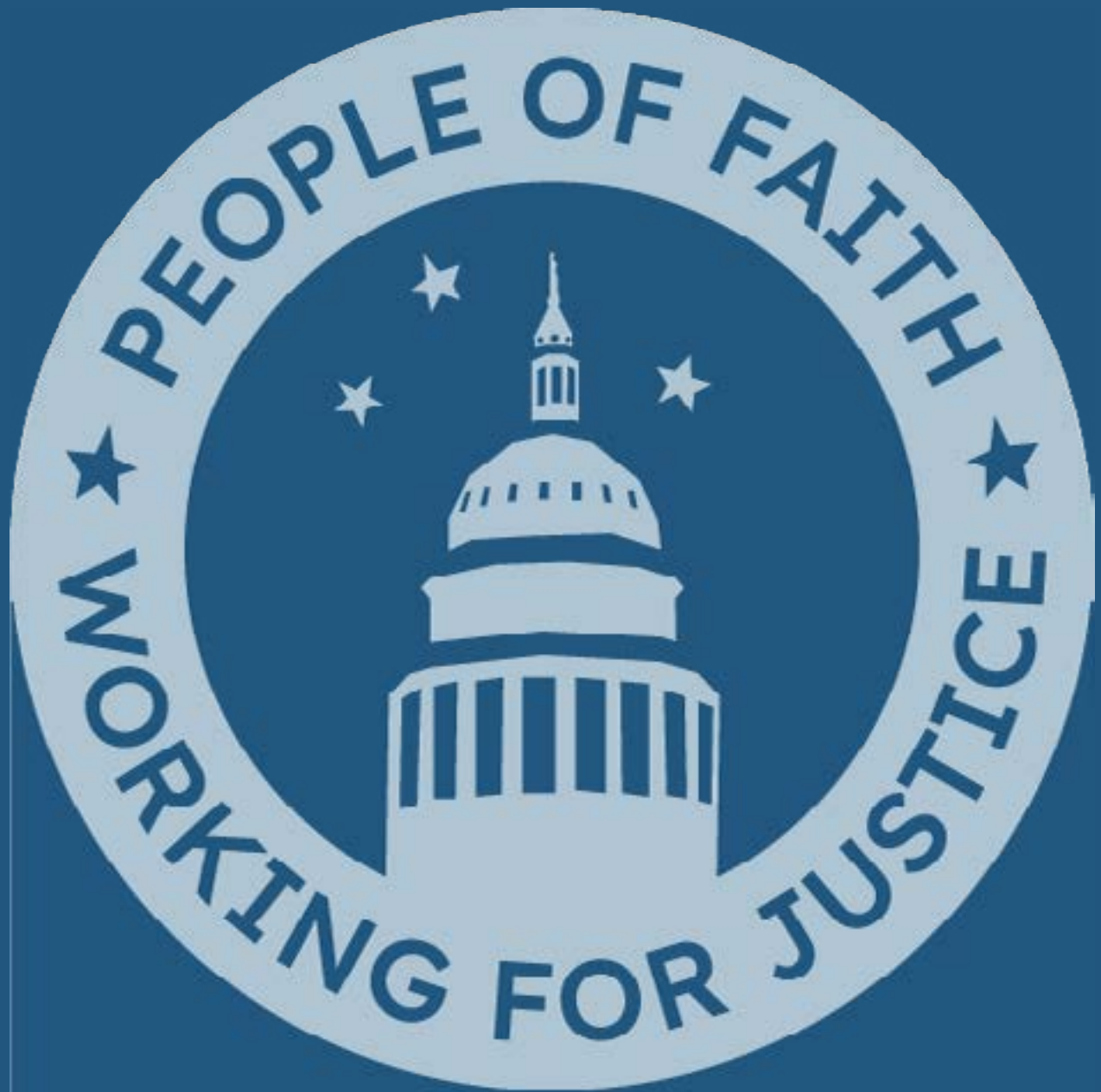


Legislative Priorities 2027



★ TEXAS IMPACT

Texas Impact equips and mobilizes Texans of faith and conscience to advocate for public policies that advance widely shared, deeply held values including love of neighbor, care for creation and wise stewardship of God’s gifts.

