



Policy Roadmap

for a Just & Equitable Texas

As we approach the 89th Texas Legislative Session, Texans have a heightened awareness of what we're worth. We know that more unites us than divides us and that regardless of our race, gender, or socioeconomic status we're all worthy of a fair shot at prosperity. Texans deserve quality public education, affordable health care, and dignified jobs. Since 1985, Every Texan has engaged in research, policy analysis, and advocacy to increase equity and opportunity for Texans of all backgrounds. ***Our "why" has always been Texans.***

This year, we took our mission on the road to hear directly from everyday Texans what they value most about how state resources are allocated and the changes they want to see in policies and leadership to build a more inclusive, equitable future for every Texan. Through our People's Budget listening tour, a wide cross-section of Texans shared their concerns and priorities through surveys, community meetings, and tele-townhalls, which helped inform these policy priorities.

For too long, the wealthy few have prioritized corporate interests over community investments. Texas policymakers know better – ***it's time to put Texans back at the heart of our policymaking.*** Three out of five People's Budget respondents (61%) believe that state lawmakers "care more about wealthy Texans or their donors than working families or low-income communities." The ongoing underinvestment in public education hits our students and teachers hard. Millions of Texans lost access to health care during Medicaid unwinding, notably over one million of whom were children. Texas workers are struggling to keep up with low wages and a lack of parental leave to care for their families. Conspiracy theories abound and threaten our democracy. ***When Texans come together, we make our voices heard. It's time to demand policy solutions that work for every Texan.*** If legislators put politics aside, we can create a state budget that invests in our communities and reflects our shared values.

HEALTH CARE:

EVERY TEXAN IS WORTH ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY HEALTH CARE

Texans deserve quality health care that's accessible, affordable, and affirming—regardless of race, gender, religion, or where we call home. Due to a lack of investments in staff and technology, too many Texans struggle to enroll in or stay enrolled in vital health coverage programs. Low-income Texans, Texans of color, and immigrants are disproportionately less likely to be able to access fair and affordable coverage. Together, we must demand our leaders fully fund our health care system so that all Texans are cared for.

The recent unwinding of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency required every single Medicaid enrollee to have their coverage eligibility re-checked in a short period of time. This enormous systemic failure has highlighted how broken the eligibility and enrollment systems are in Texas, particularly for those seeking access to health care programs like Medicaid and CHIP.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Close the Health Insurance Coverage Gap:** By making Medicaid available to more low-income adults, lawmakers can improve health outcomes for low- to moderate-income earners across the state, create thousands of jobs, and reduce budget spending.
- **Reduce Costly Red Tape Barriers to Benefits:** Texas Medicaid and CHIP should be able to use all available tools to reduce administrative burdens and taxpayer costs.
- **Restore State-Funded Grants for Outreach and Local Enrollment Assistance:** State support of outreach and enrollment assistance would help Texans access critical resources for health care, food, and basic needs.
- **Establish a Legislative Directive for Agency-Led Language Access Plan:** The state should fund resources that improve language access in the eligibility system process so that all Texas families have clear guidance.
- **Preserve Collection of and Access to Texas Health Data:** We oppose efforts to limit the collection of health outcomes or risk factor data, especially for youth and mothers.



“EVERYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO HAVE THE SAME ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE.”

- PEOPLE'S BUDGET LISTENING SESSION





FOOD SECURITY:

EVERY TEXAN IS WORTH ACCESS TO SECURE AND HEALTHY FOOD

In a state as great as Texas, no one should have to worry about where they will get their next meal. When families struggle to make ends meet – juggling finances to cover rent, utilities, and transportation – often little is left for food.

Food insecurity affects families of all races and ethnicities, though certain populations are at higher risk for hunger. Black and Hispanic families are twice as likely to report not being able to afford food as white Texas families. We can all agree – no Texan should ever go hungry. Together, we can break down barriers that keep Texans from accessing food.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Remove Harmful Barriers to Food Assistance:** The Legislature should expand SNAP certification for 12 months to reduce the number of applications the state reviews and alleviate the burden on families.
- **Improve Access to School Meals:** The Legislature should preserve funds that provide free breakfast in lieu of reduced-price breakfast, expand that program to lunch, and take explicit measures to ensure Texas kids have access to food when schools are closed for the summer.



“[WE NEED] HEALTHY FOOD, FOOD, FOOD. CAN'T WORK OR LEARN WITHOUT FOOD.”

- PEOPLE'S BUDGET LISTENING SESSION





EDUCATION:

EVERY TEXAN IS WORTH ACCESS TO A HIGH-QUALITY, FULLY-FUNDED EDUCATION

Texas wins when all students have access to a public education that prepares them for civic engagement and post-secondary success. Every student must be empowered to learn through a world-class education grounded in truth, facts, and diverse perspectives.

