



CAPITOL COMPANION GUIDE

2025 Advocacy Impact Highlights
From the Texas Capitol to Washington, D.C.



100
YEARS OF IMPACT

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Way
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A MESSAGE FROM UNITED WAY

United Way of Metropolitan Dallas is pleased to present this Capitol Companion Guide highlighting our advocacy activities and impact at the state and federal levels during the 89th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature and the 119th U.S. Congress. Our advocacy team stayed busy throughout the Texas legislative and U.S. congressional sessions, engaging thousands of local advocates to speak up for meaningful policy change that would benefit North Texas.

In the fall of 2024, we hosted our Advocacy Day Kick-Off event, Keeping it 100, which included a conversation with two North Texas House Representatives, Jeff Leach and Toni Rose, ahead of the 89th Texas legislative session. The event also helped kick off our year-long Centennial Anniversary celebration.

Additionally, our three-part All Eyes on Austin policy briefing series, which we co-hosted with United Ways of Denton and Tarrant Counties, focused on policy issues affecting our North Texas region. This series informed our top-line legislative priorities that guided our state legislative advocacy efforts for the 140 days of session.

At the start of 2025, we transitioned to a new presidential administration that has resulted in an ever-changing federal policy landscape. We have navigated these changes alongside our community impact partners and other stakeholders.

As local, state and federal policy shifts and evolves, advocacy plays a vital role in driving progress toward our Aspire United 2030 goals in education, income and health. By speaking up together, with a unified voice, the Live United movement can inform legislators of the challenges and opportunities in our communities and push for meaningful change. This guide shares the outcomes of United Way's state legislative priorities, federal legislative efforts and continued advocacy on public policy issues affecting education, income and health—the building blocks of opportunity.

We cannot do this advocacy work alone. Collective advocacy is needed to ensure that we are driving lasting, generational change for the most vulnerable communities. Thank you for joining us in advocating for all North Texans to thrive. Our advocacy work together continues.

Sincerely,



Hillary Evans
VP, Policy and Advocacy
United Way of Metropolitan Dallas



Brent Chaney
Co-Chair, Advocacy Committee
Vistra



Lindsey Hughes
Co-Chair, Advocacy Committee
Haynes Boone

OUR MISSION

For 100 years, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas has united the community to create opportunity so all North Texans can thrive. We drive progress toward this mission by improving access to education, income and health—the building blocks of opportunity—uniting thousands of hand-raisers from across our community to invest in, advocate for and volunteer in support of lasting, generational change.

Our vision is a North Texas where all students graduate prepared for success, all workers achieve financial stability and all families have the health resources needed to live longer, healthier lives.

OUR ASPIRE UNITED 2030 GOALS

To make our vision for the future of North Texas a reality, we set and track quantifiable 10-year goals to drive meaningful change.

**INCREASE BY
50%**

the number of students reading on grade level by third grade.

**INCREASE BY
20%**

the number of young adults who earn a living wage, adding more than \$800 million per year to the local economy.

**INCREASE TO
96%**

the number of North Texans with access to affordable healthcare insurance.



ADVOCACY IMPACT: BY THE NUMBERS

Throughout these legislative and congressional sessions, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas joined the United Way Network and more than a dozen local, state and national coalitions advocating at the Texas Capitol and on Capitol Hill. Here's a snapshot of our impact this year.

- **2,600 members** of the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas **advocacy engagement network** participated in our advocacy events and subscribed to our advocacy publications (an increase of 1,700 people)
- **50 advocates** participated in Texas United Way Capitol Day (more than double the number of participants from last session)
- **400+ United Ways** from across the country including United Way of Dallas joined the largest ever United Way Worldwide Advocacy Forum and Hill Day
- **40 state and federal lawmakers** were engaged in Advocacy Days, Reading Day, and other United Way of Dallas volunteer engagement events
- **20+ public comments, legislative testimonies and Advocacy Alerts** provided to influence legislation
- **120+ state and federal bills** tracked related to education, income and health
- **6 advocacy briefing events** led by United Way of Metropolitan Dallas, including a **three-part All Eyes on Austin** virtual policy briefing series with United Ways of Denton and Tarrant Counties, an Advocacy Day Kick-Off Luncheon, and **two** virtual lunch-and-learn budget briefings with Dallas Regional Chamber, United Way Worldwide and Every Texan

STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES AND OUTCOMES

The 89th Texas Legislature Regular Session adjourned on June 2, 2025, followed by two special sessions called by Gov. Greg Abbott. During the regular session, lawmakers filed nearly 9,000 bills and joint resolutions and passed 1,200+ bills.