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Economic Justice

Public Education

Public School Funding

With the current public school funding formula in place, schools across the state are closing. For the 2024-2025 school year and beyond, over 140+ schools have closed across the state. Due to the lack of increased basic funding in the 89th legislative session, school districts are forced to consolidate and merge schools to make ends meet. The basic allotment, or the amount given to schools per pupil (\$6,215), has not been adjusted for inflation and needs to be addressed for schools to run adequately. As districts across the state try new tactics to work with the money they have, Raise Your Hand Texas announced a plan to bring new funding to public schools, called the Legacy Education Fund. The Legacy Education fund would include money from the Rainy Day Fund, State General Revenue, dedicated share of sales tax growth, and private donations/gifts.

Religion and Education

Religious freedom in public schools was under attack during the last legislative session. We believe that every child has the right to express their faith at public schools, however SB11 (89R) infringes on that right. By establishing state mandated prayer time, students of different or no faith will be pressured or forced to take part in an involuntary practice.

Vouchers

After a decades-long fight, the Texas Education Freedom Accounts (school vouchers) were established last year. Tax-payer money will now be used to pay tuition for private schools across the state, many of which are parochial schools. Students with disabilities and students of color are not appropriately represented in the demographics of voucher recipients, and therefore are not being used as the bill author expressed. We deserve to know where our tax-payer dollars are going, and how they are being spent in the Texas Comptroller run program.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Establish the Legacy Education Fund public education endowment for Texas.
- ★ Increase the basic allotment for public education and index it to inflation.
- ★ Sunset SB11 (89R), which required school districts to consider adopting a period of prayer by April 1, 2026.
- ★ Mandate a comprehensive, publicly available audit of the Texas Education Freedom Accounts program that includes comprehensive information on the characteristics of voucher recipients; the contractors administering the program; compliance with nondiscrimination laws; and a list of schools accepting vouchers.
- ★ Impose a moratorium on increased funding for the Texas Education Freedom Accounts program pending the publication of the recommended audit.

Women’s and Reproductive Health

Abortion Rights

Since the 2022 overturning of Roe v. Wade with the Dobbs decision, abortion has been banned in Texas. There are no exceptions for rape or incest, or for cases of fatal fetal abnormalities. During the 89th legislative session, advocates including Texas Impact supported legislation to clarify the only narrow exception that exists in current law—providing an abortion when the pregnancy is threatening the life or major bodily functions of the mother. Prior to this legislation, doctors, and their legal advisors, were unsure when they could intervene in life threatening circumstances without being subject to the civil and criminal penalties for providing an illegal abortion. This clarification was important, but the ban for all other abortions is still causing harm to Texans. Texas Impact knows that a total repeal of Texas abortion bans is the only way to ensure that no Texans are denied access to abortion care. While continuing to work toward a total repeal, Texas Impact also supports changes to increase abortion access.

Family Planning

Reproductive healthcare and family planning options have increasingly become targets of anti-abortion

movements in an attempt to further restrict when, where, how, and which Texans can grow their families. Texas currently allocates \$210 million to the Thriving Texas Families program, formerly Alternatives to Abortion. This program claims to provide services to women and families unable to receive prenatal care and maternal health support through the medical system. However, this program is statutorily unable to provide medical services, and has no methods of oversight or accountability. In response to these efforts, Texas Impact supports legislation that would strengthen protections for all methods of family planning.

Community-Based Women’s Health Supports

Texas currently allocates \$210 million to the Thriving Texas Families program (formerly known as Alternatives to Abortion.) While the Health and Human Services Commission describes Thriving Texas Families as supporting prenatal care and maternal health, the program is statutorily prohibited from providing medical services, and has no oversight or accountability measures associated with its appropriation.

Maternal Mortality

The Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee is responsible for reviewing all Texas deaths determined to be pregnancy-related, to identify causes of these deaths and to make associated actionable recommendations. The recommendations of the committee are intended to help prevent future pregnancy-related deaths and improve the health of Texas mothers and babies. To date, the committee has not reviewed data from pregnancy-related deaths from 2022-2023—the first two years the full abortion ban was in place.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Allow abortion in cases of fatal fetal abnormalities when doctors and families determine that is the right decision for that pregnancy.
- ★ Ensure that continuing education programs are created and implemented in relation to the Life of the Mother Act for doctors and lawyers.
- ★ Allow abortion in cases of rape or incest without requiring confirmation of a crime.
- ★ Protect fertility options including IVF and surrogacy.
- ★ Protect availability of medication abortion and other medically accepted treatments for miscarriage management and other medical conditions.
- ★ Ensure the stability and availability of breast and cervical cancer screening for uninsured Texans, including through facilities supported with Thriving Texas Families program funds.
- ★ Establish reporting and accountability measures for the Thriving Texas Families program.
- ★ Adopt the recommendations of the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee.
- ★ Mandate the authoritative review of cases and reporting of data from the period directly following the banning of abortion in Texas.

