



# LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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The Arc was created decades ago by parents determined to ensure full and independent lives for their children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and to build a network of support for families.

As laws and access to services and supports change, so do people's attitudes and understanding of disability. Despite a continued trend towards individualized, person-centered, inclusive, integrated services; policies, practices, and pay scales are struggling to keep up with the shift from outdated, congregate, and segregated services and supports.

The Arc of Texas supports policy that moves Texas forward in its treatment and community inclusion of Texans with disabilities by improving access to quality services and supports.



*For people with intellectual  
and developmental disabilities.*

## **What is Public Policy and Advocacy?**

Public policy addresses a public issue through laws, regulations, and programs developed by governments to solve problems. Being involved in public policy means informing, educating, and advising the general public and policymakers, like elected officials, about the nature of problems, ideas to address problems, and the costs associated with providing services or conducting research to make changes. Advocacy is speaking out about an issue that impacts you. Advocacy in public policy can mean talking to a legislature about a law, talking to an advisory committee making decisions, talking to a reporter, sharing your story on social media with others, and more.

## **What Public Policy and Advocacy Work Does The Arc of Texas Do?**

Some of our activities include:

- Monitoring federal and state legislation
- Researching, evaluating, and analyzing laws, regulations, and programs
- Tracking state legislation, regulation, and programs
- Informing, educating, and advising the general public, state agencies, and members of the Texas Legislature
- Supporting and encouraging Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families to talk to the public and legislators about issues important to them
- Promoting The Arc of Texas policy positions to the general public, state agencies, and members of the Texas Legislature.

## How Can I Get Involved in Public Policy?

People with IDD, their family members, and their allies should get involved in their local, state, and federal governments on the issues important to them. By telling your own story, you can effect positive change benefitting all Texans with IDD. In the disability community, we call this *advocacy*. The Arc of Texas has compiled many resources below that can help you in your legislative advocacy.

### Legislative Advocacy Resources

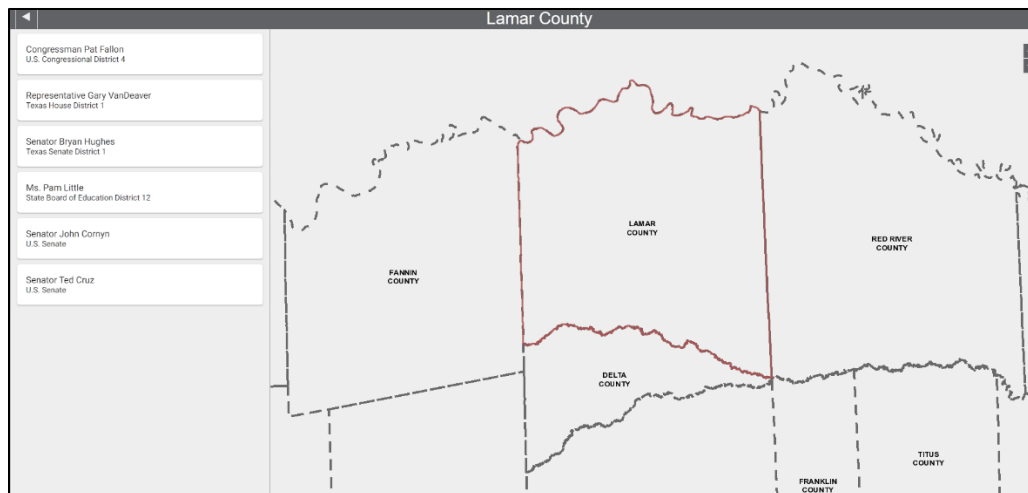
- Identify your legislators
- Learn how to track legislation (also known as bills) in the Texas Legislature
- Learn about the legislative process in Texas
- Learn how bills become laws
- Subscribe to receive email updates from The Arc of Texas on upcoming advocacy opportunities
- Learn how to engage who represents you in state and federal government
- Learn how to give public testimony or input to the Texas Legislature and state agencies
- Connect with other disability organizations in Texas
- Learn about the public policy issues important to The Arc of Texas

## IDENTIFY YOUR LEGISLATORS

How to find out who represents you in the Texas Legislature:

1. Visit the [Texas Legislature Online website](#)
2. On the right side of the webpage, find the “Who Represents Me?” section. It can also be accessed directly on [this website](#).
3. Enter your address or select your county and hit “submit”

Note the district numbers for each.



