



children's  
defense fund  
texas

## Legislative, Policy and Advocacy Report

1. CHAMPIONING EXPANDED HEALTH COVERAGE FOR LOW-INCOME TEXANS—ESPECIALLY MOTHERS AND CHILDREN.
2. DEFENDING THE RIGHT OF IMMIGRANT FAMILIES TO BE SAFE, HEALTHY, AND TOGETHER, REGARDLESS OF LEGAL STATUS.
3. PIONEERING NEW WAYS TO FOSTER CIVIC EMPOWERMENT AMONG TEXAS YOUTH.
4. BUILDING AND SUPPORTING STRATEGIC COALITIONS TO LEVERAGE DIVERSE STRENGTHS IN WHATEVER WAY WILL BEST ADVANCE COMMON GOALS.



  
March 4, 2019

Let the People Vote!  
Texas Rally for Medicaid Expansion

## **CHAMPIONING EXPANDED HEALTH COVERAGE FOR LOW-INCOME TEXANS—ESPECIALLY MOTHERS AND CHILDREN.**

From before the 86<sup>th</sup> session of the Texas Legislature convened to long beyond the final gavel, CDF-TX and partners have used every possible method— peaceful assembly, expert testimony, story collection, media coverage, legislative education, constituent mobilization, public outcry and more—in pursuit of **a healthy start for children and families.**

CDF uses all these tools to **build a bridge** between the communities we serve and the halls of power where we push for policies to improve the lives of children and families. We don't just talk **about the people** (policy) or **for the people** (advocacy), although these are integral parts of our work. We also create platforms to **let the people speak for themselves.**

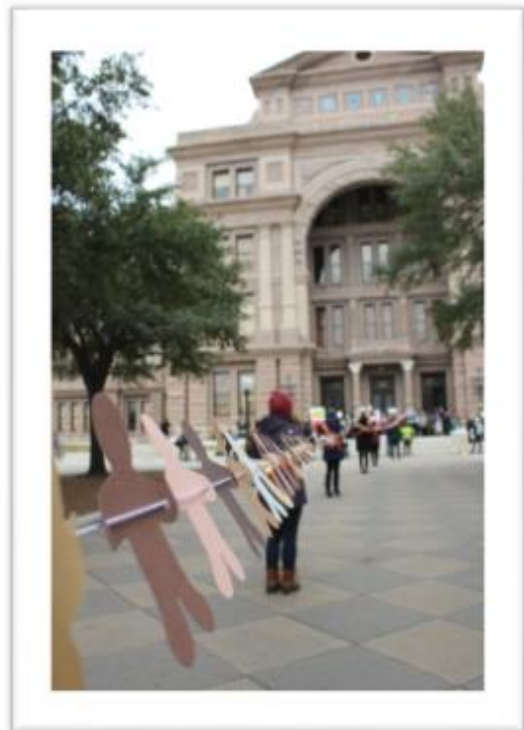
What follows are just some of the ways CDF-TX has done so far in 2019.

### **MEDICAID EXPANSION**

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, **Texans from across the state gathered on the steps of the state capitol** to demand that lawmakers put Medicaid expansion to a popular vote. Led by CDF-TX and the Cover Texas Now coalition, hundreds gathered to hear lawmakers, doctors, and everyday Texans **describe how the failure to expand Medicaid had hurt them**, their families, their patients, and their constituents.

To illustrate how many Texans were affected by legislative inaction on healthcare, CDF-TX crafted an attention-getting string of **1,000 paper dolls—each representing 100 uninsured Texans**—which was unfurled during the rally.

**It worked.** The combination of compelling stories and visuals brought [extensive media coverage](#) from [across the state](#), pushing to the forefront a vital issue that lawmakers had clearly hoped to sidestep during the biennial session.



We successfully [pitched op-eds](#) to key markets about the need for health care reform, setting the tone for the new session by letting lawmakers know that passivity would not be considered neutrality.

Shortly after the rally, **the Texas legislature held its first hearing on Medicaid expansion in six years.** The House Insurance Committee heard extensive testimony—including from [CDF-TX Senior Policy Associate Dr. Cheasty Anderson](#)—on a bill to expand Medicaid to cover uninsured Texans. In addition to providing our own testimony on behalf of Texas children and families, CDF helped organize an [impressive turnout](#) at the hearing where advocates, doctors, hospitals, health plans, faith leaders, county officials, healthcare associations of all kinds and everyday Texans raised their voices in support of coverage expansion.

