



February 2025 | Infants, Toddlers, Children, and Youth

## Travis County Votes “Yes” for Affordable Child Care

Building on years of collaborative work across sectors, advocates in Travis County, TX, won a ballot measure in 2024 that will provide more than \$75 million annually to fund services for infants, toddlers, children, and youth.

Photo credit: United Way for Greater Austin

### Summary

Travis County, TX, which includes the majority of the City of Austin, is having something of a “magical moment” for children and youth. Thanks to years of collaborative work across sectors, the county is moving from “most expensive child care in the state” to the first Texas county to create a dedicated source of funding for child care and out-of-school time programs.

On November 5, 2024, Travis County voters approved a ballot initiative to increase property taxes by 2.5 cents for every \$100 of assessed value and use the funds to provide access to affordable and high-quality child care, after-school, and summer programs for children in low-income families. The measure will raise more than \$75 million per year in perpetuity to expand access to quality child care for families earning up to 85% of the median family income in Travis County, boost wages for child care providers, and create a business-government partnership to encourage employers to offer child care stipends.<sup>1</sup>

Travis County Votes “Yes” for Affordable Child Care

How advocates accomplished this win offers lessons for other communities looking to establish long-term funding streams dedicated to children and youth.

### 2020–2022: “What Can We Do Next?”

When the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to decimate an already-struggling child care sector in Travis County, TX, early childhood leaders and advocates tasked with shoring up and protecting the sector had decades of groundwork to draw on: [Success By 6](#) (a coalition of more than 50 community organizations led by the [United Way for Greater Austin](#)), an active city council, and others who had long made the case for investing in early childhood services.

As a result, city and county leaders were able to quickly direct [American Rescue Plan recovery funds](#) to early childhood. In all, more than \$15 million in federal and local recovery funding was allocated to child care providers in Austin and Travis County to keep

them in business and pilot successful improvement efforts, including higher wages, training for family-based caregivers, and expanded access to care during nontraditional hours.<sup>2</sup> It was a lifeline for a crucial sector during a challenging time, one that both underscored the need for a more permanent solution for low-income families and offered a model for how the city and county could work together to design such a solution.

In April 2022, Cathy McHorse, then vice president of Success By 6 with United Way for Greater Austin, was preparing a presentation to the City of Austin Public Health Committee about how the city was spending [American Rescue Plan](#) recovery dollars on child care. “The night before, a city council member called me and said, ‘Tomorrow, I’m going to ask you what’s next when these dollars expire. Do you have anything you want to bring forward?’”

It was one of several pivotal moments—and, yes, McHorse had an answer.

McHorse and colleagues at the United Way had been working with Children’s Funding Project to explore options for public funding to make quality child care accessible in a region known for having the [most expensive child care](#)<sup>3</sup> in Texas, and some [5,000 children on waitlists](#)<sup>4</sup> averaging two years for subsidized care.

## Travis County, TX, Demographics

**Population:** 1.29 million

**Percentage of Population Younger than 5 Years:** 5.5%

**Percentage of Population Younger than 18 Years:** 19.7%

**Median Annual Household Income:** \$97,543

**Percentage of Total Population Living in Poverty:** 10.2% below 100% poverty threshold in 2024; 11.3% live below 100% of poverty and 24% below 200% of poverty threshold in 2018–2022

**Percentage of Children Younger than 18 Years Living in Poverty:** 14% living under 100% poverty threshold; 30% below 200% of the poverty threshold in 2018–2022

### Sources:

“Travis County, Texas,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed January 22, 2025, [https://data.census.gov/profile/Travis\\_County,\\_Texas?g=050XX00US48453](https://data.census.gov/profile/Travis_County,_Texas?g=050XX00US48453)

“Quick Facts: Travis County, Texas,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed January 22, 2025, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/traviscountytexas#>

Research and Planning Division, “Travis County Poverty Brief Using 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates,” Travis County Health and Human Services, 2024, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6e8e8c22818a406c8be74ba94566242c>.

**“Many years of leading on early childhood/child care laid the foundation for what felt like this magical moment where it all just came together ... Every piece was important to our success.”**

– **David Smith**, CEO, United Way for Greater Austin

“With support from Children’s Funding Project, we were able to bring the city council information about what it would take to do a fiscal map or a cost model to chart a path forward” to a strong and sustainably funded child care sector, says McHorse.

