



Testimony to House Delivery of Government Efficiency (DOGE) Committee

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Every Texan is an independent public policy organization that uses data and analysis to advocate for solutions that enable Texans of all backgrounds to reach their full potential.

We appreciate Texas lawmakers' work to increase transparency and efficiency in state government. Every Texan uses research, information, and data to understand how programs work, who they work for, how much they cost, and how effective they are. Most of all, Every Texan understands that running our state takes tireless work from agency staff, advocates, lawmakers, and residents. In particular, we appreciate the everyday effort of our state agency and higher ed workforce, and we have consistently encouraged the Legislature to continue supporting our state workers with higher wages and sufficient staffing levels.

Well-tested frameworks already exist for evaluating state government agencies. The State Auditor's Office conducts audits, investigations, and reviews of state agencies, higher education institutions, and other entities using generally accepted accounting and auditing principles. The Sunset Advisory Commission uses the Sunset Licensing and Regulation Model when conducting its reviews. The Licensing Model provides Sunset staff with a consistent evaluation structure and standards by which to assess the purpose, efficiency, and effectiveness of agency processes and look for greater efficiencies. Sunset's model has evolved over 40 years of use.

Texas State Government Effectiveness and Efficiency Report

Another successful example of agency evaluation was the biennial *Texas State Government Effectiveness and Efficiency Report* (GEER). The Legislative Budget Board last published the GEER in 2015. Nearly 450 pages, the report contained 49 analyses of the effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency of state agency programs, and was a valuable tool for lawmakers, staff, state agencies, advocates, and the public.

Standards laid out in Government Code Chapter 322 provided the LBB with a framework to conduct its evaluations and issue recommendations. The 2015 report included sections on the Economic Stabilization Fund, transparency of Medicaid rates for managed care organizations, border security oversight, and much more.

Every Texan recommends DOGE and LBB consider reinstating this report.

Public Information Requests

We understand that agencies cannot provide comprehensive data due to privacy laws, capacity, and other reasons, and we are grateful for the state's responses to our public information requests when we need data that's supplemental to the helpful reports state agencies share regularly. We request public information from various sources: agencies, formal public information requests, and – when those methods fail – requests from lawmakers.

For instance, the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) restarted eligibility interviews for families applying for SNAP food stamps in June 2024. HHSC does report monthly on the number of applications HHSC staff complete for Texans applying for benefits programs, including staff. However, those data do not share the number of applications approved or denied. In October 2024, an Every Texan analyst requested those more specific data on the results of 2024 application completions to learn if rates of SNAP denials remained the same, decreased, or increased following the reimplementation of SNAP eligibility interviews. HHSC staff replied that they would follow up at the next monthly meeting. In subsequent meetings, HHSC staff did not report on the data. In February 2025, HHSC replied that analysts seeking those data should submit public information requests.

While our data team is working on that submission, this description shows that HHSC was unfortunately unable to produce those figures for community-based organizations (CBOs) in that four-month period. HHSC's clear communication in February 2025 about the need for CBOs to submit public information requests was very helpful, and we look forward to a swift response to the request due to the four-month delay from the HHSC office, who are very busy.

Additionally, in May 2024, an Every Texan analyst requested data on Medicaid enrollment figures from HHSC staff, who advised the analyst to request those data through a lawmaker's office. We worked with a collaborator in the Texas Senate to submit that request, to which HHSC responded with requested data in mid-October 2024, a six-month wait.

Student Well-Being and Mental Health Surveys

Every Texan is committed to ensuring that Texas policies support strong public health outcomes, evidence-based policymaking, and the well-being of all children. We have testified in opposition to SB 112 and SB 400, which would require active parental consent (“opt-in”) for student well-being and mental health surveys. These bills would unintentionally create significant obstacles to gathering accurate, statewide public health data needed to inform effective solutions. The surveys impacted – including the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), Texas Youth Tobacco Survey (TYTS), and Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Survey – have been instrumental in identifying trends in youth mental health, substance use, and suicide prevention. Research has consistently shown that requiring opt-in consent significantly reduces participation rates,¹ particularly among the most vulnerable and at-risk

¹ Eaton, D. K., Lowry, R., Brener, N. D., Grunbaum, J. A., & Kann, L. (2004). Passive versus Active Parental Permission in School-Based Survey Research: Does the Type of Permission Affect Prevalence Estimates of Risk Behaviors? *Evaluation Review*, 28(6), 564-577. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193841X04265651>

students.² Without comprehensive data, Texas will struggle to make informed policy decisions, and efforts to address youth suicide, vaping, and mental health crises will suffer.

Additionally, statewide surveys like the Texas YRBS serve as a primary source of data on health risks and prevention strategies, providing policymakers with invaluable insights. The YRBS is an important tool for decision-making throughout the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the public health community.

² Courser, M. W., Shamblen, S. R., Lavrakas, P. J., Collins, D., & Ditterline, P. (2009). The Impact of Active Consent Procedures on Nonresponse and Nonresponse Error in Youth Survey Data: Evidence From a New Experiment. *Evaluation Review*, 33(4), 370-395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193841X09337228>