Over the last six months, CDF-Texas also laid the groundwork for the creation of a much needed [Grassroots Campaign for Healthcare Coverage - #SickofitTX!](#) The goal of the campaign is to lift constituent voices during the interim to ensure all elected officials and candidates running in the 2020 elections understand that Texans expect them to take action to improve health care access in 2021 - the next time the Texas Legislature will be in session. If you would like to be part of this important movement, please [join](#) over 50 local leaders who have already signed up from across the state.

## CHILDREN'S HEALTHCARE COVERAGE

Before the 86th Texas Legislative Session convened [Census numbers](#) revealed that for the first time in a decade our child uninsured numbers got worse. Data showed that Texas had over 80,000 more uninsured children in 2017 compared to 2016. This alarmed us and our close partners. CDF-Texas immediately went into action building a robust [coalition](#) of organizations to advocate for streamlining policies that would decrease the number of children falling off their Medicaid coverage due to red tape issues. After years of asking we finally received data from the state agency that confirmed our suspicions - tens of thousands of children were losing their healthcare coverage because of monthly income checks instituted by the state in 2014. These checks increased red tape and confusion for families and heightened the possibility that eligible children would be inadvertently dropped from their healthcare coverage.

CDF-TX Deputy Director Laura Guerra-Cardus, M.D., [testified](#) before the powerful Senate Finance Committee, House Human Services Committee, and House Appropriations Committee-Article II on the importance of providing 12 months of continuous coverage to children who qualify for Medicaid. True to form we also helped organize a strong line up of testimony by providers, healthplans, hospitals, and child advocates; with nearly [50 organizations](#) and individuals registering in support of improving children's healthcare coverage.

After years of working directly with families struggling with red tape issues as a result of these income checks, CDF-Texas quickly identified [real stories](#) to help the media and

policymakers understand the issues families face trying to keep their children covered. As a result of the data and compelling stories, the need to remove the red tape and support children's healthcare coverage was one of the [most covered issues](#) during the legislative session.

Thanks to the hard work of our coalition partners who made more than 100 visits to legislators during the session and helped generate thousands of calls to policymakers, the [Children's Health Coverage bill](#) garnered strong bi-partisan support. Despite stalling in the last days of the legislative session, there remains a path forward for getting an administrative fix to this problem. CDF-Texas is working with the Health and Human Service Commission and Texas leadership to see what can be done in the interim period to reduce red tape for Texas families.

## **SUPPORTING PROGRESS ON HEALTHCARE**

CDF-Texas provided support to [various other initiatives](#) to improve healthcare for Texans, including the need to improve [maternal health](#), [access to and quality of managed care services](#), transportation for pregnant moms, and the [end of surprise medical billing](#) in Texas.

Continuing its commitment to amplifying voices from the communities it serves, CDF-TX facilitated the travel and testimony of affected individuals for a variety of healthcare issues. Olga Garza Kauffman, a healthcare specialist based in San Antonio, for example, testified before the Senate Finance Committee on the importance of **extending maternal health coverage to a full year** with the authority of a woman who had personally witnessed the premature deaths of three uninsured mothers in the previous year.

**A bill to address Texas' alarming maternal mortality rate passed the Texas House by a margin of 2-to-1.** The bill would have let low-income mothers keep their Medicaid insurance for 12 months after giving birth rather than losing coverage after two months. CDF-TX, through its leadership of the Cover Texas Now coalition, helped [keep constituents informed and mobilized](#) as the bill worked its way through the legislative maze. Its journey ultimately ended in the Texas Senate, which refused to assign it to a committee, but in a legislature hostile to anything that sounds like "expanding Medicaid," getting this important bill halfway there this was an incontrovertible victory.

