



88th Legislative Session Recap

Missed Opportunities for Restorative Change

Texans of all backgrounds, regardless of how we look or where we call home, are worth a fair shot at reaching our full potential. When we provide Texans with equal access to well-funded public education, affordable health care, and dignified jobs, we create a state where everyone does well. **Unfortunately, the Texas Legislature failed to take advantage of a huge chance to ensure that we all prosper together.**

Coming into session, the Legislature had a projected 2022-23 ending cash balance of \$32.7 billion. **Along with expected revenue, this gave the Legislature about \$188 billion for general spending in 2024-25 – nearly \$39.2 billion above the 2022-23 biennium.** Comptroller Hegar advised the Legislature to focus on short-term spending and not squander the extra funding on long-term commitments. With the completion of the second special session, the Texas Legislature did the opposite, instead committing billions of dollars in tax cuts that will mostly benefit business owners, wealthy property owners, and large corporations, including the newly reconstituted school tax abatement for large corporate manufacturers. By failing to invest in school children, college students, renters, or programs that benefit all Texans, regardless of race and income, **the Legislature put corporate interests ahead of the people of Texas.**

Beyond the budget, this session will be remembered for the harmful attacks by a handful of powerful legislators that cause division and use fear to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts that benefit all students and disempower local communities that have passed efforts to protect our transgender neighbors and relatives. The Legislature also removed all worker protections at the local level, including water breaks, fair chance hiring, leave policies, and non-discrimination ordinances beyond federal law.

But all was not lost. **Every Texan secured wins to increase pay and paid parental leave for state employees, improve access to SNAP benefits, extend postpartum Medicaid care for new mothers to 12 months, and defeat school vouchers and extreme anti-immigrant proposals.**



HEALTH CARE:

EVERY TEXAN HAS AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY HEALTH CARE ACCESS

Texans are worth comprehensive health coverage that is accessible, affordable, and affirming. **Sadly, Texas has the worst uninsured rate in the nation**, which hurts our families, communities, and economy. **Texas also remains one of just 10 states that refuses federal funds to expand Medicaid to adults with low wages.** Heading into session, an eligibility system with too much red tape and too few workers meant extreme delays for eligible families to get health and food benefits. Fortunately, House interim discussions created hope for steps forward on access to health care coverage.

OUR HEALTH CARE GOALS

- WIN!
Expand Medicaid for adults with low wages: During the last session in 2021, a majority of House members signed on as co-authors to legislation known as the Live Well Texas program that would have brought a 90% federal funding match for Medicaid. Similar legislation was filed by members of both parties in the House this session. Despite overwhelming public support, undisputable positive revenue projections, and support from health advocates, providers, and insurers, leadership did not allow any bill hearings. Every Texan with our partners at Sick of It Texas remained undeterred and held a People's Hearing to give voice to the uninsured communities in Texas.
- WIN!
Expand postpartum coverage for new moms to one year, as recommended by the Kids Count Report: House Speaker Phelan prioritized 12 months of Medicaid coverage for postpartum women (HB 12). The House passed the bill with little opposition but faced a tougher road in the Senate. Eventually, the Senate agreed to move the bill with controversial language related to abortion. Rep. Rose and health care advocates eventually worked out the language in conference to give the bill the best chance for federal approval. We look forward to its implementation next year.
- 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:** The budget ensures that Health and Human Service Commission (HHSC) eligibility workers will keep their pay raises, and all government employees receive a general salary increase. This aims to address the understaffing issue in crucial roles affecting Medicaid and SNAP processing times. The HHSC received only \$123 million out of the requested \$143 million for Medicaid unwinding support. Wages for Medicaid community attendants increased to \$10.60/hr, up from \$8.15/hr.
- Establish a legislative directive for robust agency-led outreach to the one-in-four children who live in mixed-immigration-status households, to reach those who are eligible but not enrolled in Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP:** Unfortunately, despite a tremendous effort and appeals to House leadership, this proposal did not gain traction. Immigrants continue to be ignored despite their crucial role as frontline workers and taxpayers.
- WIN!
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:** The Legislature invested an additional \$113 million into state women's health programs that provide contraception, well-woman health care, and life-saving cancer screenings. Critically, the Legislature increased funding to the Family Planning Program by 65%, which has been woefully underfunded for many years. Unfortunately, the Legislature did not alter its course on abortion.

WIN!

