



Urban Leagues of Texas (Austin Area & Houston Area)

The Urban Leagues of Texas (ULoT) affiliates for the 2025 Legislative session have formed a non-partisan alliance with policy makers, advocates, and constituents to address complex legislation that adversely impacts communities across our state. Our legislative focus offers a multifaceted response to invasive legislative policies that diminish state representation, Quality of Life, and safeguards meant to protect citizens often disenfranchised across Texas.

Consistent with the previous 2023 legislative session and policy cycle, ULoT will prioritize unbiased nonpartisan policies that center the human experience, belonging, and advances the balancing of justice. This reflects our commitment to address societal constraints through disproportionate determinants affecting the most vulnerable populations of Texans by promoting Dignity, Fairness, and Innovation.

The State of Texas legislative policy agenda – influenced by federal mandates with executive actions to criminalize abortion, discriminate health access, eliminate immigration, undermine educational opportunities, restrict voting rights, and dissolve environmental protections – will position ULoT’s capacity to advocate for progressive and impartial reforms. This will ensure Texas’ commitment to "Union, Justice, Tolerance, Liberty, and Peace."

This solid unprejudiced advocacy strategy during the 89th Legislative session will promote informed civic engagement and ensure a truly exemplary representative democracy across critical societal sectors. ULoT’s agenda is aligned with the National Urban League’s campaign: **Defend Democracy, Demand Diversity, Defeat Poverty.**

Legislative Priorities

**Flagged: High Alert Bills*

DEFEND DEMOCRACY

PROTECT VOTING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Voting Rights & Civic Engagement - Support Equity Reforms, Remove Barriers, and Promote Civic Engagement



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The Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act (SAVE Act) will force citizens to provide documentation of citizenship by requesting Passports or Birth Certificates, making access difficult for American citizens to exercise their fundamental right to vote. The Act overhauls the National Voting Rights Act of 1993 allowing residents to vote with an official ID or Driver's License.

To combat restrictions, we propose Texas state policy makers enforce responsible regulatory reforms to protect Texas communities in accordance with the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. By ensuring eligible voters are not impaired, prohibited through barriers, intimidated or left behind, comprehensive procedures must deter discriminatory practices impacting social and economic outcomes to defend democracy in Texas.

Recommendations:

- Combat restrictions by ensuring voters who are eligible can have access without barriers.
- Reduce discriminatory processes by generating reforms to help voters and voters with disabilities to support enhanced social outcomes.
- Safeguard the removal of registered voters and voter eligibility.

DEMAND DIVERSITY

ENSURE ALL HAVE THE ACCESS TO A HEALTHY QUALITY OF LIFE

Housing & Environmental Justice - Regulation Reform and Remedy

Industrial pollution and particle matter contribute to air quality impacting emissions through industrial facilities, including concrete batch plants, in Texas. Exposure to particle matter or other air pollutants is not evenly distributed across the population and is disproportionately located within underserved communities experiencing poverty. More air quality monitoring and emissions reporting with regulatory agencies must consider the growing health of environmental impacts from these sources as a part of the permit approval process.

While environmental concerns impact us all, they impact vulnerable populations at higher rates. Neighborhoods including poor, racial and ethnic minorities, elderly, and disabled populations will experience climate-related disasters more severely. This is exacerbated further for the unhoused population. Extreme weather conditions and industrial pollution make homeless individuals more at risk of hypothermia and heat stroke.



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Recommendations.

- Reduce air and noise pollution by improving air quality standards.
- Improve inclement weatherization measures for vulnerable populations.
- Monitor set emission limits requiring plants to submit operating capacity, and emission limits to improve the processes for issuing permits for inspections.
- Improve enforcement of regulations requiring TCEQ to maintain an up-to-date listing of current or active plants in operations to mitigate negative impacts on hot spots in high populated areas.

Emergency & Equitable Health Care Access - Expand Medical Coverage for Texans

Texas is one of 10 states that has not expanded Medicaid, leaving approximately 4.5 million people uninsured. The Affordable Care Act expanded coverage to fill in the gap for underserved, low-income individuals who earned approximately \$285 dollars a month (for a family of four or middle-income individuals who required access to subsidies).¹ With the recent decision to freeze federal programs, the purge will leave 1 million families vulnerable and severely isolated from equitable healthcare. Those who lose coverage or suffer from mental illness are caught in the crossfire of positive intervention and punitive action.

Between 2021 and 2022, Texas experienced a 12.9% increase in infant deaths compared to a 1.8% increase experienced by the rest of the U.S.² The situation intensifies among Black women who are three times more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth, when seeking reproductive support. In 2024, though new medical guidelines were adopted through the Texas Medical Board to address patient care, members of the board and physicians alike raised concerns that this guidance didn't go far enough to ensure doctors felt safe treating patients. We propose Texas lawmakers enhance access to health care for all.

Recommendations

- Allow \$100 Billion dollars to support Medicaid expansion to improve health impacts and outcomes.
- Ensure protocols for emergency mental health detentions promote systemic reforms to improve holistic and appropriate care.

¹ Texas Tribune, *Texas Medicaid Unwinding: Consequences and Impact*, Sept. 26, 2024, <https://www.texastribune.org/2024/09/26/texas-medicaid-unwinding-consequences/> (last visited Mar. 3, 2025).

² Gemmill, Alison, et al., *Infant Deaths After Texas' 2021 Ban on Abortion in Early Pregnancy*, 178 JAMA Pediatric. 784 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.0885>.