Healthcare Access and Affordability

Recent federal data show that the number of Texans enrolled in Affordable Care Act (ACA) health plans dropped from 4.2 million on January 15, 2026, to 3.3 million on February 1. The drop has been driven by changes to the Health Care Marketplace enacted in HR1 in 2025 that have made premiums much more expensive for many Texans and Americans. In 2024, more than ten years after the enactment of the ACA, the uninsured rate in Texas was still twice the national uninsured rate. While the ACA allowed Texas to make progress in expanding access to coverage, the state has not taken advantage of many of the ACA’s tools, some of which are now foreclosed to Texas because of HR1’s provisions.

In response, Texas leaders are mounting a PR campaign calling for health care affordability and touting various schemes to lower insurance costs. However, without the robust safeguards and financial supports included in the ACA, reliable health insurance will remain out of reach and many Texans could be lured into various versions of “junk insurance.” Instead of heading down the junk insurance path, Texas Impact recommends legislators take a holistic approach that accounts for regional and cultural variations in our state’s communities.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Establish state grants for charitable clinics.
- ★ Strengthen healthcare access in rural areas and maternity care deserts.
- ★ Support additional guardrails and heightened oversight to ensure health insurance consumers don’t inadvertently end up underinsured or in substandard products.

- ★ Ensure that state-regulated health plans comply with ACA protections such as benefits requirements and non-discrimination provisions.

Public Health

Immunization Policy

In Texas, The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) establishes vaccine requirements as a statewide control measure for communicable disease as defined in Health and Safety Code. DSHS works with the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services in formulating and implementing the Texas immunization requirements for children and adolescents in childcare and education settings.

Suicide Prevention

Texas has taken steps to address suicide as a growing concern. Suicide prevention activities are housed within HHSC’s Office of Mental Health Coordination in partnership with the Texas Suicide Prevention Collaborative, which is a membership group of statewide agencies and organizations, local universities, military and veteran groups, community suicide prevention coalitions, and many other stakeholders across the state. The Collaborative, with support from HHSC, oversees the implementation and ongoing updates of the Texas State Plan for Suicide Prevention: Guidelines for Suicide Prevention in Texas, which was most recently updated in 2022 and is intended to guide efforts from 2023-2028.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, which is one of the core stakeholders in the Collaborative, Texas has not enacted a number of state laws that are recommended suicide prevention measures. These laws range from training for certain school personnel and medical professionals to restrictions on the sale of firearms. While all the recommended measures might not be good fits for Texas, there currently is no structure in place within DSHS to evaluate Texas suicide data and make recommendations from a strictly public health perspective.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Ensure that vaccine requirements adopted as a statewide control measure for communicable disease conform to the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended vaccine schedule for children and adolescents.
- ★ Establish a suicide prevention task force within the Texas Department of State Health Services.

Food Security

Since President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law on August 31, 1964, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) has been one of America’s most effective tools for combatting hunger. Now, federal changes approved as part of H.R. 1 are shifting more of the federal program’s costs to states for the first time in SNAP’s history. Beginning October 1, 2026, Texas will have to cover 75% of SNAP’s administrative costs, up from the 50% it previously paid. Even more significantly, HR1 creates a benefit cost-share plan where states will be charged based on their SNAP error rate beginning on October 1, 2027. Combined, these two provisions of HR1 are expected to cost Texas around \$2 billion in new general revenue spending in the upcoming biennium. Legislators and the governor have expressed concern about whether the state can afford the additional costs. Policy experts expect lawmakers may ask the Health and Human Services Commission to cut other social program budgets to fund the SNAP obligation.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Fully fund Texas’ SNAP obligations for the 2028-2029 biennium under existing eligibility requirements without taking funds from any other social program.