- **Maintain access to affordable and comprehensive health insurance through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace:** A proposal emerged (HB 700) mandating that Texas take over the management of the ACA Marketplace at the state level instead of the federal level. Every Texan rose to the threat and helped defeat the legislation in committee before it got traction, explaining that such a takeover could undermine Texas' record enrollment in affordable and comprehensive coverage.



KEY TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

The House continues to show true leadership on the health care front by prioritizing bills like HB 12, but until state leadership addresses Medicaid Expansion and outreach to mixed-immigration-status families, Texas will continue to lead the nation in uninsured rates. Communities of color are being left behind in health care access and the lack of leadership during the Medicaid unwinding process is exacerbating the problem.



FOOD SECURITY:

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

All Texans are worthy of access to secure, accessible, and nutritious foods for ourselves and our families. The COVID pandemic and the rise in inflation have changed the narrative on food access. Electeds of all stripes now realize that anyone's circumstances can change in an instant and access to healthy food is a core need that should never be limited.

Every Texan and our coalition partners identified the following priorities to address access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):

OUR FOOD SECURITY GOALS

WIN!

- **Modernize the vehicle ownership limits of the SNAP program as recommended by the Kids Count report:** We won! HB 1287 by Rep. Guillen updated the Vehicle Asset Test (VAT) and will be effective on September 1, 2023. This is the first time the VAT has been updated since 2001. The new limits are \$22,500 for first vehicles and \$8,700 for any additional vehicles. This legislation will have a significant impact on communities of color but will benefit all Texans, regardless of race and ethnicity.
- **Increase access to SNAP for low-income college students:** Rep. Walle and Sen. West filed legislation but it did not pass this time around. We are hopeful it will gain more traction next session.

- WIN!**
- **Ensure children retain access to SNAP by extending enrollment to a year:** Legislation failed to pass the House or the Senate.
 - **Allow people approaching release from incarceration to pre-apply for SNAP benefits:** HB 1743 by Rep. Leach, which allows eligible Texans leaving the criminal justice system to pre-apply for SNAP, takes effect on September 1, 2023. This change ensures that formerly incarcerated people will have access to food on release and can focus on finding a job and rebuilding their lives.



KEY TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

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EDUCATION:

EVERY TEXAN HAS ACCESS TO A HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION

Students across Texas are still experiencing learning loss from the pandemic which is especially felt among low-income students, emergent bilingual students, and “at-risk” students. With the additional available funding, there was a clear opportunity to invest in Texas students and teachers, but voucher schemes, censorship, and attacks on diversity and inclusion derailed most of the positive prospects for education reforms. There were some encouraging developments, notably the positive reforms in community college funding through HB 8.

OUR EDUCATION GOALS

- **Establish a sustainable revenue model that supports public schools and long-term funding that counts every child.**
- **Increase funding for Pre-K, low-income students, and emergent bilingual students:** During the budget process, legislators made half-promises of small increases to the basic allotment. HB 100 included a modest increase and a framework for enrollment-based funding for certain allotments, but the bill failed in conference committee after the Senate gutted it and amended it with a voucher scheme already rejected by the House. Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer made school funding a priority at every opportunity, but the Governor and Lt. Governor's insistence on vouchers derailed any real opportunity to support students and teachers.
- **Ensure immigrant children and young adults continue to have access to public and higher education:** Thankfully, the bills filed to remove certain immigrant children from the education school finance and accountability system did not get hearings, nor did the bills attempting to repeal in-state tuition for immigrant students in higher education.

WIN!

(FOR NOW)

- **Protect against programs that take crucial funding from public schools:** As with every other session where vouchers take center stage, urban and rural legislators in the House voted in alignment with their district's interests and opposed voucher schemes. A majority of members voted twice on the House floor to oppose voucher funding. Time and time again, a majority of House members emphasize their opposition to vouchers because of the drain on education resources, which are vital for the economic well-being of rural communities across the state. Even in the Senate, Democrats and rural Republicans consistently oppose voucher measures. If not for the combination of specific carve-outs and political pressure, voucher proposals would have failed to reach the Senate floor. Every Texan continues to keep student voices at the forefront and ensure the racial history of voucher schemes isn't forgotten. Nothing passed in the regular session but Governor Abbott called a special session in October of 2023 to continue pushing vouchers.
- **Ensure all students have access to culturally relevant, academically sound curriculum and properly trained teachers:** Legislation to add ethnic studies courses into the social studies curriculum received a late hearing in the House, but it was too late in the session for it to advance. We look forward to continuing this conversation in the interim.
- **Remove barriers to attaining postsecondary degrees and fund support programs for students:** SB 17's DEI repeal was the biggest legislative loss in education. While the House tried to save some jobs of currently employed DEI officers, the final result offered no job protections. The House prevented attempts to repeal tenure for professors at state universities (SB 18), but every state university must follow the same process that removes some protections and could reduce recruitment and retention of valuable faculty across all state universities. Lastly, instead of ensuring that students have access to an accurate and honest education, HB 900 continued the trend of censorship in schools and libraries.



