

A photograph of the Texas State Capitol building in Austin, Texas. The building is a large, ornate structure with a prominent dome and a statue on top. It is surrounded by lush green trees and a clear blue sky. The building's facade features classical architectural elements like columns and arches. Two flags, the American flag and the Texas state flag, are flying from a pole in front of the building. In the foreground, there are more trees and a black lamppost.

20TH ANNIVERSARY
TexProtects

**FROM THE CAPITOL
TO YOUR COMMUNITY:
INSIGHTS FROM THE 89TH
LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

June 2 marked 140 days of legislative activity and dedicated advocacy, as the 89th Legislative Session came to a close. Our mission — **to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect** — served as our compass throughout this dynamic period. To that end, we tirelessly advocated to ensure that families are connected to the vital supports they need to be safe and thrive.

Our policy priorities were deeply informed by the inspiring work of our Texas Prevention Network members and the invaluable experiences shared by families across the state. This input was then shaped and refined through the guidance of our Public Policy Advisory Committee. The result? **Five strategic priorities that guided our work at the Capitol.**

Throughout the session, we witnessed significant legislative strides and historic investments that will undoubtedly **bolster support systems for Texas children and families.** Yet, this session also brought its share of complexities. Some critical proposals, despite strong momentum, ultimately fell short, underscoring the need for continued advocacy and collaborative effort.

This preliminary report provides an overview of the key bills and budget allocations from the 89th Legislative Session that will impact Texas families.

Strengthening Texas Families

TexProtects' advocacy during the 89th Legislative Session focused on increasing investments in a continuum of preventative services. Our goal was to ensure all Texas families have access to a comprehensive range of family strengthening services and supports, no matter where they live in the state.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Serving More Texas Families

Both the **Fatherhood EFFECT** and **Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF)** programs received an **additional \$1 million each** over the biennium.

Addressed Critical Workforce Needs

SB 462 by Senator Kolkhorst was passed, which will help ensure there is **child care available for child care workers** themselves.

Support for New Mothers & Infants

HB 136 by Representative Hull will allow **Medicaid coverage and reimbursement for lactation consultation services**.

Expanded Program Funding

The **Thriving Texas Families** program saw a substantial expansion with an **additional \$60 million investment** over the biennium.

A Crucial Step for Working Parents

\$100 million was allocated for child care scholarships for low-income families through the Texas Workforce Commission.

Incentive to Strengthen Families

SB 2018 by Senator Paxton created a **Strong Families Tax Credit**, incentivizing businesses to contribute to approved nonprofits that provide family strengthening services.

Strengthening Texas Families

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Expanded Access to Crisis Intervention

HB 5342 by Representative Landgraf was passed to **set up a trust fund for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**.

Addressed Mental Health Workforce Shortages

To **increase the availability of mental health services for families, SB 1401** by Senator West will establish the Texas Mental Health Profession Pipeline and **SB 646** (Sen. West) will expand loan forgiveness for mental health professionals.

Boosted Mental Health Service Funding

Community mental health services for children received over **\$41 million more** than the last session, and **community mental health crisis services** (serving both adults and children) saw an increase of **over \$53 million**. This funding likely includes **\$54 million to expand Youth Crisis Outreach Teams**.

AREAS FOR CONTINUED ADVOCACY

YES Waiver Funding: No additional funding was specifically allocated for YES Waiver mental health services for children.

Family CARE Portfolios: Legislators expressed interest in a digital version; however, no funding was set aside to expand the availability of printed Family CARE portfolios.

Strengthening Texas Families

AREAS FOR CONTINUED ADVOCACY

Summer EBT Funds: \$60 million was initially allocated to draw down an estimated \$450 million in Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer funds, providing vital SNAP benefits to eligible families during June, July and August, beginning in summer 2027 (contingent on federal decisions). It was vetoed by the Governor due to the uncertainty of federal matching rates for this program and can be reconsidered once there is more clarity.

IECMHC Pilot Sustainability: State funding was not secured to sustain Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) pilots once their federal grant concludes in December 2025.

Home Visiting Reimbursement Study: A budget directive that would require the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to study the feasibility of Medicaid reimbursement for Home Visiting services was not adopted.

Medicaid Coverage for Behavioral Therapies: HB 2036 by Representative Oliverson and HB 475 and HB 488 by Representative Johnson, bills that would have allowed Medicaid to cover critical behavioral health services and therapies like Multisystem Therapy and Functional Family Therapy, did not pass.

“Active Efforts” Proposal for DFPS: A proposal for Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) workers to apply “active efforts” (going above and beyond to ensure families receive necessary supports) instead of “reasonable efforts” did not pass. Although this legislative change could improve outcomes for children and families, it was determined that the state is not currently positioned to successfully implement it due to insufficient community resources.

Priority 2

Connecting Families to Resources

TexProtects' advocacy for this priority aimed to improve coordination amongst information and referral systems and provide clarity to professionals on what connectors exist in their communities. This would ensure families could access services in a timely manner, ultimately leading to less families in crisis.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Strengthened Benefits and Eligibility System

The Legislature made a significant investment in Texas' benefits and eligibility system, allocating **\$386 million** over the biennium and providing 642 temporary full-time employees. This investment targets **technology upgrades, case management improvements and partial funding for staffing increases** to enhance the experience for individuals applying for or managing benefits such as SNAP, Medicaid and TANF. This includes **\$163 million in additional funding for the vendor responsible for managing 2-1-1 Option 2**, the eligibility helpline, which is available during regular business hours.