McHorse and fellow advocates had ready champions on the Austin City Council. Council Member Alison Alter had been working for years to shore up the early childhood sector, as had several of her colleagues, including Council Member Vanessa Fuentes, Council Member Ryan Alter, and Council Member Jose Velásquez. There was also strong support from the business community, including the members of [Early Matters Greater Austin](#), an association of local businesses committed to early childhood.

“Having spent the last eight years studying the benefits of high-quality early child care and education, I am more convinced than ever that these investments are among the best we can make,” says Tom Hedrick, a member of Early Matters Greater Austin and one of the initial group of advocates pushing for long-term investment in early childhood. “Kids get high-quality education, parents can work, families have more resources, and kids’ educational and life attainment increases dramatically.” At the same time, sustainable funding affords providers the ability to retain quality staff and expand the number of children they serve.

In November 2022, the group joined Children’s Funding Project’s [ballot measure cohort](#), an application-based learning community to support efforts to establish local [voter-approved children’s funds](#).

## 2023: Building the Numbers Case

Together, McHorse; Council Member Alison Alter; Tom Hedrick; David Smith, the CEO of United Way for Greater Austin; and Travis County officials worked with others to lay the groundwork for an eventual public ballot measure campaign to support child care.

With help from Children’s Funding Project, United Way for Greater Austin created a new role—the nation’s first [children’s funding coordinator](#)—to build out the community’s [strategic public financing](#) resources and oversee the research, collaboration, and strategic communication necessary for success.

In January 2023, Margo Kinneberg was hired to fill this role, housed within United Way for Greater Austin and funded through philanthropic dollars. The City of Austin provided additional funding to support technical assistance training for Kinneberg from Children’s Funding Project.

That spring, the Central Texas Chapter of the Asset Funders Network also stepped in to provide a seed grant, which was essential to the coalition work at this stage as well as for the polling and campaign phases that would follow.

In her first year as a children’s funding coordinator, Kinneberg led the development of a [cost model](#) to quantify the true cost of quality child care and pre-K for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in Travis County. As part of this process, Kinneberg compiled state and local data on reimbursement rates and surveyed more than 60 child care centers and approximately 40 family-based providers. Survey respondents were

compensated for their time through funding leveraged by United Way for Greater Austin. (To learn more about the work Kinneberg did, read our blog “[Laying the Groundwork for Strategic Public Financing Success in Austin, TX.](#)” )

The [cost model](#)—a comprehensive spreadsheet with adjustable variables including child-to-staff ratios required by age, provider wages, and operating costs—allowed the coalition to determine provider reimbursement rates and map the true cost of the systemic changes needed to expand quality care to all families struggling to access it. Once they had that crucial data about the true cost of transforming the child care system, the members of the ballot measure cohort team could identify what they could achieve if the community approved new revenue from a successful ballot measure campaign.

“We built a very good numbers case,” says Austin City Council Member Alison Alter. “We could answer just about any question about the impact on city and county budgets, children, and families, and returns for local business. The simplicity of the strategy and being able to say it’s tailored to us, based on data, and has the backing of Children’s Funding Project as a national organization gave us credibility.”

Throughout 2023, the Children’s Funding Project ballot measure cohort team continued the work to make the case.

**“The simplicity of the strategy and being able to say it’s tailored to us, based on data, and has the backing of Children’s Funding Project as a national organization gave us credibility.”**

– Austin City Council Member **Alison Alter**

# Travis County Proposition A/Affordable Childcare TODAY! Timeline

The story of how Travis County became the first county in Texas to raise dedicated funds to support affordable child care, offers lessons for communities looking to establish long-term funding for children and youth.

2012

- **Success By 6** launches.
- Austin and Travis County align investments in early childhood with Success By 6 strategic plan.

2018

**Early Matters Greater Austin** launches (formed by United Way for Greater Austin and E3 Alliance).

2020-2022

Success By 6 advocates with Austin City Council and Travis County leaders to allocate recovery funding to stabilize the child care sector and pilot improvements in access to quality care, including \$1 million in funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act for child care providers and \$15 million in American Rescue Plan funding. Discussions begin for a longer-term solution, including a potential Tax Rate Election.

