



Texas Legislative Study Group

An Official Caucus of the Texas House of Representatives

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January 4, 2023

Dear Colleagues and Supporters,

With the start of the 88th Texas Legislature imminent and state coffers holding billions of surplus tax dollars, state leaders, legislators, and advocates are calling for action on their priorities. The Texas Legislative Study Group will continue doing what it's done for three decades: use facts and evidence to promote public policy that benefits all Texans.

As a precursor to the 88th, we'll look back at six policy reports produced during the interim — each with a deep dive into issues sure to come up this session.

We know that Texas property tax cuts are on the agenda but will tax cuts benefit working families or will they primarily target wealthy individual and corporate taxpayers?

We know there will be an effort to undermine our neighborhood public schools and steer Texans' tax dollars into private schools, but will there be an effort to address the teacher shortage to ensure all students have an opportunity to receive a quality education in a safe environment?

We know that millions of Texans could lose access to healthcare when [the PHE \(Public Health Emergency\) expires](#), but will the state continue to deny Medicaid coverage for more than a million Texans, and allow 200,000 more (including those with [disabilities](#) and Moms with autistic children) to wait as long as 10 to 20 years to secure services?

These are just some of the many serious issues the LSG will address in policy reports and floor reports as we move through the session.

Thank you,

Rep. Armando L. Walle
Chair, Texas Legislative Study Group

Looking Back: A Primer to the 88th

Rep. Ramon Romero
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Sen. Judith Zaffirini

During the interim, the LSG produced six detailed policy reports that can be found in their entirety on the LSG website. The brief summaries below are updates related to those six reports.

Children Suffer in State Foster Care System

Incidents of abuse at the now-shut-down Bastrop County facility, the Refuge, renewed frustrations with the state's failing foster care system. Last fall, court monitors released a detailed report that found 501 children spent at least one night in a non-licensed placement, such as a hotel or office, during the first half of 2021.

A separate DFPS report found that more than 100 children died under state care in just two years since 2020, including 44 in 2020, 38 in 2021, and 22 in the first three months of 2022. [READ MORE HERE.](#)

Since we released our report in May of 2022, the Governor fired DFPS Commissioner Jaime Masters and replaced her with Stephanie Muth, a health care consultant and former Medicaid director at the Health and Human Services Commission. Masters' tenure was marked by a *staff exodus* during a long-running federal court case that highlighted safety concerns regarding hundreds of foster children who had no certain place to stay, sleep or get regular access to support as the state attempts to make a transition to community-based care.

Mass Shootings, the Price of Inaction

We have a gun problem that no other country has. In the USA, firearms are the leading cause of death for children ages 1-19, with 56.2 deaths per million compared to 6.2 in Canada, 3.1 in France, 1.6 in Australia, 1 in Germany, 0.5 in the UK and 0.3 in Japan.

Following a 2021 session that loosened gun restrictions and refused to consider gun violence prevention, the Robb Elementary massacre in Uvalde cost the lives of 19 students and two teachers. Since the 2018 Santa Fe school shooting, Texas has spent \$2.2 million on a rarely used, unproven safety tool to prevent school shootings, iWatchTexas. [State agencies have stopped promoting this tool and school districts have since turned to proven systems.](#) This session, there is an opportunity to enact evidence-based gun safety laws, which a [majority of Texans](#) support. [READ MORE HERE.](#)

Texas Still Ranks Last in Healthcare Access

Medicaid expansion, [supported by a large majority of Texans](#), would provide public health, economic and fiscal benefits for all Texans and all Texas communities. [Texas must prepare now](#) to develop an effective 12-month transition to prevent hundreds of thousands of Texans from losing healthcare eligibility and [keep rural hospitals from being forced to close](#) when the PHE (Public Health Emergency) expires. The Texas Medical Association and healthcare advocates are concerned by the state's suggestion that post-PHE eligibility "re-checks" can be done in just six months, fearing that many might

fall through the cracks. Health care providers also face an acute shortage of nurses leaving the profession due to workplace violence, threats, staff shortages, and pandemic burnout. [READ MORE HERE.](#)

The Anatomy of the Teacher Shortage

Nearly [43,000 Texas teachers left the profession](#) in the last year, a 13% attrition rate, due to longer hours and stress due to the pandemic, inadequate salary and benefits, and the effect of censorship and book bans on effective teaching. A [TSTA survey](#) conducted by Sam Houston State University found that:

- 41% of teachers had to work a second job during the school year and a majority had to moonlight during the summer,
- 79% of teachers thought taking an extra job made it harder to excel in the classroom, and
- 70% have considered leaving the profession.

Texas teacher salaries lag \$7,000 below the national average. According to the Texas Education Agency, [nearly one in 5 \(20%\)](#) of the 43,000 new teachers hired this year were not certified to teach. Meanwhile, Texas Teachers of Tomorrow, the largest state-approved (by TEA) teacher prep program, enrolled nearly 70,000 would-be educators last year, but only 6,000 people completed the program and fewer than 5,500 gained their full teaching certification. [READ MORE HERE.](#)

Maternal Mortality and Reproductive Health, a Life and Death Matter

The United States maternal mortality rate is double the rate of any other developed nation. Furthermore, Texas is the worst state in terms of access to prenatal and maternal health care. [READ MORE HERE.](#)

Since we released our report in September of 2022, the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee has released its long-anticipated report after a 3-month delay by the state. [Report Findings](#) included:

- As many as 90% of the deaths may have been preventable.
- Severe medical complications from pregnancy and childbirth increased from 58.2 in 2018 to 72.7 cases per 10,000 deliveries in 2020.
- As in past years, the rate of maternal mortality impacted Black women worst of all. In 2013, Black women were twice as likely as white women and four times as likely as Hispanic women to die from pregnancy-related causes and that data has remained constant.
- Obstetric hemorrhage was the leading cause of pregnancy-related death in Texas, accounting for a quarter of cases. The most common cause of hemorrhage deaths was ectopic pregnancies.
- Suicide and homicide represented 27% of pregnancy-related deaths, with intimate partners most likely to be perpetrators of homicide among reviewed cases.
- The committee's top recommendation to reduce maternal mortality rates is expanding access to comprehensive health services during pregnancy and the year after childbirth. In the last legislative session, the House approved 12 months of postpartum Medicaid to benefit the poorest mothers in the state, but the Senate reduced it to six months.

Every Vote Must Count

Senate Bill 1, now law, was a solution in search of a problem. Texas' 2020 election was "smooth and secure," according to the Director of Elections for the Texas Secretary of State. Likewise, audits done by the Secretary of State found

there was [neither widespread fraud nor serious problems](#) with the 2022 primary or general elections. [READ MORE HERE.](#) Several voter suppression bills have already been filed in this 88th session.

Looking Forward

We look forward to developing additional policy reports as our analysts meet with advocates, staff members and policy experts.

The Legislative Study Group (LSG) is a caucus in the Texas House of Representatives that is committed to developing sound public policy that benefits all Texas families. Created in 1993, the LSG has become one of the leading policy resources in the Texas Capitol.

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