## **SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT WITH WHO REPRESENTS YOU**

Now that you have identified who represents you, contact them and schedule a time to meet.

You can meet in-person at their district or capitol office, or via video conferencing. Let them know which way is better for you. Don't forget to advocate for yourself and ask for any accommodations you need for the appointment. For example, let staff know you use mobility equipment or an interpreter.

Below are some templates you can use to schedule your appointment by phone or email. Please don't forget to revise and personalize to meet your specific needs.

### **Email template**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is <first name, last name>, and I am your constituent. I am emailing you to schedule an appointment. As a member of The Arc, I am committed to improving the lives of Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I would love to briefly discuss with you issues that are important to Texans with disabilities and their families. I am open to meeting via video conference (e.g., Zoom) or in-person at your district office.

Thank you in advance for your response.

Sincerely,

<Your name>

<Your home address>

<Your phone number>

### Phone script

Hello, may I speak with the  
Senator's/Representative's/Candidate's scheduler please?

My name is <first name, last name> and I am a constituent. I am calling to schedule an appointment. As a member of The Arc, I would love to briefly discuss with the <Senator/Representative issues that are important to Texans with disabilities and their families. I am open to meeting via video conference (e.g., Zoom) or in-person at your district office.



## PREPARE FOR THE APPOINTMENT

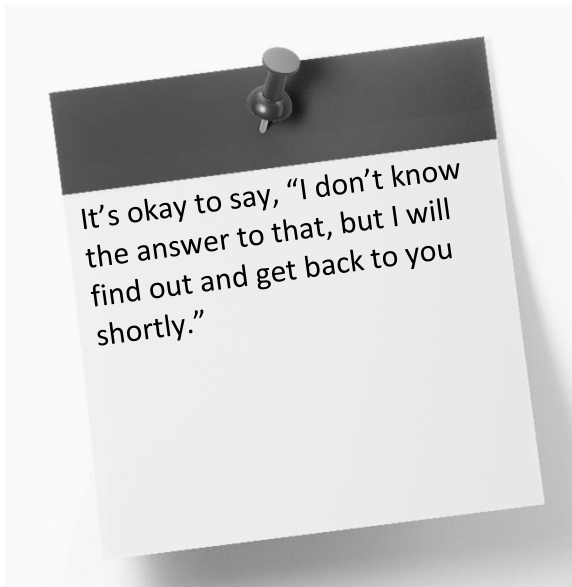
Before you meet with your legislator or their staff, take some time to prepare for the appointment. You should plan for your visit and practice your message.

### K.I.S.S.

Keep it short and simple.



1. What is your main goal?
2. What is your WHY?
3. Who are you talking to?
4. What are your details and examples (data)?
5. What does it make you feel?
6. What should it make your audience feel?
7. What is your call to action?