Social Safety Net Access

In July, the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House (known collectively as “the leadership”) issued instructions to state agencies and institutions to guide the preparation of budget requests for the upcoming legislative session. Despite the fact that state revenues for the first 10 months of the current

2026-2027 biennium are four percent more than prior-year revenues, the instructions direct agencies to submit base budgets that are three percent less than their current budgets.

Data from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) show that over the first half of 2026, the number of Medicaid applications awaiting assignment to an eligibility worker increased dramatically, while fewer applications were being processed within federal timeliness standards. SNAP application backlogs have also grown significantly, suggesting broader strain on the state’s eligibility system. While the leadership’s instructions direct the Health and Human Services Commission to maintain benefits and eligibility as required by state law for Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), foster care programs, adoption subsidies programs, the Permanency Care Assistance program, in reality eligibility and benefits are of little importance if families and individuals can’t access programs because of red tape.

To ensure Texans receive benefits timely, legislators should fund improvements in the eligibility determination and enrollment systems that support all these programs. Texas Impact reiterates our longstanding recommendation for a two-pronged approach that leverages the capacity of Texas public and private entities.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Strengthen automated systems for new and renewal benefits applications.
- ★ Fund community-based enrollment assistance programs.

Climate Justice

Disaster Response

Texas has experienced multiple natural disasters requiring activation of the Texas Division of Emergency Management in this biennium. Climate projections indicate that flash flooding, wildfires, and other impactful weather will continue to increase in intensity and frequency as the climate warms. Faith-based disaster response organizations are a critical part of the disaster response apparatus in Texas, but there is limited formal coordination between these organizations and state and local disaster response agencies. An opportunity exists to improve disaster readiness and response by incorporating updated hazard risk projections, improving coordination between state and local disaster response personnel and faith-based relief organizations, and upgrading and expanding municipal hazard warning systems, infrastructure, and procedures.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Adopt a statewide severe weather adaptation plan.
- ★ Publish a comprehensive statewide study of climate impacts.
- ★ Strengthen flood mitigation and warning systems.
- ★ Implement recommendations from the Task Force on Faith-Based Disaster Response Report (TDEM, 2020).

Community Resilience

Texas is vulnerable to a diverse array of serious climate impacts. This includes both extreme events (see above) and slow-moving disasters, which include things like drought, desertification, and sea-level rise. To promote the safety, stability, and economic resilience of individuals, communities, and the state, a comprehensive hazard resilience plan must be undertaken at all scales. Everything from large-scale infrastructure improvements reflective of current projections for extreme precipitation to incentive programs which help homeowners make resilience improvements to individual homes will be necessary to make Texas climate-ready. A coordinated, data-driven approach will make the best use of available resources.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Use climate projections in state water planning.
- ★ Enact hazard-resilient building code improvements.

- ★ Support community-scale resilience-building programs.
- ★ Enact heat protection requirements for workers, TDCJ inmates and staff, students, unhoused people, and other vulnerable populations.

Climate Safeguards for Texas Industries

Data Centers

Texas leadership has courted investment from data center companies for more than a decade, including passing a sales tax exemption for new facilities in 2013 that is now expected to cost the state more than \$3 billion in the next biennium. In recent years, the rapid acceleration of construction of hyperscale data centers, built most often with no community input or knowledge, has taken advantage of that hospitality, threatening to overwhelm already scarce energy and water resources.

Last session, the Legislature passed SB 6, designed to update Public Utility Commission (PUC) and Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) procedures for permitting large load interconnection to the grid, 90% of which is from data centers. Safeguards against speculative permit applications and other strategies designed to manage interconnection requests have proven inadequate. The industry has also failed to comply with Texas Water Development Board statutes requiring water-use reporting from large industries. Questions remain about how to pay for new transmission infrastructure needed to service data centers without raising the rates residential customers pay.

The rapid buildout of these facilities and unfairness with which they have been favored above existing agricultural, residential, and industry water and electricity customers in cases of scarcity has driven significant public anger directed at the industry and at Texas elected officials. Advocacy in the data center space requires careful attention and foresight to avoid unintended consequences. For example, recent calls for new data centers to “bring their own power” were intended to reduce load on the ERCOT grid but have had the impact of causing each facility to construct a dedicated natural-gas generator on site, which worsens air quality and contributes to climate change. Advocates must be prepared to explain why they favor few restrictions on renewable energy development in Texas counties, while also asking for more local and county authority to block data center development.