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- Clarifying exemption policy for accessing abortions in instances of sexual assault, rape and incest to save lives of pregnant people and address rising infant mortality.
- Eliminate disparities by lifting excessive restrictions on all stages of pregnancy that jeopardizes patients' access limiting health care reproductive protections.

Gun Safety - Regulation and Reform

The impacts from Uvalde's school shooting still permeates throughout the State of Texas where 45.7% of adults live in homes with guns.³ With weakening gun laws and the expansion of gun ownership, firearms remain the leading cause of death for both children and teens in the United States and in Texas.⁴ In 2022, there were more than 48,000 firearm-related deaths in the United States reflecting ~132 people dying from a firearm-related injury each day.⁵ Texas suffered 4,630 fire-arm related deaths alone.⁶

Recommendations

- Implement Gun Safety storage policies and support common-sense gun reform.
- Pass prevention policies to curb firearm access for youth under 18.
- Ban firearms on school property.
- Support training with stronger messaging around gun safety, school safety, domestic violence, and suicide prevention.

DEFEAT POVERTY
CREATE PATHWAYS TO STABILIZATION

³ CBS News: Gun Ownership Rates by State." CBS News, CBS Interactive, <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/gun-ownership-rates-by-state/>. Accessed 3 Mar. 2025.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Trends in Firearm Mortality – United States, 2010-2021*, 72 Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report 1 (2023), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7250a1.htm> (last visited Mar. 3, 2025).

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Firearm Violence: Data & Research*, <https://www.cdc.gov/firearm-violence/data-research/facts-stats/index.html> (last visited Mar. 3, 2025).

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Firearm Mortality by State*, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/firearm_mortality/firearm.htm (last visited Mar. 3, 2025).



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Supporting High Quality Education for All — Expand Access

Ranking 39th for Pre-k spending in the nation, only 52% of 4-year-old children in Texas are enrolled.⁷ Enrollment in Pre-K with digital literacy promotes social emotional learning and empowers child development to strengthen achievement gaps. ULoT supports standardized, foundational programs that strengthen cognitive, language, academic, literacy, language, and math skills. With prolonged exposure, Texas scholars can be empowered to meet the criteria at grade level by 3rd grade and beyond.

School vouchers, often referred to as “school choice programs,” use public funds to help families pay for their children’s private education. Classroom dollars also supplement enhancements to curriculum to allow students a more robust learning experience. ULoT’s priority this legislative session is to closely evaluate decisions around Texas school choice proposals. Every family should have the right to choose a quality education for their children which should include teacher training, social-emotional learning, mitigation of staff shortages, and the promotion of student success. This should be representative of all educational eco-systems, not just private schools. A parent does have the right to choose, however this should not come at the cost of depleting dollars for another child’s public education.

Recommendations

- Expand Pre-K full day attendance for all.
- Support federal funding through Head Start to improve academic outcomes.
- Enact significant increase to the basic allotment with mechanisms in place to trigger automatic pay increases for educators.
- Remodel outdated public school finance system.

Improved Higher Education for All — Ensure Future Scholars’ Success

Higher education is a vital pathway to economic mobility and innovation, and Texas must prioritize policies that enhance access, equity, and student success. With a \$33 billion surplus in the 88th Legislative Session, the state had a unique opportunity to invest in institutions, particularly Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which play a crucial role in bridging educational disparities and supporting first-generation students.

⁷ National Institute for Early Education Research, 2023 Texas Pre-K Report, Apr. 18, 2024, https://nieer.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/2023_texas_4.18.24.pdf (last visited Mar. 3, 2025).



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A strong higher education agenda should expand civic engagement, reduce financial barriers, support students with disabilities, and foster diverse, inclusive campuses. Ensuring accessible polling locations, eliminating tuition costs for non-transferable credits, and improving resources to reinstate diversity initiatives will strengthen Texas' higher education system. By committing to these goals, Texas can build a more equitable and competitive future for its students and institutions.

Recommendations

- Close student impact gaps by distributing funding to shift how Universities operate.
- Support inclusion programs to promote community's cultural heritage and traditions to enhance the scholastic educational experience.
- Provide funding and resources for College Savings plan to help students pay for higher education.
- Waive fees for college credits not affiliated with degree program.

Restorative Justice Reform — Rehabilitation through Data-backed Solutions

Sentencing laws in Texas have long ignored scientific evidence on adolescent development and the psychological science of adolescent behavior and decision-making. Lifting criminal record-based barriers to employment fosters greater economic stability for families and communities. A criminal record regardless of the offense level can translate into a lifetime sentence of poverty. Expanding eligibility for record sealing and expunction initiatives will not guarantee an individual is granted relief, but it will open a pathway forward for many facing barriers to economic stability. People are less likely to commit another crime if they can access jobs, housing, education, and government services.

Recommendations

- Expand access to record sealing for individuals with past nonviolent drug or property-related state jail felony convictions.
- Modernize criminal justice standards.
- Automated expunction of arrest records.

ULOT's Core Advocacy Values

1. **Equity:** Ensure all individuals, regardless of background, have equitable access to essential services and protections.



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2. **Autonomy:** Center laws and policies on individual choice, informed consent, and collaborative decision-making.
3. **Accountability:** Promote transparency and fairness in government and public institutions while protecting privacy and dignity.
4. **Progress:** Leverage evolving knowledge, modern standards, and inclusive practices to reform outdated laws and systems.

