

# 2022 Texas Policy Agenda

Young people represent the present and future of Texas, and their fortunes are intrinsically tied to the future of our state. We find ourselves at a critical period, where substantive and comprehensive investments are necessary to ensure the long-term success of Texans. Young Texans continue to struggle amidst the joint health and economic upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic and are counting on the state legislature to advance interim research that will support their mental, physical, and financial health. Young people of color, in particular, face a disproportionately challenging economic landscape with barriers to accessing health care, higher student debt, and higher job losses in the pandemic, as well as the restart of student loan debt payments in 2022.

Most importantly, young people have stories to tell, and they seek to be heard. Through our conversations with over 200 young Texans in our student-led Health Equity Symposium, directly hearing from women in apprenticeships, and our statewide analysis of apprenticeships, we support the following actions during the interim to support the future of young Texans.

## Workforce

We are in time of both recovery and innovation in the Texas workforce. Monumental legislation to expand work-based learning and “earn and learn” apprenticeship programs comes while many young people seek these options. However, these initiatives must prioritize those most impacted during the pandemic, with a focus on gender equity and parenting students.

We recommend the following steps:

- Expand apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities with commitment to gender equity, student voice in program design, and access for parenting students.
- Ensure that young voices are at the table in key decisions with the Texas Community College Finance Commission, career pathways, and work-based learning state policy planning.
- Pursue state-level gender equity initiatives that will ensure women and mothers learn about available programs and are equipped with resources to complete them.
- Explore innovations in micro credentials and buildable credentials, to create opportunities for immediate skillbuilding alongside degree completion and career planning.
- Increase gender and racial equity in STEM, health care, and high paying in-demand apprenticeship programs.
- Increase access to child care, especially for parents working early morning and overnight hours, and sustainably expand the child care workforce.

## Higher Education

Invest in state postsecondary finance and student support systems that promote degree completion and economic stability for young people.

- Drive decisions toward college affordability and debt-free college education.
- Take action on student debt, including analyzing statewide student loan debt data and increasing Texas student debt consumer protections. Consumer protections include state student loan information and ombudsman, and policies to ensure that transcripts are not withheld due to student debt.
- Research and promote initiatives for best practice post secondary student mental health care.
- Build student support systems for today's students, prioritizing housing and food security.

## Health Care

Pursue health equity statewide and ensure that young people have access to comprehensive, affordable health coverage.

- Solidify a path to affordable and comprehensive health coverage for young people in Texas, including access to reproductive and mental health care.
- Create a Texas Health Equity Office and initiatives to guide state decision-making.
- Expand access to contraception and reproductive justice for young people across the state.
- Build upon efforts in the 87th legislative session to reduce maternal mortality, such as expanding access to Medicaid for a full twelve months postpartum, access to doulas, and long-term comprehensive coverage before, during, and after birth.
- Support continuity of care for those enrolled in Healthy Texas Women, CHIP, and/or Medicaid.

## Civic Engagement

- Create an online voter registration system.
- Pursue access to voting for students by pursuing a Student ID as a Voter ID.
- Expand polling places on college campuses, so that campuses with over 1,000 students include an on-campus voting option.