Texans won't stop fighting until every student has access to a public education that prepares them to be active participants in our communities, workplaces, and economies. From childhood to early adulthood, the 89th Texas Legislature has the opportunity to reinvest in our state's future by investing in Texans seeking an education.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

K-12 Legislative Policy Recommendations:

- **Improve Funding for Public Schools:** The Legislature should ensure our public school finance system counts every student, pays for an education system that leads to economic opportunity and social mobility, and keeps up with rising costs. We oppose any form of voucher scheme that directs public money to private schools.
- **Increase Teacher Pay:** Teachers should earn salaries that reflect their intensive labor and allow them to live in the communities where they work. When teachers of all backgrounds earn a living wage, we raise the bar for every Texan living in our state.
- **Promote Inclusive School Climates:** Legislators must support high-quality Emerging Bilingual/English Learners by combatting censorship policies and attacks on culturally relevant, academically honest curriculums. Teacher training programs can also prepare educators to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

Higher Education Legislative Policy Recommendations:

- **Increase Need-Based Financial Aid:** The Legislature should provide full funding to all students eligible for the Texas Educational Opportunity Grant (TEOG) and Toward Excellence, Access, and Success (TEXAS) grant programs. The Legislature must protect in-state tuition for every Texas student regardless of immigration status.
- **Protect Academic Freedom:** The Legislature should repeal anti-DEI bill SB 17 and strengthen tenure protections for faculty.



“THE KIDS IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE THE FUTURE OF TEXAS, SO CLEARLY WE NEED TO FUND ISDs ADEQUATELY.”

- PEOPLE'S BUDGET LISTENING SESSION



WORKER POWER AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES:

EVERY TEXAN IS WORTH A FAIR SHARE OF TEXAS' ECONOMIC ABUNDANCE

As our state's GDP skyrockets, the gap between the wealthy few and the hardworking masses widens, creating one of the nation's highest poverty rates. This growing economic disparity is particularly acute among low-income, Black, Latino, and rural communities. We raise the bar for every Texan living in our state when workers of all backgrounds earn living wages, experience safe working conditions, and can access essential benefits like affordable health care coverage and paid family, medical, and sick leave.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Ensure All Workers Are Safe on the Job:** The Legislature must repeal bills passed last session that removed a number of municipal protections for workers' health and safety, such as mandatory water breaks.
- **Ensure Paid Parental Leave and Access to Childcare for All Workers:** Texas is facing a child care crisis; part of the solution must include paid parental leave. Legislators should also develop legislation to subsidize child care options for working Texans.
- **Stop Wage Theft and Worker Misclassification:** Texas' high prevalence of wage theft and poor minimum wage enforcement are just a few of the reasons why our workers experience low wages. The Legislature needs to fully fund the Texas Workforce Commission responsible for enforcing minimum wages and other worker protections.
- **Expand Collective Bargaining to Public Sector Workers Including Educators:** When teachers collectively bargain, they experience better wages and public schools face less attrition.
- **Increase Wages for State Workers:** Regular salary increases tied to inflation are necessary to ensure the state can recruit and retain a high-quality workforce.



“MANY TEXANS ARE STRUGGLING WITH PROVIDING FOR THEIR FAMILY NEEDS; COST OF LIVING HAS RAISED DRAMATICALLY WITH LITTLE RAISE IN PAY.”

- PEOPLE'S BUDGET SURVEY RESPONSE





FAIR TAXATION:

EVERY TEXAN IS ADEQUATELY SUPPORTED BY AN EQUITABLE TAX SYSTEM

At all levels, our government supplies goods and services that support our common good. All Texans should bear the cost of these goods and services fairly. The Texas tax system is upside down: the wealthiest pay the least percentage of their income while working families pay the highest. Without a fair and adequate tax system, the state's ability to invest in schools, public safety, roads, and other services will continue to become more difficult. It is time for Texas policymakers to think outside the box of across-the-board property tax cuts.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Make the Property Tax System More Fair:** The Legislature must implement reforms that prioritize equity and offer more substantial assistance to renters. Legislators should empower cities and counties to offer flat-dollar-amount homestead exemptions.
- **Target Tax Refund to Increase Economic Security:** The Legislature should implement policies that provide targeted tax refunds for those who need them most, such as low- and middle-income renters and homeowners.
- **Redirect Wasteful Border Security Funding:** Education and infrastructure needs must be prioritized over ineffective border walls and costly enforcement of Operation LoneStar.



“THE TOP PRIORITY OF THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE ON TAX CUTS... FIRST WE SHOULD ADEQUATELY FUND NECESSITIES LIKE PUBLIC EDUCATION, HEALTH CARE, WATER, ROADS...”

- PEOPLE'S BUDGET SURVEY RESPONSE





VOTING RIGHTS:

EVERY TEXAN HAS THE FREEDOM TO FULLY PARTICIPATE IN OUR DEMOCRACY

Regardless of race, place, or background, Texans value our democratic systems and agree that we must push to make them stronger and more accessible. Our democracy is only as strong as the systems we use for national, state, and local elections. When we join together as voters, we ensure every Texan is heard and counted.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Implement Online Voter Registration:** We must change the current outdated registration process to create a voter registration system accessible to Texans of all backgrounds and regions.
- **Support County Voting Efforts:** The Legislature must ensure county resources are available to properly register voters, train poll workers, distribute and collect mail-in ballots, hold elections with minimal wait times and obstacles, – particularly for voters with disabilities and language barriers – and reject excessive penalties that undermine democracy.
- **Fortify Democracy:** Expand countywide polling sites and accessible voting sites at K-12 and college campuses.



“MORE PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION FOLLOWED BY BETTER VOTING PATTERNS THAT LEAD TO BETTER PUBLIC SERVANTS AND FAIRER VOTING LAWS.”



- PEOPLE'S BUDGET SURVEY RESPONSE

Social justice requires public policy.

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