



## Testimony to the House Appropriations Sub-Committee on Article II

Luis Figueroa, Chief of Legislative Affairs, Every Texan

February 2025

Every Texan (formerly CPPP) appreciates the opportunity to submit recommendations and comments on Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) for the House Appropriations Sub-Committee on Article II.

The Benedictine Sisters of Boerne, Texas, founded Every Texan (formerly CPPP) in 1985 to advance public policy solutions for expanding access to health care. We became an independent, tax-exempt organization in 1999. Today, we prioritize policies that will measurably improve equity in and access to health care, food security, education, and financial security.

First we ask the committee to appropriate **the \$50 million rider to support Summer EBT**. Officially called Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer, or Summer EBT, it would provide \$40 per summer month per child on a debit card for families with eligible school-age children to buy groceries. \$120 in Summer EBT benefits will help families close the summer hunger gap when kids are on summer break and not getting nutritious school meals. USDA estimates 3.75 million Texas students could be eligible to receive approximately \$450 million in food aid through the Summer EBT program.

Child hunger spikes in Texas every summer as children do not have access to free or reduced-price meals when schools close. In Texas, 2.6 million children eat free or low-cost lunch, and 1.6 million eat school breakfast every day. When schools are closed, parents often struggle to afford to replace those meals. While some children can access local summer meal sites run by some school districts or youth programs, most kids in Texas do not have an option nearby. For every 100 children who ate lunch during the school year, only 4.6 children ate a summer lunch. Children in rural and suburban areas are the least likely to have access to a summer meal site or a way to get to school when school buses are not running.

Summer EBT is a valuable economic driver. Hundreds of millions of Summer EBT dollars would provide a significant boost to food retailers and local economies across our state, especially for small businesses in rural communities, while also helping to ensure healthier Texans.

Second, Every Texan supports **maintaining funding levels for FY24–FY25 Women’s Health Programs**. We are grateful to the legislature for its commitment to fully funding programs for Texan women’s health care and are excited to see the mobile health units being implemented by those programs operating. Women’s health programs provide critical health care services – cancer screenings, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, and routine wellness exams – to people who are remote from clinic networks and hospital systems. We ask the committee to ensure that Women’s Health Programs are fully funded so the programs can



operate and not be constrained by budget shortfalls, which directly will reduce services and diminish health outcomes for women across the state.

Third, we thank you for **funding improvements to Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System (TIERS)** exceptional Item #2 that will support HHSC staff and improve efficiency and accuracy in the Texas Health and Human Services Commission's (HHSC) computer hardware and software systems. The updates will ensure more timely processing of applications and a greater ability to recruit and retain staff.

Fourth, Every Texan supports **funding the HHS Community Partner Program** in order to decrease rates of uninsurance by restoring funds for Medicaid and CHIP application assisters across Texas. Within the last year, Medicaid application assisters across Texas reported wait times for Medicaid application processing by HHS of up to 187 days. Letters and forms that HHS sends to applicants are notoriously complicated and difficult to understand. One of the reasons there are children in Texas who are eligible for Medicaid but not enrolled is because the trickiness of applying for and enrolling in Medicaid is difficult to shoulder for a family without an expert's guidance. As trusted community support offices, Community Partner Programs support applicants through these difficult circumstances and help them get connected to programs when they are eligible for those programs. Increasing the Community Partner Program will also help reduce workloads at HHSC due to more complete and better applications.

Lastly, we would like to address the **general concerns related to fraud and abuse** within the Medicaid and SNAP programs. Texas lawmakers, administrators, and national partners have successfully implemented and operationalized supportive offices with myriad focus areas in reducing waste, fraud, and abuse: the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Department of Justice, the Texas Attorney General's Office, HHS's Office of Inspector General, the Access and Eligibility Services (AES) department's Quality Control Division and Quality Assurance Division, special investigative units operated by Texas Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCOs), and others. Due to the steadfast efforts of these oversight and accountability officers, cases of fraud and abuse in Texas rarely come from households with children, pregnant people, disabled people, or seniors in them who are enrolled in Medicaid. Recent research from the US Digital Services office shows that technology solutions, called "ex parte" data retrievals, increase compliance; reduce waste, fraud, and abuse; and save states money on expensive manual reviews and revisions of applications for families when their household, employment, and income information has not changed. Industries around the world, from banking to health care delivery to financial transactions use similar technologies every day with no increased threat of waste, fraud, or abuse. By streamlining application and renewal processes, Texas lawmakers will also support health care industry leaders and workers.