2022

- **April:** Cathy McHorse (United Way) presents to the City of Austin Public Health Committee about plans for supporting child care after American Rescue Plan dollars expire.
- **November:** Driven largely by Alison Alter (Austin City Council), Tom Hedrick (Early Matters Austin), and Cathy McHorse, an Austin team applies for and joins Children's Funding Project's ballot measure cohort.

2023

- **January:** With Children's Funding Project's help, the the United Way for Greater Austin develops the first-in-the-nation children's funding coordinator role and hires Margo Kinneberg to fill it.
- **April:** The Central Texas Chapter of Asset Funders Network signs on to provide \$200,000 in seed funding for strategy, marketing, and administrative support.
- **October:** Members of the coalition attend the Children's Funding Institute in San Antonio, TX.
- **November:** Austin becomes first city to take advantage of a new statewide **proposition** by providing qualifying child care centers a **property tax exemption**. Travis County **follows suit** in March 2024. Cost model finalized.
- **December:** Tom Hedrick, Alison Alter, and Cathy McHorse draft the proposal for a Tax Rate Election, which includes considerations for both city and county ballot measure initiatives.

# Travis County Proposition A/Affordable Childcare TODAY! Timeline (continued)

2024

- **January–April:** Coalition meets with city and county staff, including Austin City Council members, Austin mayor, and Travis County commissioners.
- **January:** The coalition engages Y Strategy, which launches poll #1 to inform the policy design for an ultimate ballot initiative and to evaluate options of pursuing a city or county path.
- **February:** United Way for Greater Austin Board presentation secures organizational support.
- **March:** Cathy McHorse joins as coalition manager and the Affordable Childcare NOW! coalition officially launches. The coalition decides to pursue a county-level ballot initiative, rather than city only. Andy Roddick Foundation, which leads the Travis County Learn All the Time Network, joins the campaign, providing crucial funding and engagement support and data about after-school and summer programming. The coalition decides to include after-school and summer programs and workforce supports to build a cradle-to-career support system and engages Seeker Strategies.
- **May:** The coalition conducts its first presentation at a County Commissioners Court hearing.
- **June:** The coalition conducts its second presentation to County Commissioners Court.
- **July:** Y Strategy launches poll #2 to identify key audiences to engage.
- **August:** County Commissioners Court votes unanimously to approve Proposition A for the November 2024 ballot. Children’s Funding Accelerator provides matching funds for the campaign’s local fundraising.
- **September:** Affordable Childcare TODAY! campaign launches. PAC established.
- **September–November:** Campaign activation (messaging, block walks/canvassing, public engagement events, including local screening of *Make a Circle* film)
- **November:** Proposition A is approved by voters.



Photo credit: Children’s Funding Project

In October 2023, Children’s Funding Project held its fourth [Children’s Funding Institute](#) in San Antonio, TX. For participants from the city and county—including City Council Member Alison Alter, McHorse, Kinneberg, Smith, Hedrick, and Travis County Judge Andy Brown’s staff and others—the institute proved to be another pivotal moment, providing essential information, tools, and connections, and a fresh infusion of energy.

“Going through the institute was the moment that got us all together, galvanized, and determined. It was the first time I really knew we could do this,” says David Smith, CEO of United Way for Greater Austin. “We don’t want to put Band-Aids on situations, we want to address the systems that keep people stuck in a very difficult path. We were all so inspired that we came back pretty much thinking whatever it takes to make this happen, we’re going to do it.”

After researching several options for public financing to support child care, the coalition set its sights on a property tax increase through a process in Texas called a Tax Rate Election. Over the 2023 winter holidays, Hedrick, Alter, and McHorse drafted a proposal for a Tax Rate Election to support access to affordable, high-quality child care. It included costs and options for a ballot approach at both the city and county levels.

## January-February 2024: Putting the Pieces in Place

The Austin/Travis County Children’s Funding Project cohort team had data, expertise in early childhood, and deep relationships with key community members

in Austin. The team hired [Y Strategy](#), an Austin-based political consulting firm led by Mykle Tomlinson, to provide the political expertise necessary to run a successful ballot measure campaign.

“We had done a lot of local work to prime voters around ballot measures [and] bond initiatives, so we knew there were folks willing to raise taxes for the right cause,” says Tomlinson. To determine just how willing, Tomlinson’s team and Z to A Consulting conducted [polling](#) to understand the local context and what the public would support in terms of a tax increase.