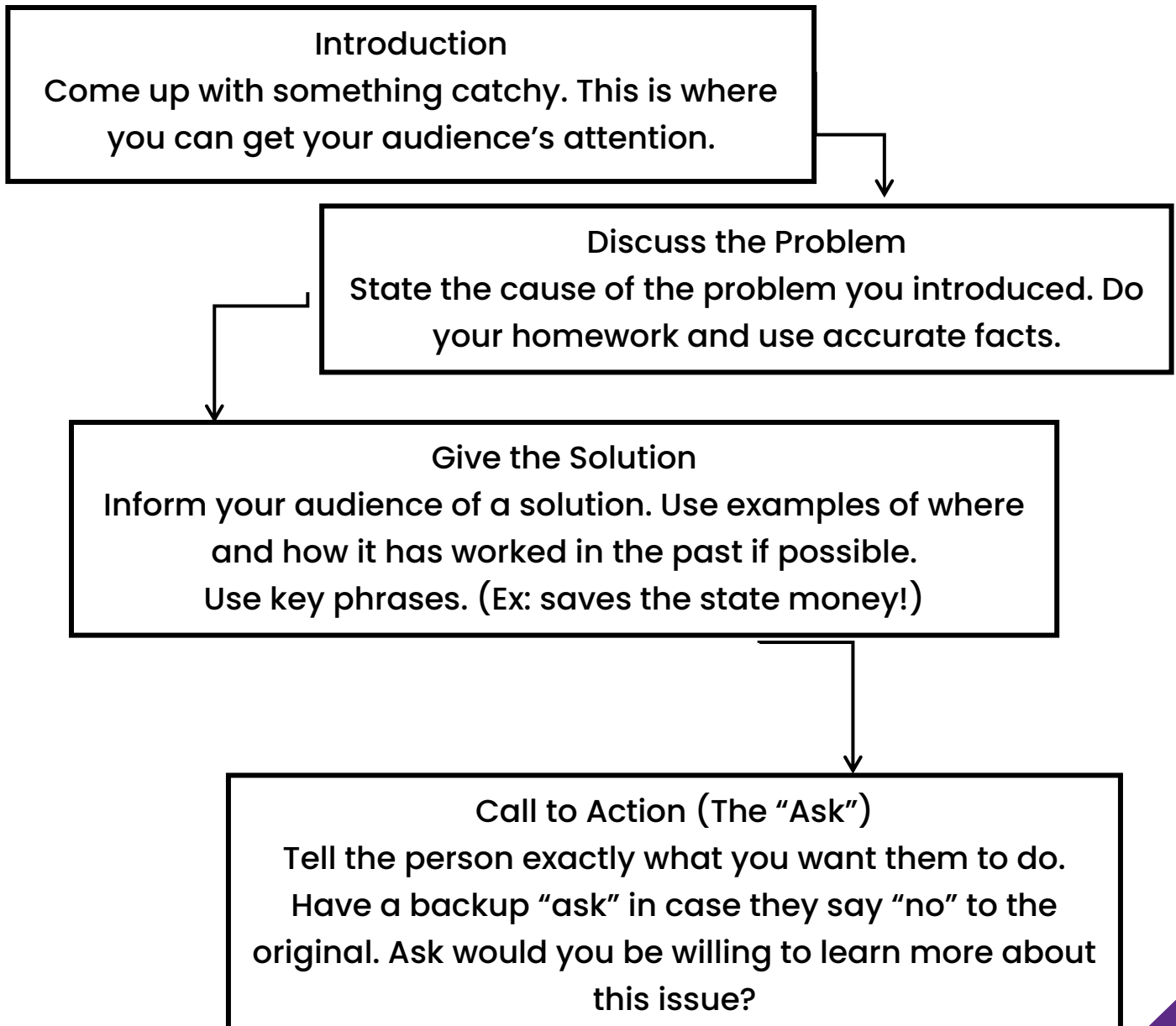




## WRITING AND SHARING YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH

An elevator speech is a way to share your story in a concise and compelling way.

There are four parts to an elevator speech:



## WRITING YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH WORKSHEET

```
graph TD; A[Introduction:] --> B[Discuss the Problem:]; B --> C[Give the Solution:]; C --> D[Call to Action:];
```

**Introduction:**

**Discuss the Problem:**

**Give the Solution:**

**Call to Action:**

## Tips for sharing your elevator speech:

- Be sure and know your audience! (Ex: Do not ask a county commissioner to pass a state law because county commissioners cannot pass state laws.)
- Use the introduction to get to the decision maker's heart!! (Knowing your audience helps!)
- Only use a few sentences per section.
- Try and keep it to two minutes or less. (Imagine riding in an elevator with a decision maker.)
- Do not use jargon or acronyms that your audience may not understand.
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! (It helps to practice with a partner.)
- Always remember to say thank you (even if you are not happy with the outcome), leave written copy of your story/info, and report back to The Arc.



### Example of Message Script

I am a constituent and a member of The Arc of Texas. (If applicable let them know you are a Texan with a disability, a family member of a Texan with a disability/a provider of services that support Texans with disabilities.)