## **DEFENDING IMMIGRANT FAMILIES.**

Because CDF-TX has advocated on behalf of detained and separated families at the Texas border for years, we were in a unique position to respond to the many attacks on immigrant families brought by the Trump administration this year. Among these ongoing activities were:



- Participating on the steering committee for the Protecting Immigrant Families (PIF) Campaign, a national initiative to combat the Administration's attack on access to health care, nutrition, housing, and economic security programs for millions of immigrant families.
- Responding to public information and media requests. CDF-TX is one of the first organizations called upon by the media to help explain new regulations and advise immigrant communities on what to do.
- Co-chairing (with RAICES) the national End Family Detention Coalition, where we have been integral to expanding the coalition's membership to include grassroots organizers and community leaders as well as legal rights activists and advocates.
- Working with concerned state policymakers, specifically the Mexican-American Legislative Caucus (MALC), where we've become a key advisor to their family separation and detention working group.
- Working with local health providers and community-based organizations to make sure they are informed about policies that will directly impact their clients. This includes providing trainings to outreach and enrollment staff, working to address related crises within Austin immigrant communities, and connecting organizers in other parts of the state to each other to achieve similar goals in their own communities.
- Direct organizing, both locally and state-wide. Examples of this are the 20,000 person rally we organized at the state Capitol in 2018 with Families Belong Together (a national campaign) and a peaceful, public protest this past July at the recently-opened child detention center in Carrizo Springs, TX, which drew hundreds of protestors from around the country.

CDF-Texas is proud to have been the first children's group in Texas to fight against the detention of children starting over three years ago.



## **IMPROVING CIVIC EDUCATION AND FOSTERING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

CDF-Texas continues to lead the Texas Civic Education Roundtable in partnership with Generation Citizen, the League of Women Voters, and the Annette Strauss Institute. The roundtable provides a central platform for connecting, educating, and mobilizing the civic education community in Texas to ensure that students have equal access to learn and practice the skills they need to engage in civic life. Our team produces monthly newsletters for the coalition that reach 70 subscribers with legislative updates, advocacy opportunities, and news alerts from around the country.

During the first part of this year we co-hosted the second annual High School Voter Registration Convening, bringing together non-profit partners from across the state to coordinate and support their young-voter registration work. At the convening, our team presented original research identifying “Opportunity Counties” to target for youth voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts due to their large numbers of young residents and low youth voter turnout rates across recent election cycles. We continue to work with partners in Austin and Houston to share resources and offer registration opportunities in more high schools.

During the legislative session, CDF-Texas supported comprehensive civics education legislation that would have required the State Board of Education to develop a project-based civics curriculum for middle schoolers and high schoolers, and provided financial support for schools serving marginalized and low-income communities.

Currently, we are working on a report that documents current and historic impediments to youth voting and civic participation, with a focus on state legislation that disproportionately discourages young voters of color. This report will include a review of best practices for civic education and provide resources that teachers and advocates can use to help young Texans overcome the multiple barriers to participation implemented by Texas lawmakers over the last two decades.

## **BUILDING AND SUPPORTING STRATEGIC COALITIONS**

Besides its leadership in Cover Texas Now and the Children’s Healthcare Coverage coalition, CDF-TX benefited from being part of several coalitions where we were able to lend support on an expanded range of issues that affect the wellbeing of children in Texas. These included:

- [Texas Gun Sense](#)
- [Coalition for Juvenile Justice](#)
- Texas High School Voters
- [Texas Child Protection Roundtable](#)

- Texas Civic Education Roundtable
- Student Mental Health
- Texas Forward
- End Family Detention Coalition (co-chaired with RAICES)

Through our partnership with these coalitions, CDF-Texas provided testimony on the importance of: promoting a complete and accurate Census; funding Early Childhood Intervention initiatives and nurse visits to prevent family interaction with Child Protective Services; rejecting efforts to weaken enforcement of gun bans in public spaces; raising the age at which a child is subject to the juvenile justice system; and supporting initiatives that would improve the state's civic engagement curriculum while meeting state and national social studies standards.

We submitted well over 100 cards of support on issues ranging from promoting education about the effects of secondhand smoke to providing support for young people in foster care ageing out of the system to establishing systems of trauma-informed care for public school systems and open-enrollment charter schools.

A few highlighted achievements on these issues include:

- Dedication of \$100 million for mental health initiatives at public schools
- Making it easier for former foster youth to obtain personal identification documents
- Limiting the use of physical restraints on incarcerated women who are pregnant or have recently given birth
- Requiring the Health and Human Services Commission to collect data on licensed child-care facilities such as child-to-caregiver ratio and code violations that affect child safety, report this data to the Texas Legislature, and make it available to the public
- Allowing federal Medicaid dollars to be used for child abuse prevention.