Pairing the poll results with the cost model gave the coalition a clear understanding of both the true cost to strengthen child care and how much Travis County voters were willing to dedicate through a new tax. It was enough to confirm that a Tax Rate Election campaign made sense for the November 2024 ballot.

## The Case for Nonprofit Advocacy

As the backbone for the Success By 6 coalition, United Way for Greater Austin had a strong track record of leading community efforts around quality child care, and a strategic plan that prioritized nonpartisan advocacy—still, helping to drive a ballot campaign was new.

“We had not done this level of advocacy before and there were some nerves around this,” says David Smith at United Way. For this ballot measure campaign to work, his Board of Directors would need to be supportive, allowing the organization to commit time



Photo credit: United Way for Greater Austin

and resources and leverage its trusted role among the early childhood field and the community as a whole.

The coalition's core team tailored a presentation for United Way for Greater Austin's Board, and opted to have business leader Tom Hedrick deliver it, signifying the strong support among the business community.

"We positioned this as a chance to make the transformative and systemic change we talk about as an organization," says Smith. "There's our justice-centered path to wanting to get this done, based on what we know is a lack of opportunity for so many families [and] a second path, that it's really good for the economy. We had some key slides in the [presentation] deck going into detail about the economic benefits to our region."

## Broad Support

From the start, a key piece of the puzzle was already in place: a history of broad-ranging support for child care as a community priority, including among those closest to the issue and its solutions. "This work really grew out of the voices of the women who are child care center owners, [who], through Success By 6 and other networks, helped us realize that we needed to do something much bigger than what we've been doing," says Smith.

Women, especially women of color, make up the majority of the early childhood workforce, a sector struggling to operate at thin margins even before the pandemic. "We wanted to respect that, and at the same time make sure they could access opportunities to be heard. The strength of any coalition is in the voices of people with lived experience, not just at the table but central to the work," says Smith.

The team built a cross-sector "coalition of coalitions" that spanned county and city staff, nonprofit and civic organizations, faith groups, families, labor leaders, and every local Chamber of Commerce—to name just a few—each bringing their networks in to collaborate.

## March–April 2024: Navigating the Path Forward

Before long, the coalition faced another pivotal moment. From the start, the proposal and cost model outlined two paths forward: implementation at the city level and at the county level. A county model would have greater impact. It would reach more children and would help stabilize access to care for families

displaced by rising costs of living in Austin and within areas of the county. It also made logistical sense since state child care subsidies are allocated through a local Workforce Investment Board at the county level.

While there was long-standing support for early childhood among many Travis County leaders, to date the coalition had generated strong political will within the Austin City Council. Was there time to get enough votes from members of the Travis County Commissioners Court, the body that would decide whether or not a county Tax Rate Election would be included on the November ballot?

After seeking feedback from community, business, labor leaders, and elected officials, the coalition confirmed that moving forward at the county level was best for children, families, and communities.

"Access to high-quality, affordable child care has always been a priority for our community," says Travis County Judge Andy Brown. "Child care is a lynchpin to building a stronger, more resilient Travis County where all residents have access to stable housing, good jobs, and economic prosperity.

## Expanding to School-Age Children

In the ensuing conversations, several Travis County commissioners recommended adding after-school and summer programs to the funding proposal to reach families with school-age children who also were struggling.

"The funding associated with after-school and summer programs is critical to providing safe spaces for school-aged students and producing a workforce prepared to meet the needs of local employers," says Travis County Commissioner Jeffrey Travillion. "When we provide academic assistance, a third meal, learning enrichment, and work experience for students in Central Texas, Travis County will continue to be one of the most desirable regions in the country. This is one of the most important investments that we will ever make."

**“This is one of the most important investments that we will ever make.”**

– Travis County Commissioner **Jeffrey Travillion**

This marked another inflection point, and another slight delay in momentum as the coalition worked to assess the path forward. “We were clear with ourselves that we wouldn’t cut anything from our plan for early childhood,” says McHorse. From the initial poll by Y Strategy, coalition leaders knew there was some flexibility in the amount of tax increase that voters might be willing to accept.

As this decision was being debated, the Austin-based Andy Roddick Foundation joined the coalition. In addition to investing in child and youth programs, the foundation leads the Travis County [Learn All the Time Network](#), the Central Texas organizing intermediary for after-school and summer programs, whose 40 youth-service organizations are committed to increasing access to quality after-school and summer programs.