KEY TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

This session should have been known for major investments in all levels of education to pandemic-related learning setbacks and rising costs. Instead, voucher schemes and censorship bills took center stage and future investments will be squandered away in property tax cuts for businesses and affluent homeowners, leaving teachers and students behind. HB 8, which invested in community colleges, was a needed beacon of hope amidst a session of squandered opportunities.

The special session in October will be the last opportunity to salvage K-12 funding, but it may come at the price of a damaging voucher scheme that will further erode our public education system in the long run. Every Texan remains committed to advocating for enrollment-based funding, additional resources for students needing extra support, and opposing privatizing public tax dollars.



WORKER POWER AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES:

EVERY TEXAN CAN PARTICIPATE FULLY IN OUR ECONOMY

Texans deserve dignified jobs that help individuals and families thrive. The [research and data](#) consistently show that worker power, [union density](#), and stronger worker rights lead to a larger, more diverse middle class where we can prosper together. The Legislature continues to leave workers and families behind by passing policies that take away from workers' incomes and inflate the salaries of wealthy CEOs. Communities across Texas join local lawmakers to create solutions that meet their needs. However, Texas' most powerful leaders block these community-driven solutions, refusing to pass statewide policies that benefit all of us. Nonetheless, Every Texan with our partners managed some wins for state employees, Texas' largest workforce.

Every Texan and partners launched a new worker power campaign, [Texans Together for Our Common Good](#), to demand the Governor and most powerful elected officials provide the public services that benefit us all. The campaign fights against harmful legislation that would further erode prosperity for working families and advocates for raising wages and improving benefits for state government employees who provide the services we all need.

OUR WORKER POWER GOALS

PARTIAL
WIN!

- **Secure a living wage and paid family, medical, and sick leaves for all Texas workers:**

The state budget included salary increases for state employees, with the exception of teachers and university staff. The budget appropriates about \$1.8 billion across all funds for a 5% pay raise (\$3,000 minimum) in the fiscal year 2024 and another 5% in 2025 for all state workers. However, employees at state higher education institutions were excluded from these raises. Although a 10% pay raise is a step forward, it doesn't keep pace with the nearly 18% inflation experienced since the pandemic's onset. The state continues to prohibit local solutions to raise wages and legislation to increase minimum wage increases in the private sector did not advance. State agency employees won paid parental leave and will now have access to 8 weeks of paid leave for birthing a child or 4 weeks for adoption. The legislature failed to enact paid parental leave for the 74% of working Texans who do not have access to any form of paid family leave. Legislation (HB 2604) to provide parental leave for the private sector didn't get a hearing, despite promises to the contrary. We look forward to the interim to fully vet paid parental leave policy proposals.

- **Stop harmful state intervention that undermines the ability of local communities and governments to meet the needs of families and workforce demands:**

Rep. Burrows, under the influence of corporate greed, passed HB 2127, known as the Death Star Bill, because it removes the ability of cities and counties to take any action to improve conditions for workers. Using the tactic of preemption, the bill undermines local democracy, removing ordinances that address discrimination, consumer protections, tenant rights, and many other local laws in a clear violation of home rule. The law is currently being challenged in the courts, but if it stays on the books, advocacy for workers and families will likely need to happen at the state level. On the positive side, The Crown Act (HB 567) prohibiting discrimination based on hair texture passed and is now law. Legislation related to prohibiting the improper use of criminal history for employment failed to pass the House.

- **Eliminate financial and legal hardships for kinship caregivers:** Legislation to align the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program’s asset tests to SNAP was filed but did not get a hearing.
- **Ensure all workers are safe on the job and protected from wage theft and misclassification:** The Legislature failed to enact state policy that will protect workers from wage theft and misclassification, or mandate workers compensation insurance for injured workers. Every Texan and partners will continue to advocate for policies that protect Texas’ hardest-working families from exploitation.