AREAS FOR CONTINUED ADVOCACY

Limited Investment in 2-1-1 Option 1 (TIRN): While investments in 2-1-1 Option 2 are necessary and may eventually reduce call volume and confusion, the lack of comparable investment in 2-1-1 Option 1 (Texas Information and Referral Network - TIRN) remains a concern. Many calls to Option 1 (which connects individuals to trained community resource specialists 24/7) come from those unable to reach Option 2 or needing more holistic, community-based support. The limited investment in Option 1 restricts the state's ability to ensure individuals receive timely assistance, particularly after hours or in times of crisis.

HB 38 Did Not Pass: This bill by Representative Bucy, which would have modernized Option 1 of 2-1-1 by allowing more flexibility, funding and technology updates to Texas' information and referral network, ultimately did not move forward. Despite being a Speaker priority and having strong bipartisan support, it stalled after passing the House.

Prioritization of Community Supports: There was no legislative prioritization for Family Resource Centers or Help Me Grow initiatives during the 89th session.

Supporting Informal Kinship Caregivers

TexProtects' advocacy for this priority aimed to ensure that all caregivers, including relatives and friends who step in to care for a child, are able to access and connect to the resources and supports necessary to appropriately care for the child(ren) in their home.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Increased Support for Kinship Placements

Historically, the Legislature has supported formal kinship placements for children in state custody. This session saw the growing number of informal kin placements finally becoming part of the legislative discussion. This resulted in the passage of several bills focused on informal kinship caregivers, specifically:

SB 1923 by Senator West: This bill will **allow child support to follow the child**, providing additional financial support directly to kinship caregivers.

SB 226 by Senator West: This bill grants informal kinship caregivers the **ability to enroll a child under their care in school**.

Protected Formal Kinship Caregivers

HB 5394 by Representative Rose was passed to **protect formal kinship caregivers** from having additional requirements imposed upon them **while they pursue their foster license**.

AREAS FOR CONTINUED ADVOCACY

Kinship Navigator Programs Funding: State funding was not secured to maintain the Kinship Navigator Programs, whose current funding is set to end at the close of 2025.

HB 4870 Did Not Pass: This bill by Representative A. Davis and Senator West, which would have created a grant program to help offset legal fees for informal kinship caregivers, passed the House but ultimately did not advance in the Senate.

Limited Data Transparency: SB 596 by Senator West, which would have required more data transparency to better understand the use of informal kinship caregiver arrangements (specifically Chapter 34 and 35 temporary authorizations), did not pass.

Family Preservation Efforts

TexProtects advocated for minimizing further CPS intervention by funding and providing more opportunities to divert families and offer supportive services where there is a risk of maltreatment.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Permanent Texas Family First Pilots

SB 1398 by Senator Kolkhorst made the **Texas Family First Pilots permanent**, moving them under the jurisdiction of Community Based Care (CBC) contractors across the state. This legislation also requires **additional transparency in this process and program outcomes**. The Legislature adopted **\$21,275,603 for FY26 and \$22,924,851 for FY27** for these pilots and adopted a budget directive allowing additional funds, as available, to serve a broader range of families, including those at risk of relinquishment, families in reunification processes and other beneficial cases determined by CBC contractors within the conservatorship stage of service.

Strengthened Community Based Care (CBC)

Numerous bills passed aimed at addressing concerns and providing flexibility to CBC contractors. Since family preservation efforts will be under CBC purview, these measures were critical **to ensure families and children receive the best possible care**. Key legislation included **SB 513** (Senator Sparks), **SB 1589** (Senator Hancock), **SB 2032** and **SB 2034** (Senator Paxton) and **HB 4129** (Representative A. Davis).

AREAS FOR CONTINUED ADVOCACY

Lack of Funding for Concrete Family Supports: The Legislature did not prioritize funding concrete supports for families as extensively as advocates had hoped. For instance, HB 1155 by Representative Hull, which would have provided immediate financial support to families after the closing of their CPS case to aid during reunification, did not pass.

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

TexProtects advocated for the protection of children from predators, both online and in-person.

Safe Schools Initiative

With strong bipartisan support, **SB 571** passed as an omnibus bill that includes TexProtects' priority of keeping kids safe in public schools. Championed by Senator Bettencourt and many others, this bill **ensures that outside law enforcement investigates allegations of improper relationships between educators and students.**

Protections Against AI-Generated Harmful Content

Recognizing the urgent need due to the emergence of artificial intelligence, both chambers of the Legislature passed bills to **create protections for youth around harmful, artificially created images.** These include **SB 441** (Senator C. Hinojosa) and **HB 581** (Representative M. Gonzalez), both of which protect children from artificially created sexual abuse materials.

Faster Recovery of Missing Youth

HB 908 by Representative Spiller will **require local law enforcement to report runaway or missing youth to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC),** which will aid law enforcement in recovering these youth more quickly.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Support for Online Protection

SB 2420 by Senator Paxton, known as the "**Appstore Accountability Act,**" passed, providing an unprecedented layer of online protection for children. This legislation **requires age verification and parental consent before a child can download apps or make in-app purchases.**

Early Intervention for At-Risk Youth

HB 451 by Representative S. Thompson calls for the utilization of the Commercial Sexually Explicit Identification Tool (CSE-IT) with youth in juvenile probation or state custody. By securing the necessary funding for this tool's implementation, this bill will **allow prevention services to begin sooner for at-risk youth.**

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Required Sex Offender Registration

HB 2000 by Representative Ashby will **require individuals convicted of grooming a child to become registered sex offenders.**

Enhanced Employee Screening

HB 3153 by Representative Kerwin **strengthened screening requirements for employees at child-serving entities** who work with system-involved youth.

Promoting Greater Transparency

SB 835 by Senator Paxton **prohibits and invalidates the usage of non-disclosure agreements in settlements** related to child sexual abuse.

Improved Sexual Assault Survivor Protections

HB 47 by Representative Howard, a Speaker priority, passed to strengthen **protections for survivors of sexual assault** with better access to medical care.



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