Using data from the Foundation, paired with the existing poll findings, the coalition determined that it would work to propose a tax increase of 2.5 cents, up from 2 cents, per every \$100 of home value, in order to reach an additional 4,000 young people with after-school programming.

In the end, although challenging, the decision to pursue a county-level approach that included child care and after-school and summer programming strengthened the ballot measure, and helped engage additional champions across communities.

The cohort team officially became the Affordable Childcare NOW! coalition, and McHorse was hired to serve as coalition manager.

## May–August 2024: Getting Children and Youth on the Ballot

To secure a Tax Rate Election, the team—now officially calling themselves the Affordable Childcare NOW! coalition—presented at three Travis County Commissioners Court briefings.

“We had meetings with individual commissioners and advocacy from United Way, community members, our city council, and the mayor,” recalls McHorse. “We brought big turnouts to the [hearings]—with labor, business leaders, families, nonprofits, and faith communities packing our presentations—which historically isn’t always their experience.”

At the final briefing, the coalition was confident that its presentation was strong and the data sound. Yet some of the commissioners’ questions were tough, and although McHorse and her colleagues had ready data and answers, they were nervous. If the proposal didn’t advance at the county level, it was too late to return to the city in time for the November ballot. And if this failed, not only would it hurt Austin, but it could also set back other similar efforts across Texas and even in other states.

As it turned out, the Affordable Childcare NOW! coalition had made its case effectively. In August 2024, the Travis County Commissioners Court voted—unanimously—to include the [Tax Rate Election](#) on the November 2024 ballot. “We were celebrating,” says McHorse. “We blasted it in every email, celebrated it in every meeting.”

What they didn’t do was slow down. That same month, the coalition quickly transitioned to campaign mode and, with support from Children’s Funding Project and its 501(c)(4) advocacy partner Children’s Funding Accelerator, launched a political action committee dedicated to supporting Travis County Proposition A.

A press conference in September 2024 marked the official public launch of the Affordable Childcare TODAY! campaign, with just over three months until the November election.

## September–November 2024: Pivoting to Campaign Mode

Most of the coalition had little or no experience leading a ballot measure campaign, so members relied on Mykle Tomlinson with Y Strategy; Manny Garcia, who leads the Austin-based communications firm Seeker Strategies; and Children’s Funding Project for campaign strategy. Tomlinson and McHorse worked together to establish a steering committee to guide fundraising efforts, voter engagement, and align messaging and communications across the coalition.

“We were seeing that folks might not be fired up to go vote,” says Tomlinson. Y Strategy and Z to A Consulting conducted a second poll that helped identify key communities to focus on to get out the vote.

Manny Garcia’s team then helped the campaign develop tailored messaging that would encourage different community groups to vote “yes” on the ballot proposal.



“There was a tremendous amount of cost anxiety, so we needed an economic argument embedded into all of our messaging,” says Garcia. The campaign’s three top-testing messages wove this economic argument together with a values-based call to action: investing in quality child care brings long-term economic, education, and health benefits that help everyone in the community, not just the children and families who receive care.<sup>5</sup>

Garcia developed clear talking points and trained coalition members on how to speak to reporters and other members of the media. In addition to an active social media presence, the campaign garnered more than 600 earned media mentions and coverage in local and national press outlets including *The Hechinger Report*, NPR, and *Wall Street Journal*. The media coverage not only helped raise awareness and educate voters, the range of outlets also helped the campaign credibly make the case across key audiences.

The campaign steering committee’s robust fundraising made it possible to reach voters directly in their communities, with tailored messaging and clear calls to action. Children’s Funding Accelerator provided matching funds. Campaign members knocked on more than 30,000 doors across Travis County to raise awareness and canvass for votes.

The work paid off on November 5, 2024, when Proposition A passed with nearly 60% of voters’ approval. With that, Travis County became the first Texas county to pass a [voter-approved children’s fund](#),

dedicating public revenue to child care and after-school programming for families (joining the city of San Antonio, the only Texas city to have a voter-approved children’s fund, [Pre-K 4 SA](#)).

Set to phase in starting in 2025, the fund allocates revenue to four priority areas:

1. Provide subsidies to support child care spots for children from birth to age 3.
2. Expand child care during nontraditional hours for children up to age 13.
3. Build quality and capacity of the child care system in Austin by creating shared services hubs, funding workforce capacity building, funding training and quality improvement for family-based child care providers, and providing “gap funding” designed to make up the difference between the cost of quality care and the current subsidy reimbursement rates for child care slots for children from birth to age 3.
4. Create a business-government alliance to incentivize employers to help cover child care costs for their employees by matching city or county funding contributions.