I would like to talk to you about the importance of disability rights and why they are a priority to me and my community. (Insert personal narrative that situates your story and priorities within their district).

I am asking you to support legislation that prioritizes disability rights. (If applicable, thank them for their work in previous sessions)



**Build Rapport with your Legislators and Staff**

We encourage you to take some time to create something unique to build rapport with your legislators and their staff. You could give them artwork, cards, photos, or anything else that could strengthen your relationship. You can also use policy and advocacy materials available on The Arc's website.

## **THANK YOUR LEGISLATORS AND THEIR STAFF**

Whenever you have the opportunity to meet with your legislator or their staff, you should follow that contact with a thank-you note. The best thank-you notes remind the legislator about who you are, how your issue is important to his/her constituents and reiterate your “ask”. Remember, this is another opportunity to advocate for your issue.

If possible, send the handwritten thank you card within a day or two of your visit.

Use the template below as a guide.

- Include a general reminder about the issues that were discussed during the meeting.
- Answer any questions you didn't have answers to at the time.
- If you met with a staff member from the legislator's office, send your note to the staff person c/o the Senator or Representative.

[DATE]

Dear [Legislator's Name] or [Name of Staff],

Thank you for meeting with me on [DATE] in your Capitol office. I appreciate your time and interest in learning about and discussing issues affecting Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I enjoyed meeting with you, and I hope you will consider supporting community-based services.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

[SIGNATURE]

<Your phone number and/or email address>



Where do I mail my thank you note?

The Honorable [First Name] [Last Name]

Texas Senate

P.O. Box 12068

Austin, TX 78711

The Honorable [First Name] [Last Name]

Texas House of Representatives

P.O. Box 2910

Austin, TX 78768

## WRITING TO LEGISLATORS

When writing to your legislator, whether it's in a letter or an email, follow these simple steps to help you make your point easily and clearly.

1. Identify yourself, and mention you are a constituent, if you are one.
2. Identify the issue/bill you are concerned about. Add any reason(s) you may have for a special interest in the issue/bill, such as how many people are impacted by the issue.
3. Try to be specific about what you would like the legislator to do. Refer to or include information about specific bills or legislation if you know about it.
4. Thank the legislator for her/his time and interest.
5. Include your name and address, and your phone number if you want them to contact you or follow up.

If you are sending printed letters to legislators, be sure to address the letters correctly to ensure your message reaches them.

Senate Directory: <https://senate.texas.gov/directory.php>

See the next page for a sample letter to a legislator.



The Honorable Hubert Harris  
Texas Senate  
P.O. Box 12068, Capitol  
Station  
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Senator Harris:

Where do you live? Do you live in a home in your local community? Are you near friends and family, work and place of worship? What would you do if you were told that you had to leave the security of your home, and live in a large building with people you didn't know? What if this place was hundreds of miles away from your family and community? Would you fight for the chance to live where you wanted?

That's what ### of Texans are faced with every day. No choice in where they will live; no choice in how they will be involved with people they love; no choice in how their lives will be managed by others.

I am a voter in your district, and my family lives with this heartbreaking choice every day. I have a 27 year old daughter with disabilities, and she lives with us right now. But because she has to wait years for the support she needs to continue living in the community that you and I live in, she and our family may be forced to make an unthinkable choice; she may have no choice but to move far away and live in an institutional setting just to get the support she needs to subsist.

Texas is a great state with a great history of embracing liberty and promoting choice for those lucky enough to live here. But not in this area. Texas falls far behind so many other states in giving citizens a choice, and it's time to change that. It's time for you and other state leaders to give Texans the choice to live in the community and not be forced into institutional settings hundreds of miles away from their homes. This can happen if you vote to increase state funding for Medicaid Waiver programs, and

reduce the decade-long waiting list for people who want the choice to live in the community.