As data center planning, permitting, and construction is ongoing and accelerating at a rapid pace, Texas Impact joins other advocates in calling for a special session to enact common sense regulations for the industry now, rather than allowing unregulated development to continue through the end of the 90th Legislative Session.

Carbon Capture and Storage

Direct air capture of atmospheric carbon has been considered a climate solution by environmental advocates, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). However, currently available technology and existing geologic carbon storage reservoirs are not sufficient to make a meaningful impact on atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations. Leaks of concentrated carbon dioxide from geologic storage poses public safety risks, groundwater concerns, and climate concerns. And the industry is highly energy intensive. Following improved incentive structures from the federal government enacted as part of HR1, energy companies in Texas receive a federal tax credit for carbon capture used for enhanced oil recovery. Given the potential harm of carbon capture and storage, its use in enhanced oil recovery, and the lack of any meaningful climate benefit, we oppose expansion of the practice in Texas.

Strong Methane Standards

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas with a heat-trapping capacity many times that of carbon dioxide. Because methane has a shorter residence time in the atmosphere, methane mitigation measures make a big impact on the concentration of greenhouse gases on a short timescale. Methane is also an air pollutant that contributes to smog and dangerous conditions for vulnerable groups like the very young, the elderly, and those with respiratory or cardiovascular conditions. We currently have the technology and expertise to capture methane from oil and gas operations (recovery, transport, and refining) and captured gas can be sold for economic profit.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the total impact of industrial and business development in the state on water, energy, and other resources which includes direct and indirect uses of water.
- ★ Require data centers to bring their own clean energy.
- ★ Require energy efficiency measures for data centers.
- ★ Eliminate the sales tax exemption for data centers.
- ★ Enact environmental safeguards like mandatory water use reporting, requiring use of non-potable water, strong air quality standards, minimum setbacks, and decommissioning planning.
- ★ Direct the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to develop strong state methane standards, including:
- ★ Banning routine venting and flaring of methane in oil and gas operations.
- ★ Requiring oil and gas operators to stop leaks of methane.
- ★ Improving regulatory compliance and accountability.

Energy

As energy demands increase in Texas due to increasing population and industrial development, renewable energy, paired with battery storage, remains the fastest, least expensive, and most readily available way to meet growing demand. Renewable energy keeps energy costs down and improves grid stability. Additionally, there is no way to meet the Paris Agreement’s target of limiting global warming to well below 2°C without transitioning away from dependence on fossil fuels. Texas Impact recommends a comprehensive approach to reducing dependence on gas- and coal-fired power generation which includes both energy efficiency improvements and continued development of our renewable energy portfolio.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Support energy efficiency improvements for homes, businesses, and other buildings.
- ★ Reject excessive siting requirements for coastal and off-shore wind generation.
- ★ Expand development of distributed energy and microgrids, including leveraging underutilized options for siting renewable generation.
- ★ Reject excessive set-back requirements for renewable generation or battery storage facilities.
- ★ Adopt plug-in solar for residential use.

Human Rights

Gun Violence Prevention

Safe and Secure Storage

As homicides began to steadily decline in Texas, suicides continue to increase and remain the majority of firearm deaths. Firearm-related injuries remain the leading cause of death for children aged 1-17 in Texas, the majority of which are homicides. Safe and secure storage laws are associated with reductions in accidents, suicides, and firearm thefts. Texas’ current safe storage laws only apply to children under 17, and there is no statewide enforcement mechanism that school districts share information on safe firearm storage.

Regulation of Carrying

Over the past decade, the state legislature has passed a variety of laws that loosen firearm carry regulations, including expanding the number of locations firearms can be carried, removing the need for a license to carry a handgun, and more. Such policies contradict recommendations by public safety experts and increase the risk of interactions turning deadly. Recently, the push for unregulated carry has gone beyond the public sphere to threaten private entities’ ability to regulate their own premises.

Regulation of Possession

The lack of robust regulation of firearm possession in Texas has and continues to contribute to violence against vulnerable populations. Mass shootings at schools are often disproportionately committed by youth in their teens and early twenties, including two of the Uvalde and Santa Fe school shootings. The lack of an enforcement mechanism for firearm surrender protocols for prohibited possessors of firearms

has contributed to intimate partner homicides. Despite these tragedies, the Texas legislature has not addressed these gaps, and, conversely, has taken steps to ban potentially life-saving prevention tools like Extreme Risk Protection Orders, a tool to temporarily remove firearms from an individual deemed a risk to themselves or others.

