

# FAIR SHOT *for* TEXAS WORKERS

## 88TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION AGENDA

**THE TEXAS AFL-CIO ADVOCATES FOR AN AGENDA THAT LIFTS UP AND IMPROVES THE LIVES OF TEXAS WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**



The Texas AFL-CIO advocates for an agenda that lifts up and improves the lives of Texas workers and their families.

During the 88th Legislative Session, we will fight to enhance worker protections, make healthcare affordable and accessible, increase pay for educators and support staff, enact gun safety laws to protect our children and our workplaces from violence, and find ways to address our changing climate while creating a new generation of good paying union jobs.

The following are the United Labor Legislative Committee (ULLCO) priorities for the 88th Legislative Session.

### INCREASE WAGES AND EXPAND WORKPLACE BENEFITS

One job should be enough to make ends meet! The state must raise the minimum wage for all Texans and increase pay for public employees, end wage theft and worker misclassification, protect and improve public pensions, make sure every Texas worker is covered by Workers' Compensation, and expand access to health coverage and other benefits.

To stop undermining wages, the Legislature should end tax giveaways to corporations that ship Texas jobs overseas. We also support ending loopholes and special treatment for corporations that erode the needs of Texas workers.

### SUPPORT A LONG-OVERDUE COLA FOR TRS AND ERS RETIREES

Texas has failed our public sector retirees. TRS and ERS retirees are teachers, school district staff, university employees, and state employees who dedicate their lives to the service of our state.

TRS and ERS have gone too long without a true cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). ERS retirees have not seen any benefit enhancements since 2001 – a 36% loss in buying power during this period. TRS has not seen a COLA since 2004.

To fulfill the state's promise of a dignified livelihood and retirement, the Legislature must increase state employee pay, bolster state pension funding, and provide a COLA and a 13th check for retired state employees. With an anticipated \$27 billion budget surplus, the state has the resources to make this a priority.

### STOP ATTACKS ON TEXAS WORKERS

Texans elect local officials to enact policies that will protect the health, safety, and well-being of those in their communities. We oppose efforts to limit local control and to stifle the ability of these officials to adopt worker-centered policies for their communities.

We will also continue to fight attempts by the state to weaken prevailing wage standards.

## IMPROVE FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS PAY

In Texas, we are facing a teacher shortage and retention crisis in our public schools. Chronic underfunding and increased pressure placed on educators from state-mandated requirements have produced overwhelming workloads for a salary that has dwindled over the past decade.

The Legislature must make it a priority to increase teacher and staff salaries as well as add critically needed funding for our neighborhood schools. We will oppose diverting money to private schools through vouchers.

The Legislature must also end censorship and attacks on academic freedom, which undermine public K-12 schools and institutions of higher education.



## FULLY FUND STATE AGENCIES AND UNIVERSITIES

Inadequate funding by the Legislature has led to a state employee turnover crisis, with the rate of turnover hitting a record 22.7%. As a result, state services are suffering. A State Auditor report found that the majority of state employees are leaving because of low pay and lack of benefits, along with growing opportunities for better livelihoods elsewhere.

To improve services that Texans rely on, the Legislature must provide an across-the-board pay raise to all state employees, including higher education workers, of at least \$10,000 while enhancing benefits, such as returning the ERS pension to a traditional defined benefit pension.

## INVEST IN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

During the past two years, the federal government has passed historic legislation sending billions of dollars in funding to states to improve infrastructure. Included is money for training to increase the number of skilled workers.

The Texas AFL-CIO strongly supports growing vital training infrastructure to help meet growing demand while building stable, middle-class careers. We also support ensuring that federal dollars go to Department of Labor registered apprenticeship programs.



## INCREASE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Access to healthcare should be a fundamental right for all Texans. Sadly, our state's place remains at the bottom in both the number and percentage of uninsured, with nearly one-in-five of our neighbors lacking coverage.

Our state has the opportunity to join 40 other states and Washington, DC in expanding Medicaid, a move that would make at least one million working Texans eligible for healthcare coverage overnight. Medicaid expansion would also help return billions of our federal tax dollars to Texas each year, enough to pay the large majority of the cost while also helping protect rural communities from shuttering hospitals and losing providers.

The recent *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision and last session's S.B. 8 stripped important worker rights, and the Texas AFL-CIO is committed to ensuring workers regain reproductive rights and access to related healthcare services.



## FIX THE STATE'S UNEMPLOYMENT SYSTEM

Nationally, our state ranks near the bottom in the percentage of unemployed who are eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits. The outdated Texas unemployment system is in dire need of modernization, including a revamp of arbitrary eligibility requirements and criteria.

We support measures that would expand, rather than restrict, the number of working Texans who qualify for unemployment insurance benefits.

## INCREASE AND PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

All workers, regardless of the type of job or income, should have the ability to take leave in order to care for themselves or a loved one. However, an estimated 40 percent of workers in Texas lack earned paid sick leave, with women, low-income workers, and part-time workers carrying the heaviest burden.

The lack of leave forces many Texans to depart the labor force to care for their families or their own personal health. Providing leave will ultimately reduce turnover among employers of all sizes and boost the economy.

We support expansion of paid leave policies. Additionally, we support increased options for childcare and elder care to further aid working Texans.

## FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE

Addressing the climate crisis and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution provides an incredible opportunity for Texas to address its crisis of inequality by creating high-quality, family and community sustaining careers in new clean energy industries.

We will support legislation that addresses climate change, and ensures that the resulting job creation in these growing clean energy industries are high-quality, union wage jobs.

# MAKE SCHOOLS AND WORKPLACES SAFER

Our classrooms and our workplaces should be safe from gun violence. It's long past time that we adopt common-sense gun safety measures, including red flag laws and universal background checks, to help keep our communities, our children and our workers safer.

## PROTECT VOTING RIGHTS

In 2021, the Legislature passed a voter suppression law that has already made it harder for many Texans to vote. During the 2023 Legislative Session, we will oppose additional attempts to stifle voting rights.

The Texas labor movement remains committed to defending the freedom to vote. We will continue to work proactively to pass online and same-day voter registration, along with other measures that make it easier for every eligible Texan to cast a ballot.



## JUSTICE FOR ALL

A minor offense shouldn't bankrupt a family or stop someone from getting a job, credit, or housing. Every day, Texans face daunting fines or languish in jail because they cannot afford to settle simple traffic violations.

The Texas labor movement is committed to working for an equal justice system that protects everyone's liberty and safety. That means fighting human trafficking, including the coercion of laborers and the exploitation of immigrants, and reforming Texas's marijuana laws and Class C misdemeanor law. We will also continue to fight payday lenders who engage in predatory practices and to protect tenants from unfair treatment by unscrupulous landlords.

We will also continue to fight for equal rights in the workplace and freedoms for people of color and LGBTQIA communities.

## PROTECT IMMIGRANT WORKERS

Congress and the Legislature have failed to protect immigrant workers. We will work to protect all workers – regardless of immigration status – and will oppose state laws that create and target a subclass of workers who may face retaliation because of their immigration status.

## CONTACT US

Emily Amps, Director of Politics and Policy  
amps@texasaflcio.org | 512-422-8458

Ana Gonzalez, Deputy Director of Politics and Policy  
ana@texasaflcio.org | 915-841-5161