Texas State Budget

The Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 1 with a record \$338 billion over the next two-year budget cycle, a 1.2% increase in "all funds" over the previous biennium's budget. House Bill 500 provides an additional \$16 billion in supplemental appropriations. There is another \$24 billion in the state's rainy-day fund.

In February 2025, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas hosted a Texas Budget Briefing in partnership with the Dallas Regional Chamber. The event featured fiscal policy expert Ursula Parks, who previously served as a director of the Texas Legislative Budget Board.

During the Regular Session, United Way focused on **four top-line legislative priorities** including:

- Improving early literacy and numeracy through effective strategies and interventions
- Increasing access to affordable high-quality childcare and early childhood education programs
- Investing in career and technical training programs to promote post-secondary success and economic mobility
- Protecting and strengthening food access systems and health outcomes

EDUCATION

Our Priorities: Improving Early Literacy and Numeracy through Effective Strategies and Interventions

Highlights from the Legislature

The Texas Legislature made a historic investment in House Bill (HB) 2, providing public schools with \$8.5 billion in new funding for teacher and staff salary increases, early learning, special education, armed campus security, pre-k partnerships and other priorities. Under HB 2, school districts can use Early Education Allotment funding for pre-k and toward early literacy and numeracy requirements. Additionally, Senate Bill (SB) 2, a signature legislative priority by Gov. Abbott, creates “education savings accounts” (ESAs) to allocate public funds to eligible families to pay for private school tuition and education expenses. The breakdown of ESA funds includes:

- **\$10,500** for most students
- **Up to \$2,000** for home schools
- **Up to \$30,000** for special education

Funding is capped at \$1 billion and will roll out with the 2026-27 school year.

Passed Legislation

- **HB 2** includes early learning provisions from HB 123 and SB 2252 that focus on improving kindergarten readiness and early literacy and numeracy skills by requiring schools to use consistent reading and math screeners, providing timely interventions for struggling students, and offering support for parents.
- **HB 8** officially replaces the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) with a new assessment. This bill passed in the second special session.

Areas of Opportunity

- On the STAAR exam in spring 2025, about 47% of third graders were reading at grade level in the Dallas Independent School District (ISD). Math recovery, however, continues to lag behind reading both locally and statewide. Around 40% of Dallas ISD students met grade level performance in math (third grade through Algebra 1).
- Additionally, locally and statewide, only around 45% of public school students have achieved a passing score on standardized tests in all core subjects (math, science and reading).
- Sustained funding is needed to support critical literacy and numeracy curriculum and interventions for improvements in grade-level reading and math scores.



Our Priorities: Increasing Access to Affordable High-Quality Childcare and Early Childhood Education Programs

Highlights from the Legislature

The Texas Legislature prioritized childcare legislation, with 100+ bills filed to support working families, build the future workforce and improve the childcare system. United Way of Metropolitan Dallas joined partners across Texas in helping to secure an additional \$100 million, a historic investment, for more childcare scholarships using unexpended funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. These scholarships support eligible low-income working families by moving them off the waitlist, which currently stands at 90,000+ families, including around 9,000 families in North Texas.

Passed Legislation

- **SB 462** prioritizes scholarships for eligible childcare educators by including them in the priority category for childcare.
- **HB 599** removes local barriers to licensed and registered childcare homes.
- **HB 2294** allows workforce boards to reimburse Texas Rising Star childcare providers at the maximum reimbursement rate to incentivize greater access to quality care for eligible families.
- **HB 3693** establishes the Early Childhood Integrated Data System to track enrollment trends and gaps in supply.
- **HB 117** establishes a Governor's Task Force on Governance of Early Childhood Education and Care under the Texas Education Agency to recommend ways to improve efficiency, service delivery and use of funds.
- **HB 4903** establishes a Quad-Agency Child Care Initiative that brings together Texas Workforce Commission, Health and Human Services Commission, Department of Family and Protective Services, and Texas Education Agency to review and streamline state regulations that would impact childcare programs.