Community Violence

CVI programs and similar public health-based approaches to gun violence establish a network or ‘ecosystem’ of trusted individuals and institutions to holistically identify and address root causes of community violence (cyclical poverty, housing, economic insecurity, recidivism). These programs are correlated with a historic drop in homicide throughout urban areas in Texas and the nation. Such programs are dealing with the fallout of budget cuts at the federal and local levels, already demonstrating negative impacts on their reduction rates. The state legislature has an opportunity to help fill these gaps to prevent a reversal in the homicide reductions the state is experiencing.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Enact firearm hold agreements.
- ★ Support distribution of safe storage information by physicians to families.
- ★ Clarify how schools are supposed to comply with sharing secure storage information with parents and guardians.
- ★ Prohibit firearms in sensitive locations, including schools, hospitals, and courtrooms.
- ★ Protect the right of private entities to prohibit firearms on their premises.
- ★ Raise the age to purchase semi-automatic style rifles to 21 years old.
- ★ Regulate firearm possession bans.
- ★ Create enforcement mechanisms for firearm surrender protocols for prohibited offenders.
- ★ Decriminalize Extreme Risk Protective Orders.
- ★ Increase the allotment for grants available to Community Violence Intervention programs and similar initiatives in the state budget.
- ★ Ensure that grants are accessible and do not include prohibitive or unnecessary stipulations.

Immigration

State-Federal Cooperation

Immigration policy and policy enforcement are under the purview of the federal government. State officials can impact federal policy in two ways: first, by intervening with federal officials on behalf of their communities, and second, by shaping incrementally how federal policies are carried out in their state. We believe change is needed at the federal level, and that Texas can exert constructive pressure to advance that change.

As state involvement in immigration enforcement increases, public services are becoming harder for immigrants to access. Local law enforcement agencies are increasingly being pressured to enforce immigration law either in cooperation with ICE or to comply with new state penalties. These developments erode already damaged trust between state agencies and immigrant and minority communities, leading them to not seek services from the state or related actors. Therefore, our communities become less safe, less healthy.

Local law enforcement agencies are not trained to be ICE agents and should not be forced to do so. State and local leaders should not collaborate with federal officials if the federal officials are not respectful of our communities, nor should Texas enable the federal government to house or transport any person in ways that fail to meet the health and safety standards of our state.

Work and Family

H-1B visas are granted to people who are highly skilled and college educated. Texas public schools are one of many industries that benefit from H-1B visas, specifically, math and foreign language departments. Teacher retention in Texas is low, as wages are not as competitive as in other states and funding for schools barely rises each legislative session. Due to those circumstances, teacher vacancies are sometimes filled by employees with H-1B visas. These employees fill critical positions in our public schools, ensuring that every student has access to the resources they need to succeed. There are over

200 H-1B visa employees employed by Texas public schools, and if they are no longer allowed to work in the school system, as proposed by the Governor, our schools will lose critical staff.

Education

Sharing the largest land border with Mexico, Texas has historically had a robust and permeable border community. Despite the volatile nature of federal immigration policy, there have always existed mixed-status families in Texas communities. In the past, the Texas Legislature has acknowledged the presence of immigrant communities in Texas in policies like the 2001 Texas DREAM Act, a landmark policy that provided in-state tuition for lifelong Texans who qualified as Dreamers under Obama-era immigration policies. However, in 2025, after a failed attempt by the legislature to gut the Texas DREAM Act, Texas courts picked up where they left off and struck down the law, taking away affordable college tuition for hundreds of Texans. While the Texas DREAM Act’s fate is in the court system, Texas Impact urges the legislature to pursue alternative policies to fill the gap left by the bipartisan and popular DREAM Act and keep higher education accessible and equitable.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Impose a moratorium on 287(g) task force agreements and all information-sharing programs outside of 287(g) agreements until federal officials have undertaken the following reforms:
- ★ Clear, enforced limits on the use of lethal force, and an end to vehicle-based enforcement tactics that predictably escalate to deadly outcomes;
- ★ An immediate review and restriction of the use of unmarked vehicles and plainclothes agents in routine enforcement stops, which sow confusion and fear and make peaceful compliance nearly impossible;
- ★ A binding requirement that federal immigration agents wear activated body cameras and visible identification during all enforcement operations;
- ★ Prompt and humane notification of families when a loved one is injured, detained, or killed, so that no family again learns of a death through social media;
- ★ Independent oversight of ICE operations and real accountability when agents violate policy or the law.
- ★ License and regulate all residential facilities in Texas, including facilities that house unaccompanied migrant children, according to the age-specific standards applied to state facilities, including enforcement of state health and safety requirements and public reporting of violations by facility.
- ★ Prohibit state hiring and exclusion from services based on immigration status.
- ★ Defend providers of health, education, and human services and faith communities from being co-opted into immigration enforcement activities or roles.
- ★ Reinstate the Texas DREAM Act.