KEY TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

All Texan workers have the right to form and join a union. It is crucial that every worker is able to join a union and bargain collectively over salary, benefits, and working conditions. Legislation supporting workers to understand their rights is a basic and necessary next step. Every Texan worked with partners to propose policies to mandate public sector employers to notify new employees of their right to join a union. This bill did not get a committee hearing.

Governor Abbott and the most powerful state lawmakers deliberately failed to address pay raises and improved working conditions for teachers. Despite relentless advocacy and a state task force’s recommendations, Gov. Abbott has made it clear that he intends to defund public education using vouchers. Teacher collective bargaining is an important tool to raise education workforce standards and improve our public school system. Texas advocates must unite to demand public school teachers be empowered to bargain collectively, fight vouchers, and raise the bar for our communities.



IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY

EVERY TEXAN DESERVES A JUST IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

Most of us Texans value the importance of building a better life for our families. Yet certain Texas leaders continue to cast a blind eye toward immigrant families and children. Research shows that metropolitan areas with the greatest economic growth also experienced the greatest increase in the labor force attributed to immigrants. [Immigration](#) is both a cause and effect of growth: growing cities attract workers, and new workers bolster economic growth. Coming into the session, we hoped for – but did not expect – a different approach to state immigration policy. In the end, Operation Lone Star funding took precedence over education and health care needs, but we were able to defeat some of the most draconian and inhumane immigration proposals.

OUR IMMIGRATION GOALS

- Eliminate barriers to economic and civic participation for immigrant Texans, including expanding access to driver's license permits:** Immigration continues to be the third rail of politics for Texas Republicans. Attempts to repeal in-state tuition for immigrants or to remove undocumented children from the K-12 school finance and accountability systems failed to get hearings. Unfortunately, a bill (HB 1869) to provide access to driver's permits for those without documents for a driver's license suffered the same fate. Even legislation to do outreach to mixed-immigrant families for eligible health care benefits failed to get any traction. The only policies gaining ground are enforcement-focused border security bills that drain tax funds, violate civil rights and international treaties, harass local residents, and do not provide measurable safety improvements.
- End Operation Lone Star funding and establish budgetary checks and balances within the Legislature to prevent unappropriated, unilateral spending in the future:** The final budget provides approximately \$5.1 billion for border security programs, including \$1.6 billion to the office of the Governor with little direction. Thankfully, Every Texas with our partners were able to defeat a host of bills that created new and enhanced criminal penalties for border immigration enforcement. Advocates also defeated vigilante border security enforcement bills (SB 2424/HB 20) known as the Border Protection Unit or Border Force, due to tremendous leadership from the Mexican American Legislative Caucus (MALC).

WIN!



KEY TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

Some of these proposals may come back in future sessions, but the evidence from Operation Lone Star continues to show a complete disregard for the safety of women and children, federal law, and humane enforcement. Every Texan will continue to work closely with partners and the community to advocate for policies that welcome and value immigrant Texans and their many contributions to our state.



FAIR TAXATION:

EVERY TEXAN IS ADEQUATELY SUPPORTED BY AN EQUITABLE TAX SYSTEM

Texans are worth a fair and just tax system. However, Texas continues to have an upside-down tax system that places the largest burdens on lower- and middle-income taxpayers. With the unprecedented revenue available this year, there was a real opportunity to reduce taxes on students, lower-income households, and communities of color across Texas that are struggling in this economy, while still investing in education, health care, and infrastructure. Unable to come to a decision on tax policy during the regular session, state leaders decided in the second special session to squander the opportunity on school property tax rate cuts, corporate franchise tax cuts, an appraisal cap on commercial property, and an increased homestead exemption. Homestead exemptions, at least, focus on households and not corporations, but ultimately, when the economy turns, this concoction of tax cuts will hamper future investments in Texas children and infrastructure.

OUR TAXATION GOALS

WIN!