For decades, The Arc of Texas has worked actively with state agencies to increase state funding for these Medicaid Waiver programs to reduce the massive Waiting Lists. We ask you to support Senate Bill 000 TODAY to give all Texans the chance to live in local community settings. I stand ready to talk with you more about the importance of this critical issue. I look

forward to knowing your position on SB 000, and will follow up with you and your staff in the coming week. Thank you for your continued service to our district.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Susie Brown



## **TALKING TO MEDIA**

### **TESTIFYING TO A LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE**

Attending public hearings organized by the legislator or a committee, or by other organizations, can be an excellent occasion for advocates to learn what the status of an issue is. It is also a chance for advocates to provide information and education to legislators and their aides on ongoing issues of importance. Offering your expertise to committee members or staffers can mean they come to rely on you for information.

Public hearings are generally held after a bill is assigned to a legislative committee. It can also be scheduled to get input into drafting rules, or to see how well current laws or programs are working. Sometimes they are held as a requirement by law before a statute can be approved or implemented. They are usually held in the Capitol but can be held in a legislator's district as well.



Public hearings are important because they can:

- Educate and influence legislators
- Educate the public
- Publicize positions, problems and solutions
- Test reactions to positions
- Indicate what others are thinking and asking about the issue

With testimony, individuals are called on to give prepared statements on the issue being addressed at the public hearing.

You can learn how to register as a witness for a committee hearing here:

<https://mytxlegis.capitol.texas.gov/hwrspublic/Video/HouseWitnessReg.mp4>

Step 1: Hearings Select a hearing	Step 2: Agenda Items Select an agenda item	Step 3: Representing State your representation	Step 4: Contact Provide contact information	Step 5: Acknowledgement Verify and submit request
<b>Contact Information</b>		John Smith 123 Main St.	Hometown, TX 99999 (123) 456-7890	<a href="#">Edit Contact Information</a>
Showing 1 to 1 of 1 items.				
Agenda Item	Bill Caption	Hearing	Position	Remove
HB 555	Relating to reportable boating accidents and the penalties for certain boating accidents.	Culture, Recreation & Tourism - January 23, 2013 - 2:00 PM	Position: For Testify: Yes Self;...	<a href="#">Remove</a>
<b>Read and acknowledge disclaimer before proceeding:</b>		<input type="checkbox"/> I acknowledge that by signing or marking this document, I am swearing an oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I solemnly swear and affirm, under penalty of perjury, that the information entered herein and the testimony I may give in connection with this official proceeding are true and correct.		

More information about House Witness Registration can be found here: <https://mytxlegis.capitol.texas.gov/hwrspublic/about.aspx>

This is the chance for advocates to tell their story and humanize the issue.

#### Tips for Developing Testimony:

- Become familiar with the issue and how it affects you and others.
- Gather available data, including pertinent statistics. Legislators want hard data (cost of care, numbers on waiting lists, etc.).
- Begin by identifying yourself, the group you represent, the bill number and title, and your position.
- Be brief and accurate, leaving out lengthy philosophizing and avoiding clichés, repetition or threats.
- Use personal examples to make your point.
- Do not make claims you are not prepared to defend.
- Prepare a written copy of your testimony to leave with committee members, attendees, and the media, including your name and contact information for further questions from legislator (s).
- Have large representation of groups and other advocates testify as well.

- End by thanking the committee or the legislator for the opportunity to testify.

## **SAMPLE TESTIMONY**

Watch here: Example:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjnIC1pVQzs>

Senate Health and Human Services Committee Support for SB  
1881: Supported Decision-Making Agreements  
Jessaca Bond, The Arc of Texas  
April 8, 2015

Dear Senators,

My name is Jessaca Bond and I live in San Antonio, Texas. I am a self-advocate. I serve as a Project Advisory Committee member for The Arc of Texas. I am with the San Antonio League of Self-Advocates and the Texas Advocates. We are people with intellectual disabilities. I am also a Board Member of the Down Syndrome Association of South Texas.

I am my own guardian. People with disabilities have the right to make their own decisions just as much as the next person. My parents support me to make my own choices. They help me make decisions on things like my medical care, where to live, what purchases to make, transportation, and working and volunteering in my community. They help me, but they do not make the decisions for me.

I have the ability and the right to make my own decisions, with support from people I trust. Please support this bill.