LGBTQIA+ Rights

Since 2015 the LGBTQIA+ Texans have increasingly become the target of legislation attempting to restrict their rights, dehumanize them, and exclude their stories from public life. National leaders have identified Texas as a testing ground for legislation intended to further harm, and potentially criminalize the lives of LGBTQIA+ Texans.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Reject attempts to criminalize statements by transgender individuals regarding their gender identity on official documents or to employers.
- ★ Maintain legal gender recognition in state documents.
- ★ Protect and maintain LGBTQ+ voices in schools and libraries.
- ★ Protect gender affirming healthcare.
- ★ Prohibit gender-discriminatory policies such as requiring gender-identity information on forms.
- ★ Restore Texans’ ability to change official documents to reflect their gender identity.
- ★ Enshrine equal marriage rights in the Texas Constitution.
- ★ Enact protections for doctors who provide gender affirming care in Texas.

Civic Participation

Voting and Elections

Voter Roll and Registration Efficiency

During the 89th Texas legislative session, there was significant discussion and numerous bills aimed at strengthening, cleaning up, and safeguarding Texas voter rolls including requiring documentary proof of citizenship (DPOC) to register to vote. While everyone agrees that voter rolls should accurately reflect eligible voters while also protecting voters’ personally identifying information, there was excessive attention given to keeping noncitizens from voting in Texas elections despite any evidence that this is an issue. Like a bad penny, more DPOC bills will likely turn up. These bills were defeated in the 89th session, but we must stay diligent to ensure that undue burdens are not put on Texas voters just to exercise their right to vote.

Texas is one of only seven remaining states (and, by far, the most populous) that does not offer online voter registration to all eligible voters. There is an opportunity to advance a proactive measure to increase voter registration and lower costs for taxpayers by moving away from paper voter registration and adopting online voter registration in Texas. HB311 by Rep. Bucy, which called for online voter registration, received a hearing in the Elections Committee, giving hope that this idea might be gaining traction. Moving to online voter registration would simplify the registration process for those just turning 18 and those moving to the state while lowering administrative costs.

Keeping Primaries Open

Texas is one of 17 states with open primaries, which means regardless of which party voters identify with, they can choose from year to year which party’s nominees they’d like to select in a primary election. Because Texas has open primaries, people who traditionally affiliate with the Democratic or Republican parties can vote in the other party’s primary election, commonly referred to as “crossover voting.” The Republican Party of Texas (RPT) has launched a sweeping legal challenge to the state’s open primary system, arguing that allowing non-Republicans to vote in GOP primaries violates the party’s First Amendment right to free association.

While Texas Impact supports every opportunity to practice nonpartisanship, our primary argument for supporting open primaries is that it drastically and unnecessarily changes the election infrastructure across the state. To close primaries would send shock waves through the electoral process, putting unacceptable burdens on counties both large and small to completely restructure election processes. Additionally, the Open Primary model leads to the selection of more moderate candidates and allows greater participation in primary elections.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Adopt online voter registration for Texas.
- ★ Maintain existing voter id standards, which do not require Documentary Proof of Citizenship (DPOC).
- ★ Mandate a study of primary election systems with recommendations for strengthening voter participation in primary elections.
- ★ Defend voting rights for transient populations.
- ★ Mandate sufficient polling locations in each county to ensure fair access to voting for all residents.
- ★ Maintain Texas’ existing system of open primaries.

Freedom from Persecution

Recent legislative sessions have seen a trend toward legislation to constrain Texans’ exercise of constitutionally protected rights to free speech and free assembly. In many cases, such legislation includes implied limits on free religious exercise; in some cases, it targets specific religious beliefs specifically. Constraints can be explicit, such as limits on conduct based on time of day or location, or they can be framed as excluding individuals or groups from a benefit, such as revocation of nonprofit status, based on religiously motivated activity. In all cases, data collected without a warrant such as license plate information can be used to target individuals for persecution.

