **Eliminate financial and legal hardships** for kinship caregivers.

- **Enact and enforce strict guidelines on worker classification** to protect access to unemployment benefits and prevent employers from using fraudulent exemption loopholes.

- **Combat harmful state intervention** that undermines the local government's ability to meet the needs of families and the demands of their workforce.

- **Increase wages for state employees** and allow public sector employees, like teachers, to engage in collective bargaining.

- **Eliminate barriers to economic and civic participation for immigrant Texans**, including expanding access to driver's license permits.

- **End funding of Operation Lone Star** and establish budgetary checks and balances within the Legislature to prevent unappropriated, unilateral spending in the future

💰 Fair Taxation:
Every Texan is adequately supported by an equitable tax system

A state budget and tax system that is equitable, adequate, and responsive to its growing population and needs supports a more prosperous future for all Texans, regardless of race, place, or background. Certain elected officials and their wealthy friends have rigged Texas' tax system to be upside down; the wealthiest pay the least percentage of their income while working families pay the highest percentage of our income.

In Texas, the wealthiest residents pay an average of 4.1% of their income in state and local taxes, compared to 16.8% for residents with the lowest incomes.

Our elected leaders must do right by all Texans and ensure corporations and the wealthy elite pay what they owe to fully fund the schools, roads, and other essential community services all of us rely on.

Legislative Policy Recommendations:

- **Modernize our tax system, close corporate tax loopholes, and eliminate wasteful tax breaks.**
- **Improve the fairness and accuracy of the property tax appraisal process.**
- **Permit cities and counties to grant flat-dollar homestead exemptions.**
- **Use the Economic Stabilization Fund (Rainy Day Fund) as it was intended to avoid cuts to services essential to all Texans.**

📣 Voting Rights:
Every Texan has the freedom to fully participate in our democracy

Democracy can only work for all of us if it includes all of us. Every eligible voter in Texas reserves the right to be heard at the ballot box. However, Texas has a long history of voter discrimination against Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian American voters. As a result, thousands of eligible voters are disproportionately prevented from exercising their fundamental rights. As reported by the Brennan Center in October of this year, Texas absentee applications and mail ballots were rejected at extremely high levels. These reports showed that some 12,000 applications and 25,000 ballots were rejected during the March primary and that there were "signs of a race gap," which resulted in nonwhite voters being at least 30% more likely to have an application or mail ballot rejected than white voters. Texas policymakers should learn from the recent and long-term history of voter discrimination and work together to expand the franchise by removing artificial barriers to the ballot so that everyone in our state can make our voices heard on Election Day.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Modernize the Texas voter registration system** through electronic registration and automatic registration at age 18.

- **Reject attempts to purge eligible voters from the rolls** and limit restrictions on individual voters or county election administrators.

- **Support measures that increase voter participation**, voter education, and training for poll workers.

- **Ensure adequate resources to properly register voters**, distribute and collect mail-in ballots, and hold elections with minimal wait times and obstacles, especially for voters with disabilities and language barriers.

Social justice requires public policy.

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