Thank you,  
Jessaca Bond

**Senate Health and Human Services Committee  
Support SB 602  
Wednesday, April 5, 2017**

My name is Katie Funk. I live in Fort Worth with my mom. Someday I would like in an apartment with a friend. I do not understand why the Texas Legislature is willing to spend so much money to keep the State Supported Living Centers (SSLCs) open and to allow the abuse that happens in those places. It costs so much less to allow people who want to live in the community to actually live there. When you are allowed to live in the community it is possible to live lives like "normal" folks. If you have an apartment you can go to bed and get up when you want. You can decide what to eat and buy your own groceries. We have MITS busses here to take you to shop, to malls and Target, to go see movies and out to eat with your friends. Also to go vote (and lots of my friends vote.) You can also go to your own doctors and dentists. I know it will work for people to live in the community. I have friends who lived in the SSLCs who now live in their own apartments and homes and they do very well there. Four of my friends are now caring for their mothers who are in their 80's and 90's.

I have a very active life. I go to church and help to make sandwiches for the Presbyterian Night Shelter. I'm in the History Club, a part of the Woman's Club of Fort Worth. I am in charge of passing out the name tags since I know all the members. I help raise money for nine scholarships at the TCU Guild. I belong to Community Now, United Advocates, the Self Determination Group, and my local and state Arc chapter. I enjoy all my friends at all my activities in the community.

Please prioritize funding of the Medicaid Waiver waitlist so more people can enjoy life and their community as I do.

## TESTIMONY WORKSHEET

Name:

Where are you from?

Are you with an organization?

Introduction



Did you know that Texas ranks 49th in funding for community based services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

#### Discuss the Problem

More people want to live in their communities.

#### Provide the Solution

A responsible reform of the system would allow people to live where they want to live and support more people in their communities.

#### Call to Action

Will you support a plan to redirect funding for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to serve more people to live in the setting of their choice?

Thank you!





## **LEGISLATIVE RESOURCES:**

Citizen Handbook: How the Texas Legislature Works:

[https://senate.texas.gov/\\_assets/pdf/86th\\_Citizens\\_hdbk.pdf](https://senate.texas.gov/_assets/pdf/86th_Citizens_hdbk.pdf)

Texas Senate Committees:

<https://capitol.texas.gov/Committees/CommitteesMbrs.aspx?Chamber=S>

Texas House Committees:

<https://capitol.texas.gov/Committees/CommitteesMbrs.aspx?Chamber=H>

Texas Senate Staff Directory:

[www.thearcoftexas.org/wp-content/uploads/Staff-Directory-for-Senate-88th-Texas-Session.pdf](http://www.thearcoftexas.org/wp-content/uploads/Staff-Directory-for-Senate-88th-Texas-Session.pdf)

Texas House Staff Directory:

[www.thearcoftexas.org/wp-content/uploads/Staff-Directory-for-House-88th-Texas-Session.pdf](http://www.thearcoftexas.org/wp-content/uploads/Staff-Directory-for-House-88th-Texas-Session.pdf)

**88th Legislature: Dates of Interest**

See: <https://lrl.texas.gov/scanned/calendars/Dates-of-Interest-88.pdf>

Tuesday, November 8, 2022: General election for federal, state, and county officers.

Monday, November 14, 2022: Bill prefiling begins.

Tuesday, January 10, 2023: 88th Legislature convenes at noon.

Friday, March 10, 2023: 60-day bill filing deadline.

Monday, May 29, 2023: Adjournment sine die.

Sunday, June 18, 2023: Post-session 20-day deadline for Governor to sign or veto.

Effective Dates: Time of Taking Effect of Laws.

