



Children's Defense Fund-Texas 2023 State Legislative Priorities

Healthy Children and Families

We work to ensure every child and their family has **affordable, stable, and comprehensive** health coverage. That includes protecting critical health insurance programs for low-income children and their families, ensuring programs work so that eligible children are able to get and stay enrolled, tackling barriers that discourage families from enrolling, and improving children's health coverage and care.

Texas has the worst uninsured rate of any state in the nation, more than double the national average for both children and adults. We cannot give Texas children and families a healthy start in life without addressing the **5 million Texans** who are left behind without health coverage.

- Texas must expand Medicaid this session, and in doing so, simultaneously create a pathway for health coverage for the nearly 1 million Texans, and return billions of federal dollars back to the state each year. Medicaid expansion will stimulate the state's economy, strengthen rural hospitals, promote healthy births, and give Texans the coverage they deserve.
- New mothers need more Medicaid coverage than they get now; no new mom should go without healthcare in the year after pregnancy. Texas should extend coverage 12 months after childbirth.
- Every eligible child in Texas should be enrolled in health insurance, and no eligible child should be kicked off their coverage because of administrative or procedural reasons. Yet, over 15% of Texas children eligible for Medicaid or CHIP are not enrolled— and many more Texas children are expected to lose coverage following the April 2023 end of the Public Health Emergency's continuous coverage provision. Children in Texas need a strong, supported Medicaid eligibility and enrollment system, which includes strengthened funding for both eligibility system workers and restored community partner program grant funding. Community Partner organizations collaborate with Texas Health

and Human Services to offer vital, on-the-ground community outreach and enrollment assistance and reduce burden on state eligibility workers and the 2-1-1 call center. Yet, without robust funding from the state, Community Partners' ability to conduct strategic outreach and enrollment assistance to eligible families is limited, especially in rural areas.

- Children with unmet health needs struggle to meet their full potential, yet resource-strapped schools struggle to meet their students' healthcare needs. Schools should be permitted to receive federal reimbursement for services provided to *all* Medicaid-enrolled students, which would support districts with a sustainable source of funding to offer expanded school health care services, including behavioral health services.

Protecting Immigrant Children and Families

We work to protect and advance the rights of children in immigrant families. We partner with local, state, and national organizations to oppose harmful policies, defend immigrant families, and ensure immigrant families in Texas are connected to the resources they need to *thrive*.

- Safety for immigrant children and their families means the state must work to close down immigrant detention centers and shut down Emergency Intake Sites in Texas to minimize the number of unaccompanied minors in government custody in Texas and across the nation.
- Texas must prohibit the Texas Department of Criminal Justice from entering or renewing contracts with private corporations to run family detention facilities.
- The state should establish conditional driver's permits for undocumented immigrants who are Texas residents, have taken an approved driver's education course in Texas, and do not have any disqualifying convictions.
- We need to establish systems of accountability and transparency to support the well-being of unaccompanied minors in government custody in Texas.

Youth Engagement and Leadership Development

We work to ensure every child has access to a **quality, culturally-responsive, and comprehensive civic education** that prepares young Texans for lifelong civic engagement. Our work reimagines how schools teach civics, how we must support first-time voters, and how we create meaningful opportunities for youth to engage in their communities. We also work to **create avenues for young people** to be part of identifying issues and crafting solutions in our communities, including speaking directly to policymakers about issues that matter most to young Texans.

- Texas must strengthen our existing high school voter registration law to ensure all eligible young Texans have the opportunity to register for the first time in their schools. Texas must have consistent high school voter registration data collection and reporting on compliance rates by school districts.
- The state must enact online voter registration and automatic registration during interactions with state agencies. One in four eligible Texans remains unregistered to vote, with hundreds of thousands more young Texans turning 18 each year.
- Texas must also ensure that every college student has access to an on-campus polling location. Young Texans continue to be underrepresented in elections, with just 25 percent of registered young voters successfully casting their ballots in the 2022 midterm election. Young people are increasingly aware of political issues and engaged in their communities. We must support them by recommitting to the freedom to vote. All Texans benefit from having more options to exercise their right to vote. Our state must enact no-excuse vote by mail and other systems that make voting more accessible.
- It is time to reimagine what civic education should look like in Texas schools so that every Texas student is prepared to be lifelong civic leaders. We need comprehensive standards that are also sensitive to the perspectives of marginalized communities, particularly Black students, students of color, and LGBTQ+ students. All students deserve to know that they belong in history, in their classrooms, and in our communities.
- Support greater state and local funding for civics education. As it stands, the quality and quantity of civic education varies greatly across school districts and even within schools themselves.
- From our nation's founding through Reconstruction to the modern day, public schools are the cornerstone of our democracy. Today, when nearly three in four Texas public school students are children of color, Texas must provide access to a quality, fully funded public education to ensure that all children can realize the promise of a multicultural democracy.