- Modernize our tax system, close corporate tax loopholes, and eliminate wasteful tax breaks:** Last session, Every Texan defeated the reauthorization of Chapter 313, the much-criticized corporate tax abatement program that allowed giant corporations to escape their responsibilities to pay school taxes in exchange for misleading job creation promises. Both conservative and progressive legislators aligned to expose Chapter 313’s abuses and defeat the program. This session, the House Speaker sought to revive the program via HB 5. Every Texan and our allies worked diligently to remind the members of the program’s wastefulness. In the end, HB 5 passed, but in a limited form and with less potential for abuse. Similar tax breaks for unworthy corporations failed to pass including HB 1718/SB 675 for Certified Capital Companies and HB 3600/SB 1613, a film and TV tax credit. Every Texan also successfully defeated SB 369, which would have allowed wealthy homeowners to evade city taxes by de-annexing their communities from the city. One equitable tax break bill (SB 379) championed by Rep. Howard passed. This legislation will exempt critical items from sales tax including diapers, baby wipes, breast milk pumping, and certain personal hygiene products.
- Improve the fairness and accuracy of the property tax appraisal process:** Attempts to reduce appraisal caps did not advance in the regular session, but unfortunately, efforts to improve the appraisal process did not gain traction. In the special session, the Legislature passed the first-ever temporary 20% cap on appraisal increases for properties valued at \$5 million or lower that aren’t considered homesteads. Those would include second homes, vacation properties, rental houses, or commercial retail or business properties.
- Permit cities and counties to grant flat-dollar homestead exemptions:** Filed legislation (HB 2054/SB 854) did not gain a hearing. The failure to prioritize local-option flat-dollar homestead exemptions demonstrates that our state leaders are not prioritizing equitable tax cuts for middle-class homeowners, instead focusing on benefiting the wealthy. It is possible to enact fair tax cuts focused on the Texans who need help, but Texas leaders have failed to make that a priority.



KEY TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

Most immediately, Constitutional Amendments will be on the November 2023 ballot including HJR 132 to prohibit a wealth tax. It is likely the amendments authorizing tax cuts and a permanent ban on the wealth tax will pass, but Every Texan will continue to sound the alarm that these tax cuts are unsustainable long-term. Shifting property taxes to sales taxes is a recipe for disaster because sales taxes are inequitable and volatile as the economy shifts. We need to imagine a state that can do better for every community and that starts with a budget that can grow with our state and not continue to be cut into crumbs. Student and teacher needs, infrastructure for roads, broadband, the grid, and health care priorities do not need to be cut to the bone. Every Texan will continue amplifying the **People’s Budget** to unite Texans across race, class, and gender to establish a policy agenda that prioritizes and ensures our collective prosperity.

VOTING RIGHTS:

EVERY TEXAN HAS THE FREEDOM TO FULLY PARTICIPATE IN OUR DEMOCRACY

Texans deserve a fair electoral process that honors the voting rights of all Texans. Unfortunately, this session continued a long and recent history in Texas of using false allegations of threats to election integrity as a proxy for voter suppression against communities of color. Very little proactive legislation to address low voter turnout, reduce voter confusion, or even reduce burdens for county election officials got any traction. Instead, a litany of preemption bills aimed at urban counties, especially Harris County, dominated the discussion including proposals to criminalize, remove, fine, audit, and undermine county election officials for minor irregularities. Nonetheless, Every Texan continued to push for equitable voting rights and modernizing our election systems.

OUR VOTING RIGHTS GOALS

- WIN!
Modernize the Texas voter registration system through electronic registration and automatic registration at age 18: Both chambers filed numerous bills but none received a hearing. Texas continues to remain one of the few states that does not allow electronic voter registration.
- Reject attempts to purge eligible voters from the rolls and limit restrictions on individual voters or county election administrators:** Every Texan with our partners defeated two extreme voter suppression bills in the House that passed out of the Senate (SB 1600 and SB 900). SB 1600 would have required documentary proof of citizenship to register to vote, in violation of federal law and U.S. Supreme Court precedent. SB 900 would have inexplicably repealed countywide polling sites, despite decades of support by both parties and local officials, and no evidence of them causing voting irregularities or abuses. Thankfully, the House elections committee wisely rejected these proposals.
- 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:** Opportunities for proactive measures were fleeting during the session. Every Texan with our coalition partners focused our attention on opposing the many bills undermining local county election officials. We also combatted false narratives of rampant voter fraud and irregularities. Ultimately, a couple of bills passed that allow for election audits and a bill specific to Harris County that would place the election operations with the County Tax Assessor instead of the Elections Administrator is being challenged in the courts.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

The House Elections Committee remained deliberate and thoughtful in rejecting many of the Senate's extreme voter suppression bills, but recent history has shown the unpredictable nature of political decisions. This session truly underscores the threat to democracy, especially following U.S. Supreme Court decisions that weakened the Voting Rights Act. Federal reforms may be the only realistic opportunities to protect voting rights. Every Texan will remain vigilant in opposing all threats to democracy and voting rights, particularly those that impact communities of color.