Policy Recommendations

- ★ Prohibit use of personal data collected in the course of general surveillance of individuals by law enforcement without a warrant.
- ★ Defend and strengthen individual rights to speak, protest, and peaceably assemble.
- ★ Clarify in statute that institutions and organizations cannot be targeted for investigation or persecution based on their religious beliefs.

About Texas Impact

Established in 1973 as a program of the now-defunct Texas Conference of Churches, Texas Impact serves as Texas' membership association for judicatories, regional interfaith networks, and denominational social action groups. Most of our member institutions are Christian judicatories that make annual financial contributions to support Texas Impact's work. They elevate and validate Texas Impact by amplifying our communications and messages.

Our policy priorities reflect the consensus positions of our member faith traditions. As an interfaith organization, Texas Impact balances interfaith relationships and activities with appropriate messaging for our audiences. Our positions on issues are unanimously adopted by our Leadership Council, made up of clergy and lay leaders from our member institutions.

We rely on the social teachings and social statements of our member faith traditions, the governance structures of our faith communities, and the testimonies of our network members to guide our discernment processes. As part of our equipping and mobilizing work, we teach our network members how their faiths' social teachings and processes can guide their individual engagement in the public square.

Texas Impact brings to our work nearly six decades of experience guiding individuals and congregations from direct service experience and storytelling through discernment to collective advocacy aimed at shaping community. We have created tools and resources to bridge these practices, and we have observed that effective faithful civic engagement relies on a more expansive combination of religious practices than sometimes is suggested.

Texas Impact has extensive experience creating print, digital, and multimedia resources to support our members' civic engagement, advocacy, and spiritual development. Texas Impact has won Best in Class trophies in the Religion Communicators Council's DeRose-Hinkhouse competition for our video series Faith in Democracy (2024) and our multimedia coverage of the United Nations climate negotiations (2025). Our newest resource is Changing by Choice: a fresh look at climate and faith, a 5-part video-based study suitable for adult and young adult religious education settings.

We serve Texans who belong to our member faith traditions. They are officially represented in Texas Impact's governance structure. We invite them to contribute financially to our work, and we equip them for a variety of opportunities to learn about

issues and engage civically. We support clergy in our member denominations in teaching their congregation members about their social statements and in offering their own testimonies.

We work especially closely with United Women in Faith (UWFaith). Since 1988 we have partnered with UWFaith to hold an annual 3-day legislative conference that is in many ways the prototype for our proposed project. The conference includes hands-on training on storytelling; group discernment exercises; and a day of legislative office visits where participants bear witness to their faith.

We prepare future religious leaders through our vital work with higher education institutions. Texas Impact has a long history of partnership with Texas seminaries, including serving as an internship placement for Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary; Brite Divinity School; Perkins School of Theology; and Truett Seminary. Texas Impact also plays a role in connecting theology and policy for undergraduate students and graduate students not enrolled in seminaries. We host Lutheran Hunger Action Fellows and Presbyterian Young Adult Volunteers, many of whom go on to enroll in seminary and become ordained. We offer graduate students in social work, public affairs, and law opportunities to connect their faith with their area of study.

Finally, we seek to reach Texans of faith and conscience who currently are not connected to faith communities, either because they do not practice any faith or because they are experiencing spiritual disruption/transition. One group of special significance here are LGBTQ+ Texans, many of whom have experienced religious trauma and are particularly reluctant to trust Christian policy advocates.

Texas Impact and the Texas Impact Foundation are directed by an eight-member board elected every two years from within the Leadership Council's membership. Texas Impact's primary office is located in Austin near the University of Texas in the historic Brueggemann-Sandbo House, with some staff located in other cities in Texas.

Bee Moorhead has been Executive Director of Texas Impact since 2000. Under Bee's leadership, Texas Impact is among the most respected interfaith networks in the country. Bee's policy expertise includes health and human services, climate change, immigration, public budgets, and civic engagement. She is a credentialed observer to the United Nations climate policy negotiations process and has attended nine annual climate conferences. An ordained ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA), Bee attends University Presbyterian Church in Austin.

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