Areas of Opportunity

Even with the legislature's historic investment of \$100 million, more funding will be needed to improve access to affordable, quality childcare. Voter approved local public revenue is one way to raise funds to support childcare and out-of-school-time services. United Way for Greater Austin led an effort where Travis County voters approved a ballot measure in November 2024 that will generate about \$75 million annually for childcare and youth programs. Additionally, the Sunset Review process of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and Texas Workforce Commission will allow for public comments and hearings on improving childcare and the early childhood ecosystem.



INCOME

Our Priorities: Investing in Career and Technical Training Programs to Promote Post-Secondary Success and Economic Mobility

Highlights from the Legislature

Gov. Abbott made “life-changing career training programs” an emergency priority during the 89th legislative session. As a result, the legislature took significant steps to strengthen college and career pathways to put students on a path to economic mobility, earning a living wage or higher.

Passed Legislation

- **SB 1786** strengthens the education-to-workforce pipeline by refining community college finance, improving wage outcome reporting and requiring stronger Tri-Agency coordination on career and technical education grants between the Texas Education Agency, Higher Education Coordinating Board and Texas Workforce Commission. Legislation also strengthens the definition of a credential value.
- **SB 2314** creates My Texas Future, an online platform to assist public high school students with college admissions and financial aid.
- **HB 120** provides additional state funding for school districts to expand their career and technical

education programs, expands funding for Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH) and for Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) programs, improves workforce data and includes other income-based financial aid career-readiness supports.

Areas of Opportunity

By 2036, it is estimated that 70% of jobs in the state will require a post-secondary credential. With advances in artificial intelligence reshaping the labor market by displacing certain jobs and creating new ones, there will be a need to build a workforce strengthening pipeline that ensures more workers have access to living-wage jobs and career navigation supports.

HEALTH

Our Priorities: Protecting and Strengthening Food Access Systems and Health Outcomes

Highlights from the Legislature

The Texas Legislature addressed hunger and food insecurity with several key pieces of legislation. If Texans do not have access to affordable, healthy foods, then poor health outcomes and chronic health conditions such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease will persist. United Way, as a member of the Feeding Texas Food Policy Roundtable, joined hundreds of organizations across the state to advocate for strengthening food access systems. This collective action resulted in the following passed legislation.

Passed Funding and Legislation

- State lawmakers approved **\$300 million** to modernize the Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System (TIERS) to speed up processing for Medicaid, Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications and renewals.
- State lawmakers **provided \$19.8 million** in the \$338 billion state budget for free school breakfast and lunch for all public-school students.
- **HB 26** authorizes Medicaid to pay for nutrition counseling and instruction services and establishes

a pilot program to provide “medically tailored meals” to high-risk pregnant women on Medicaid, supporting healthier pregnancies.

Areas of Opportunity

Food insecurity continues to be a challenge for thousands of North Texans, especially with rising food costs and budget cuts to federal nutrition programs like SNAP. Implementing the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program, and removing harmful restrictions on food access programs, will be critical to ensure that North Texans have adequate food access.

OTHER STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES AND OUTCOMES

In addition to these top-line priorities, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas joined partners in supporting various other legislative priorities throughout the Texas Legislative Session that resulted in the following outcomes:

- **Modernizing 211 Texas:** Funding to improve Texas' statewide information and referral network that connects Texans to local services and nonprofits, was a priority bill for Texas House Speaker Dustin Burrows. While the bill did not pass, collective advocacy helped build strong legislative support and set the stage for progress next session.
- **Affordable Housing:** The legislature passed legislation to increase the supply of affordable housing by limiting lot sizes, allowing residential and mixed-use development on commercially zoned land and permitting single-stair apartment construction to maximize land use.
- **Eviction Defense:** Advocates worked together to weaken a harmful eviction bill that undermined legal services, due process and other pro-tenant provisions.
- **Fair Lending Practices:** Advocates pushed back on legislation that would have allowed high-interest loans and perpetuated the cycle of debt for vulnerable communities.
- **Free and Fair Elections:** United Way of Metropolitan Dallas monitored election and voting related legislation and provided monthly legislative updates to the Dallas VOTES coalition.
- **Child Welfare and Strengthening Families:** United Way of Metropolitan Dallas served on the TexProtects Public Policy Advisory Committee to support legislation strengthening families and connecting them to resources, promoting informal kinship and family preservation efforts, and preventing child sex abuse.
- **Affordable Healthcare Insurance:** Legislation supported affordable healthcare insurance coverage and the protection of Medicaid funding.
- **Improving Maternal Health:** Legislation improved maternal health outcomes and reduced disparities in maternal morbidity.
- **Preventing Homelessness:** United Way of Metropolitan Dallas advocated against legislation with harmful zoning restrictions that would have adversely impacted homeless service providers.



Scan the QR code to access the full
89th Texas Legislative Session Recap
Report from United Ways of Texas.



FEDERAL ADVOCACY EFFORTS

The largest ever United Way Worldwide Advocacy Forum and Capitol Hill Day, held July 7-9, 2025, in Washington, D.C., brought together more than 400 United Way leaders and volunteers from 49 states and Puerto Rico, including United Ways across Texas. This year's "policy as partnership" theme included programming and discussions on board engagement, strategic messaging, funding advocacy efforts and fostering collaboration. This gathering took place shortly after President Trump signed into law the One Big Beautiful Bill Act on July 4, 2025, and following the devastating July 4 floods that ravaged the Texas Hill Country.

United Way of Metropolitan Dallas advocated for policy positions that would directly benefit North Texas neighbors and Texans, including:

- Supporting the Human-Services Emergency Logistic Program (HELP) Act and the 211 social services call referral line, utilized by millions of Americans daily, particularly during natural disasters and times of crisis
- Protecting and strengthening the Childcare and Development Block Grant and Head Start in the fiscal year 2026 appropriations
- Protecting the federal investment in AmeriCorps program, which addresses critical community needs



Areas of Opportunity

United Way will continue to track the implementation of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, especially its effects on healthcare (like Medicaid) and food access programs (like SNAP). We will also closely monitor how federal funding cuts are affecting critical programs that serve low-income North Texans.

JOIN THE UNITED WAY ADVOCACY MOVEMENT

Interested in advocating with us in support of improved access to education, income and health? Throughout this year's legislative sessions at the state and federal levels, we're making it easy to speak up about issues that affect our community.

Here's what our advocacy leaders have to say:

"Joining leaders from across DFW to advocate for crucial legislation for education, income and health is an incredible experience that I would recommend to every United Way supporter. United Way got us in front of almost every hard-working member of our DFW legislative delegation. There is nothing better than diving into policy discussions with our key decisionmakers over pivotal legislation that will shape the future of our region."

- Brent Chaney, Vistra Corp, Co-Chair of the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Advocacy Committee

"Each time I participate in Capitol Day as part of the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas team, I gain a deeper understanding of the importance of advocacy. This very critical work is made easier with the help and support of the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Advocacy team. Your voice, much like your vote, matters!"

- Mary E. Henderson, Arcosa, Women of Tocqueville Member and Member of the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas Advocacy Committee

"I wanted to become more knowledgeable about how government works. I had previously participated in the Texas State Capitol days organized by United Way of Metropolitan Dallas. These events were excellent and an easy way for me to begin learning about Texas State government. So, I did not hesitate when given the opportunity to attend Capitol Hill Day in D.C. and get a small glimpse of our federal government at work."

- Karen Tavana, a dedicated volunteer leader, donor and Women Tocqueville member

Reach out to Hillary Evans, vice president of Policy and Advocacy, at hevans@unitedwaydallas.org or visit UnitedWayDallas.org/Advocate to sign up for our monthly Policy in Brief publication.



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