

Covid-19 and Latino Legislative Priorities

TXLPS III Summary

Community advocates, researchers, and health and human service providers from across the state met ‘virtually’ for the 3rd Texas Latino Policy Symposium (TXLPS III) on October 1-2, 2020. Their focus was on the decimating impact of Covid-19 on Latino families and state legislative policy priorities targeting recovery support, and their economic mobility. The Symposium objectives were linked to the [Texas Latino Family Economic Blueprint](#).

TXLPS III presenters cut a wide policy path urging local and state Covid-19 recovery support and structural changes to long neglected human capital investments. The [agenda](#) presentations demonstrated the disadvantaged position of Latino families, and effect on their economic mobility. In addition, how the pandemic exposed the states unequal and inadequate investments in education, employment, housing, health care, and economic development.

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the challenges for Latinos and allies to influence real change to Texas’s policy making.

- ❖ Latino frontline workers in meat packing plants; construction, hospitality and food service industries; healthcare and domestic and farmworkers are experiencing severe financial losses and poor health. Paying for food and bills, home evictions, day care, children’s education, and health needs are constant anxieties.
- ❖ Texas is the only state where over half of all Covid-19 related deaths are Latino – they are dying at a rate nearly four time higher than white non-Latinos.
- ❖ Nearly one-half of Latino families are low-income and 32% have no health insurance.
- ❖ The state’s history of inadequate funding of a public health infrastructure has further exposed and worsen the spread of the pandemic among Latinos and other at-risks groups.
- ❖ State political leaders have badly handled the Covid-19 pandemic and the vaccine roll-out; e.g., failure to take needed state leadership action to lack of adequate collaboration with local government leaders involving prevention and relief issues.
- ❖ State political leaders, when faced with a budget shortfall, invariably make inequitable decisions impacting people of color and low-income populations worsening economic mobility.

Immediate policy priorities must protect families from the health and economic impacts of the crisis. Local governments and non-profit organizations have been at the forefront in addressing the needs caused by the pandemic. However, policies must also address the state’s deeper, structural drivers of inequality that perpetuate low incomes, gender pay gaps, inadequate employment benefits and safety, and inequitable economic development investments across state regions.

The TXLPS III participants **first** emphasized greater collaborate among Latino advocates and allies given the policy implications created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Over-arching support was urged for the following legislative policy priorities.

- Federal and state Covid-19 funds equitably target populations most impacted with immediate food, financial, and health security needs.

- Federal Covid-19 funds targeted for education must not be used to supplant state education funding.
- State work with local governments to target relief efforts and legislation that strengthens the long-neglected public health infrastructure statewide.
- Protect funding for health and human services, including rejecting cuts or eligibility system changes that would harm vulnerable groups seeking health care, food and other basic needs.
- No tax system legislation be supported that would reduce state revenues such as tax exemptions or eliminating the franchise tax for the business sector. Instead, support tax changes that create equity and eliminate subsidies, and increase revenue opportunities.
- Utilize the Rainy-day Fund (Economic Stabilization Fund) to prevent budget cuts, and make investments in job training, education, health care access, and regional economic development.

Second, TXLPS III urges support for legislative priorities targeting human capital investment policies repeatedly identified and advocated by [Latino organizations and allies](#) to address structural and racial inequalities. They include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase workplace safety and compliance ➤ Ensure paid sick leave is available to all workers ➤ Strengthen wage theft prevention and legal actions ➤ Revamp states' weak pay equity laws ➤ Raise the minimum wage ➤ Increase health insurance coverage and expand the Medicaid program ➤ Ensure full funding of all education components of House Bill 3; including increase funding for English Learners (EL) and full funding for all-day pre-K | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Texas grant program must increase and be based on student financial need. ➤ In-state tuition must continue to include undocumented immigrants ➤ Establish an economic development fund of neglected and under-resourced state regions ➤ Remove state regulatory barriers that prevent local governmental and private partnerships in low- and moderate-income family housing development ➤ Increase and ensure equity and compliance of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) |
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Latinos comprise 40% of the state's population and will become the majority by 2022. Since 1980, they have accounted for the largest share of the state's population growth. They represent 30% or more of the population in 8 of the state's 12 economic regions. They retain the highest labor participation rate among all population groups and will soon be the states majority labor force.

Latinos represents a critically important human capital asset for the state's economic prosperity. The assets encompass economic contributions from population and labor force growth (native and immigrant), housing and small business growth, public school and college enrollment majorities, increasing tax revenues, and ever-increasing consumer markets. Covid-19 nor another unresponsive legislature should be allowed to weaken these assets, equity and prosperity driven policies must be supported.