**SEC. 7.87. REGULAR SESSION PERPETUAL CALENDAR**

<b>New Year's Day</b>	<b>Legislature Convenes (Second Tuesday of January)</b>	<b>60-Day Bill Filing Deadline</b>	<b>Adjournment Sine Die (140th Day or 20 Weeks)</b>	<b>Post-Session 20-Day Deadline for Governor to Sign or Veto</b>	<b>Effective Date (91st Day After Adjournment)</b>
Monday January 1	Tuesday January 9	Friday March 9	Monday May 28	Sunday June 17	Monday August 27
Tuesday January 1	Tuesday January 8	Friday March 8	Monday May 27	Sunday June 16	Monday August 26
Wednesday January 1	Tuesday January 14	Friday March 14	Monday June 2	Sunday June 22	Monday September 1
Thursday January 1	Tuesday January 13	Friday March 13	Monday June 1	Sunday June 21	Monday August 31
Friday January 1	Tuesday January 12	Friday March 12	Monday May 31	Sunday June 20	Monday August 30
Saturday January 1	Tuesday January 11	Friday March 11	Monday May 30	Sunday June 19	Monday August 29
Sunday January 1	Tuesday January 10	Friday March 10	Monday May 29	Sunday June 18	Monday August 28

Table can also be viewed in the [Texas Legislative Council Drafting Manual](#).

Important legislative dates and deadlines are also listed in the publications [Dates of Interest](#) and *Deadlines for Action Under House & Senate Rules* (End of Session Deadlines), which are published each session by the Texas Legislative Council (TLC). These publications are available on the [Texas Legislature Online](#) homepage in the Legislative Process section and will be



updated as the 88th Regular Session progresses.

### **New Members of the Texas Legislature**

There are 28 new members of the Texas Legislature.

Below is a chart of freshman or first time (F) members.

See:

<https://lrl.texas.gov/legeLeaders/members/membersearch.cfm>

## **COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS**

## **TEXAS LEGISLATORS ON TWITTER**

See:

<https://lrl.texas.gov/legeLeaders/members/twitterDirectory.cfm>

Follow:

[https://twitter.com/TexasLRL?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eembeddedtimeline%7Ctwterm%5Escreenshot%2Fslug%3ATexasLRL%2Ftxlegislators%7Ctwcon%5Es2](https://twitter.com/TexasLRL?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eembeddedtimeline%7Ctwterm%5Escreenshot%2Fslug%3ATexasLRL%2Ftxlegislators%7Ctwcon%5Es2)

### **Hashtags for Social Media**

**#txlege**

**#disabilityadvocacy**

**#disabilityrights**

**#txed**

**#ddawareness**

## **OUR ISSUES IN THE MEDIA:**

Disabled and Abandoned by the Austin American Statesman

A yearlong Austin American–Statesman investigation into Texas’ system of care for people with disabilities found it beset by crisis and violence.

<https://www.statesman.com/in-depth/news/investigates/2022/12/14/texas-medicaid-waiver-system-investigation-disabled-abandoned/69706529007/>

“More than a hundred thousand Texans wait years, sometimes more than a decade, on some of the nation’s longest waitlists to receive waiver services. When they finally receive those services, they find a system plagued by disastrous underfunding, dire staffing shortages and a profound lack of oversight, placing both consumers and workers at risk of injury and death.

Since 2010, state agencies have investigated nearly 80,000 allegations of abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disabilities in the waiver system.”

“Texas’ system of home and community care for people with disabilities has been beset by crisis for years. Funds are scant. Demand for services vastly outweighs supply. Workers receive poverty wages. Delays in oversight mean facilities can go more than two years without a single inspection. Investigations into horrific injuries and deaths can take even longer.

This yearlong Austin American–Statesman investigation sheds light on the collapsing Texas Medicaid “waiver system,” a set of six programs serving over 100,000 Texans through a private–public partnership.

The series reveals how decades of deficiencies and inaction have turned a system meant to care for and protect the state’s most vulnerable residents into a dangerous and sometimes deadly environment.

The Statesman unearthed dozens of lawsuits alleging violence by the system’s clients and workers. Records we obtained from about 20 state, federal and local agencies revealed decadelong gaps in government oversight.

In dozens of interviews, victims and their families, attorneys, advocates and workers described corporations’ and individuals’ brazen attempts to cover up crimes, retaliate against whistleblowers, and avoid accountability.

Frequently stonewalled by officials and corporate representatives, the Statesman scoured thousands of pages of documents and launched a monthslong data collection effort to understand the intricacies of the system and to reveal its failings.”