

# Policy Recommendations to Support Texas Children During the 2025 Legislative Session



During the 2025 legislative session, state lawmakers will have the opportunity to make significant headway on challenges facing Texas kids and families. Certain issues have emerged as higher profile priorities for this particular session, including funding public schools, improving access to high-quality child care, and ensuring that kids who are already eligible for health coverage are able to sign up. There are also opportunities to continue making real progress on persistent challenges that the Legislature has chipped away at in recent sessions, including maternal health, children's mental health, Early Childhood Intervention for toddlers with disabilities, safely reducing the number of kids entering foster care, and supporting kids who do enter foster care. Finally, as the Legislature aims to improve early learning, legislators need to pay particular attention to students with disabilities, emergent bilingual students, and pre-k students.

Fortunately, this session, the Legislature will have access to significant revenue, specific high-impact policy proposals to address these challenges and opportunities, and advocates ready to work with them. This agenda provides a high-level overview of those recommendations. We look forward to working with legislators and Texans from across the state to make these proposals a reality for Texas kids.

# Early Learning

Increase access to high-quality early learning programs that help young children thrive, including emergent bilingual students and children with disabilities.

Improve access to high-quality child care.

- Invest state funding to provide more child care scholarships through the Texas Workforce Commission's Child Care Services (CCS) program.
- Include the children of child care educators on the priority list for CCS scholarships.
- Provide grants that address shortages of infant care, care for children with disabilities, nighttime care, child care deserts, and other high-need areas.
- Ensure Local Workforce Boards have flexibility to provide reimbursement rates to Texas Rising Star programs at the state's established rate for the provider's quality.

Increase funding for public education, including dedicated funds for high-quality pre-k in schools and community-based pre-k partnerships.

Strengthen early learning opportunities for three and four-year-olds with disabilities by addressing unintended funding gaps in Early Childhood Special Education and ensuring children with IEPs are eligible for Texas pre-k.

Leverage the recommendations from the state's Teacher Vacancy Taskforce and Emergent Bilingual Strategic Plan to recruit more certified bilingual educators, increase the number of effective dual language programs, and improve early learning outcomes for emergent bilingual students.



# Healthy Families

Ensure eligible children are enrolled in health coverage and receive Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services. Enable moms to receive the support they need before, during, and after their pregnancies so they are healthy and their babies are healthy.

Ensure that currently eligible children and pregnant women are able to enroll in Medicaid and CHIP health insurance.

- Invest in upgrading the outdated technology in the state's Medicaid enrollment system.
- Empower parents with timely information about Medicaid/CHIP enrollment, including notifying parents of children's Medicaid/CHIP eligibility when they apply for SNAP, when they are discharged from the hospital after childbirth, and when they enroll children in school.

Provide adequate funding for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) for infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays.

Ensure sufficient funding for Medicaid, CHIP, Healthy Texas Women, Family Planning Program, mobile women's health units, and the DSHS maternal and child health division, including the Maternal Mortality & Morbidity Review Committee and TexasAIM initiative.

Add key maternal health services to Medicaid coverage, including:

- Doula care for women during pregnancy, delivery, and the postpartum period;
- The Case Management for Children and Pregnant Women (CPW) program for high-risk pregnancies for the full year postpartum, not just the prenatal period; and
- Additional postpartum depression screenings during well-baby visits with pediatricians.





# Child Protection and Children's Mental Health

Help parents prevent abuse or neglect and keep children safe with their families and out of foster care. Ensure parents from every community can get effective support for children with intensive mental health needs. Ensure children who enter foster care live in safe, nurturing homes with the support they need to heal and thrive.

Keep more children safely with their families and out of foster care.

- Invest state funding to preserve the Family First Pilots, which offer mental health services and targeted family preservation services.
- Maintain funding for child abuse prevention programs, such as HOPES, Nurse-Family Partnership, Texas Home Visiting, and non-home visiting programs.
- Ensure that teachers, doctors, and other “mandatory reporters” are equipped to connect families to community support, including through Family Resource Centers and a streamlined 2-1-1, when a call to a child abuse hotline is not needed.
- Improve legal services for families investigated by CPS by increasing funding for the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC).



Improve access to services for children with intensive mental health challenges, including those at risk of entering foster care due to their own mental health needs.

- Increase funding for the YES Waiver program so children at imminent risk of hospitalization or placement in foster care can receive specialized mental health services.
- Add key children's mental health services to Medicaid coverage, including intensive outpatient care, partial hospitalization programs, Youth Peer Support, and crisis stabilization services.
- Invest state funding – and leverage federal matching funds through the Family First Act – to expand the availability of Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), Functional Family Therapy (FFT), Family-Centered Therapy, and other services.

Help older youth in foster care heal, thrive, and stay on a path to success.

- Ensure youth who age out of foster care have appropriate support, including access to the Texas Tuition and Fee Waiver and health insurance.
- Divert youth in foster care away from the juvenile justice system through training for foster care facilities staff, local juvenile justice boards' diversion policies, and improved data collection.

# About Texans Care for Children

As a statewide non-profit organization, Texans Care for Children conducts research and engages communities to identify ways that state policies should change to ensure Texas kids and families succeed. We then work with legislators, state officials, partners, the media, and everyday Texans to build support for those policy solutions and ensure state leaders implement them. Our work focuses on maternal and child health, child protection (including foster care), early learning, and children's mental health.

We are grateful to the everyday Texans whose financial contributions make our work possible and the foundations and corporations who support our work.

## For More Information, Contact:

### **Stephanie Rubin**

CEO

[srubin@txchildren.org](mailto:srubin@txchildren.org)

### **Adriana Kohler**

Policy Director

[akohler@txchildren.org](mailto:akohler@txchildren.org)

### **Kate Murphy**

Director of Child Protection

[kmurphy@txchildren.org](mailto:kmurphy@txchildren.org)

### **Diana Forester**

Director of Health Policy

[dforester@txchildren.org](mailto:dforester@txchildren.org)

### **David Feigen**

Director of Early Learning Policy

[dfeigen@txchildren.org](mailto:dfeigen@txchildren.org)

### **Alec Mendoza**

Senior Health Policy Associate

[amendoza@txchildren.org](mailto:amendoza@txchildren.org)

### **Lauren McKenzie**

Senior Policy Associate for Early Learning

[lmckenzie@txchildren.org](mailto:lmckenzie@txchildren.org)

### **Muna Javaid**

Senior Policy Associate for Child Protection

[mjavaid@txchildren.org](mailto:mjavaid@txchildren.org)

Texans Care for Children gratefully acknowledges Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc., for their financial support of this publication. The opinions expressed in this document are those of Texans Care for Children and do not necessarily reflect the views of Methodist Healthcare Ministries.



[www.txchildren.org](http://www.txchildren.org)

CONNECT WITH US

