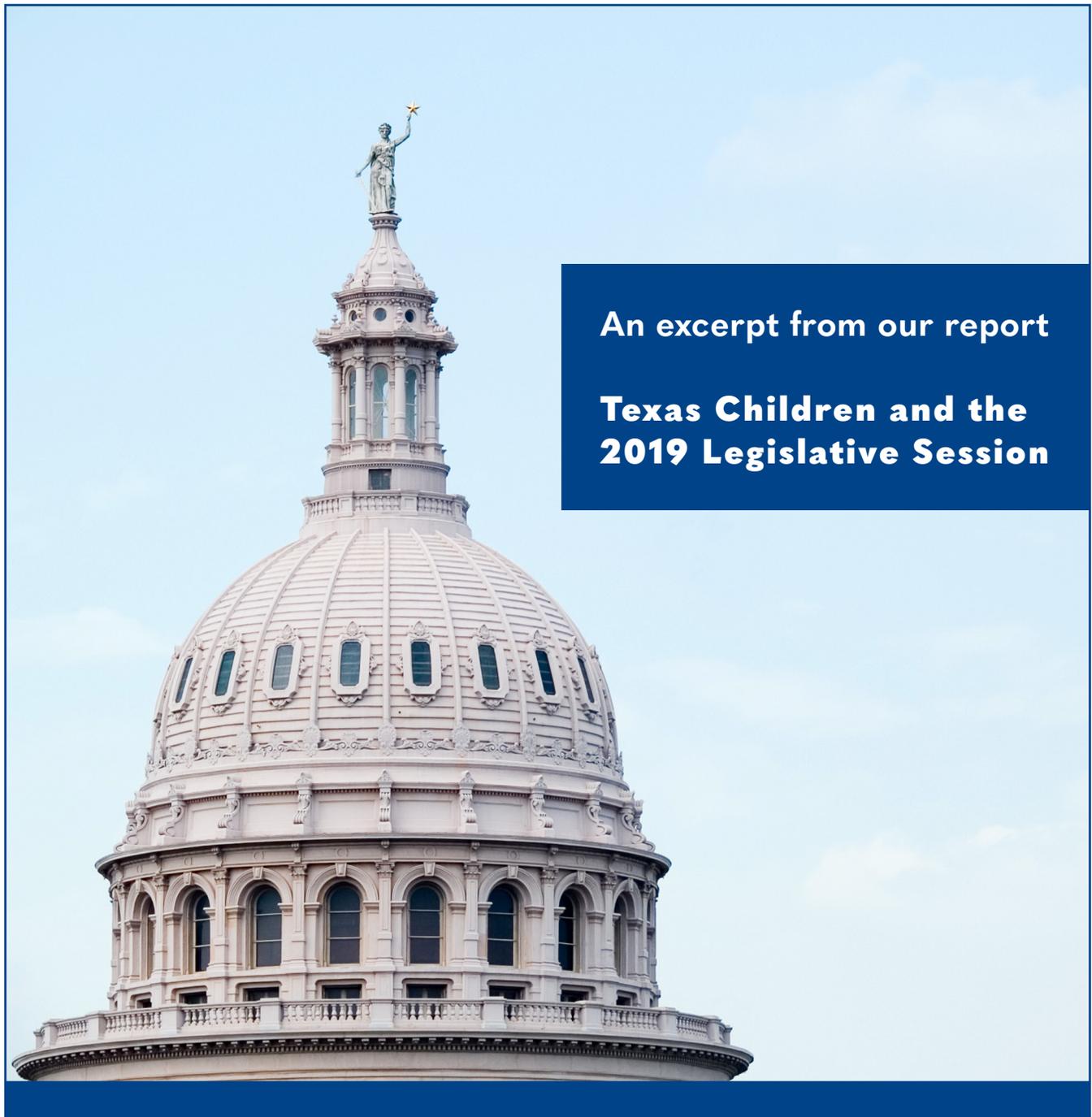


INTRODUCTION



An excerpt from our report

**Texas Children and the
2019 Legislative Session**

Introduction

The 2019 Texas legislative session ended with big wins for children on pre-k funding, student mental health, and other issues; disappointments regarding foster care as well as health coverage for moms and kids; and many reasons that we're proud of what our team accomplished for Texas children.

After years of working with our partners to lay the groundwork for progress on pre-k, child care, and student mental health — and continued efforts by our staff during the session — we saw significant victories in these areas this session. In an historic move, the Legislature provided funding for full-day pre-k for currently eligible children as part of a significant new infusion of funding into public education. Along with other important child care safety legislation, lawmakers passed the bills that our team championed to improve nutrition and active play opportunities in child care and collect the data necessary to understand how better child-caregiver ratios in child care can improve kids' safety and school readiness. The Legislature also passed several of the proposals we crafted with our partners to ensure that more schools are effectively supporting student mental health, recognizing childhood trauma, establishing positive school climates, and preventing youth suicide. We appreciate state leaders' great work on these issues this session.

Our team also helped lead the way in developing and successfully pushing through proposals in areas that otherwise received less attention from state leaders, including a bill to ensure that more mothers have transportation to prenatal care and postpartum appointments; legislation to

ensure that more teen parents in foster care receive basic parenting education to keep their children healthy and safe and their young family together; and a \$31 million increase (of the \$72.6 million increase requested by state health officials) for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) for babies and toddlers with disabilities.

These and other victories were only possible with the help of our partners and supporters as well as the legislators, staffers, and other officials who worked hard to make them happen.

In addition to these successes, we give state legislators credit for taking targeted steps forward in other areas — such as Medicaid managed care reform, funding for substance use treatment for mothers and pregnant women, and funding for Department of State Health Services (DSHS) maternal health initiatives — even though there were hopes that the Legislature would go further on these issues.

However, we are disappointed that state leaders largely put the needs of foster care children on the back burner this session and passed no legislation to address the fact that Texas has the nation's worst uninsured rates for children, women of childbearing age, and the overall population. Nonetheless, for the first time in years, there were some signs of bipartisan interest in health coverage, potentially serving as the building blocks for future progress. Our team and our partners successfully worked to pass an amendment through the House to reduce the number of eligible children who are removed

from Medicaid insurance due to red tape. Unfortunately, the Senate did not take it up. The House also passed a bill to provide health coverage to new mothers for 12 months after childbirth, a recommendation from the state’s Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force that is critical for healthy babies, healthy pregnancies, and healthy mothers. We were disappointed that the Senate declined to hold a hearing on it.

On these and other issues, there is a great deal of unfinished business. Texas should stop removing eligible children from Medicaid and stop cutting off Medicaid health insurance for new mothers two months after childbirth. In fact, Texas should go further and accept federal Medicaid expansion funding to cover all uninsured adults in low-wage jobs. The state should establish limits on pre-k class size and student-teacher ratios. Texas needs to do more to ensure that all working parents — not just those with the highest incomes — have access to high-quality child care that is safe and helps

children develop the social, emotional, and learning tools they will need in school. And Texas must recommit to ensuring kids in foster care are safe, healing, and thriving and prepare for implementation of the new federal foster care law and the court rulings on the Texas foster care system.

In the following pages, we provide more information about what the Legislature did this session on these and other issues. For each of our five policy areas, we also include a list of significant bills that passed and those that did not. We have categorized those bills as either supporting children, raising concerns, or impacting children (i.e. bills that have an uncertain impact on children).

We are hopeful that this report allows Texans to better understand what the Legislature accomplished for children, where it fell short, and how we can continue to work together to support the lives of Texas children today for a stronger Texas tomorrow.



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