



SOWING THE SEEDS OF JUSTICE

Select advocacy work over recent years

Texas Appleseed is a nonpartisan nonprofit working toward policies that are fair, just, and equitable for all Texans.



Legislative Advocacy

Years of local advocacy efforts led to a new 2023 law. It eliminated juvenile curfew ordinances statewide, which targeted youth and subjected them to criminal records and high court fees, all without appointed counsel. Now, youth who may be homeless or fleeing an abusive home cannot be punished for simply being in public at certain hours.

We fight for protections for survivors of domestic violence and other vulnerable Texans, to overcome financial damage created by an abuser. Laws in 2019 and 2021 that we advocated for as part of the Texas Coalition on Coerced Debt expanded identity theft protections to include debts resulting from coercion and abuse. And in 2023, we spearheaded a law to help prevent future financial abuse by requiring data brokers to register with the state and safeguard personal data.



Texas Appleseed worked to bring HB 123 to fruition in 2019. It created a mechanism to ensure children who are homeless or in foster care can obtain their driver's license or state ID card for free. In 2021, Texas Appleseed helped advocate for the passage of a bill that provides free driver's education to the same young people.

Texas Appleseed has been the leading voice helping to end unnecessary out-of-school suspensions (OSS), as Texas' youngest students were often being suspended for minor, age-appropriate behavior. It began with successes at school districts. The Texas Legislature later followed by ending OSS in 2017 for pre-K through 2nd graders statewide, barring narrow exceptions required by law. Our work continued in 2019 when the practice was banned for students experiencing homelessness, with narrow exceptions.



Legislative Advocacy

In 2019, Texas Appleseed successfully advocated for evidence-based multidisciplinary teams to conduct school-based threat assessments, rather than have local prosecutors charge young Texans with terroristic threats. Moreover, in 2023, Texas Appleseed supported a bill that led to increased parental involvement in this process.



We successfully advocated to include a new text messaging system for court reminders in the Texas budget. Similar programs have decreased failures to appear for court dates by 20%-25% in other jurisdictions. Based on that experience, we believe this program will result in tens of thousands more Texans getting to required court dates and reducing the number of arrest warrants for failure to appear substantially throughout the state.

We worked with other advocates to secure the passage of HB 2048 in 2019, ending Texas' Driver Responsibility Program. Many Texans could not legally drive due to the program, affecting people's ability to get to work or even apply for housing. Approximately 1 million driver's license suspensions related to unpaid surcharges were lifted, and \$2.5 billion in debt owed by Texas drivers was forgiven.



A new 2017 law came to fruition based on our advocacy – it improved the fairness of court procedures for people unable to pay fines and fees associated with minor tickets and citations. The law ensured that judges would inquire into the ability of defendants to pay fines, expanded the availability of community service in lieu of payment, and limited warrants issued for nonpayment of fines.

We helped to ensure passage of SB 499 in 2017, adopting the Uniform Partition of Heirs' Property Act. The Act gives family members additional rights in the partition process and gives judges more discretion to consider factors like wealth preservation and how long the property has been in the family when deciding on partition.



Community Work

Texas Appleseed has been a key partner in 49 Texas city ordinances to rein in payday and auto title lending abuses. We also helped spur the Community Loan Center, which has provided over 100,000 affordable loans.



In 2020, as part of our advocacy, the City of Austin and Harris County each ended their OmniBase contracts. Dallas ended its contract in 2021. The Failure to Appear/Pay program allows courts to place holds on people's driver's licenses for unpaid fines and fees related to minor offenses, such as traffic tickets. Holds continue even if someone begins making payments or starts community service. Driving with an invalid license can result in negative outcomes – warrants, arrests, and more fines – yet many Texans continue to drive to meet basic needs, such as getting to work, school, or the doctor.

Since 2019, we have worked with partners HOME and CEER to increase flood mitigation funding for underserved high-risk areas in Harris County. This work included first-time equity requirements for a \$2.5 billion flood bond and in 2023, raising the percentage of federal funding for underserved areas from less than 50% to almost 70%.



In cohort with other groups, Texas Appleseed successfully advocated for the decriminalization of the San Antonio juvenile curfew ordinance in 2018 and Austin's juvenile curfew ordinance in 2017.

Local efforts in Houston, Dallas, and Austin ISDs led to them prohibiting out-of-school suspensions for pre-K through 2nd grade students.



Community Work

Since 2021, we have coordinated the McKinney-Vento Liaison Council (MVLIC) which convenes homeless liaisons from across the state for monthly meetings. The MVLIC has been instrumental in identifying the systemic issues that impact youth experiencing homelessness and helps guide our advocacy goals.



Court Rules



Due in part to Texas Appleseed's advocacy, the Supreme Court of Texas issued a rule in 2023 ending the indiscriminate shackling of young people in juvenile hearings. Before the rule, children were routinely shackled when appearing before a judge, even for low-level offenses or no prior system history. Shackling can be traumatizing and developmentally harmful. It also runs counter to the presumption of innocence inherent to our justice system.

In 2022, the Texas Supreme Court adopted rules to create a notice and hearing process for people to recoup protected money that was wrongfully seized by a debt collector. Texas Appleseed advocated in support of rules that enabled quick hearings and clear and transparent notices. The final rules provide an incremental step forward for people to get back legally protected money seized from a bank account. Before this new process, there was no system for Texans to have their funds returned. We continue to work in support of policies and legal processes to ensure a basic amount of money in bank accounts is protected and not seized to begin with, so people can pay their rent, keep their power on, and buy food while they manage repayment of old debts.



To view additional advocacy milestones, please visit the Our Impact section of our website.

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