“It was a nonpartisan proposition that brought the community together to invest in our youth from cradle to career. It was business leaders, community organizations, community members, and city and county officials who all made this happen,” Jaime L. Garcia, president and CEO of the Andy Roddick Foundation, told the *Austin Monitor*.<sup>6</sup>



Photo credit: United Way for Greater Austin

“Maybe without some of the puzzle pieces, this effort would still have worked, but I don’t think so. We pulled together a magical group and turned what seemed like a pipe dream at one point into a reality,” says Smith.

## Guidance for Other Communities Considering a Ballot Measure

### Start Now

“I don’t want to give any community an idea that this is easy and can happen overnight,” says Smith of United Way for Greater Austin. The Austin/Travis County campaign was the result of years of work and a focus on a long-term solution—but funding success is possible even in communities that don’t yet have a strong backbone organization to lead the initiative or decades of collaborative work. Start where you are, identify the networks and connections already in place in your community, and connect key individuals who may be interested in your funding effort.

**“I don’t want to give any community an idea that this is easy and can happen overnight.”**

– **David Smith**, CEO, United Way for Greater Austin

Children’s Funding Project offers free resources and training for communities interested in exploring [strategic public financing](#) to fund programs and services for children in their communities, including a [ballot measure cohort](#).

Equally important is to use existing groundwork to exercise your advocacy muscles on small wins. Says Council Member Alison Alter: “We took a series of actions to support the child care sector before and during the pandemic, and even in early 2024 with the implementation of property tax relief for child care centers authorized by State Proposition 2. That allowed us to keep a steady drumbeat related to child care. It also showed elected officials that there was a constituency and let advocates see that their voices matter.”

## Focus on Relationships

Real change is relational, and the strength of any coalition is its people. The Affordable Childcare NOW! coalition built a broad base that included elected officials, businesses, nonprofits, faith communities, community colleges, universities, chambers of commerce, families, media, and other influencers. Children’s Funding Project also helped the coalition leaders identify essential groups they should include through a strategic power mapping process. “Early on, we looked around to see who was and wasn’t there with us, and it was eye-opening,” says McHorse.

The coalition also put significant energy into communications leading up to and throughout the official campaign phase. Coalition leaders held large- and small-group meetings; sent regular emails, texts, and calls; and offered to talk one-on-one to field questions from anyone interested in learning more about the funding effort. They reached out individually to key decision-makers—elected officials, board members, business leaders, labor leaders—so none of them felt that they were hearing anything about the funding initiative and campaign for the first time in a public conversation.

## Put the Right People in the Right Roles

At the [2023 Children’s Funding Institute](#) in San Antonio, a session speaker flagged the importance of “finding the person in the community who thinks about this issue nonstop, wakes up thinking about it, goes to sleep thinking about it,” says McHorse (who adds that several colleagues said, “That’s you,’ and I said, ‘Yes, I think that is me’”).

Pursuing a ballot measure campaign is likely to be new work for most people, so a learning mindset, ability to navigate egos (and check one’s own), and nimbleness are key. One example: Children’s Funding Coordinator Margo Kinneberg describes herself as “part research nerd and part relationship person”—a combination that proved crucial to her newly developed role, which requires balancing hard data with the soft skills needed to access that data. “You have to get buy-in because you’re adding work to other people’s load when you ask them to share data, and they have to trust that you’re going to use it responsibly” as a tool to develop policy, she says.

## Compensate Participants for Their Time

Early in the campaign, the coalition recognized the need to pay people for canvassing and/or to provide food and water or transportation for people speaking at hearings, meeting with elected officials, and participating in local events. Many of the essential spokespeople—child care providers, parents, and young people—faced scheduling and economic barriers to participating. Similarly, child care providers were compensated for the time it took to respond to the original cost modeling survey.

## Don't Fear Advocacy

United Way for Greater Austin encourages nonpartisan nonprofits and business leaders to embrace advocacy as “enhancing and elevating all of our strategies, not in competition with or a threat to them,” as Smith notes. There are a range of activities that nonprofits can engage in to support a ballot campaign like this one; in many states, that includes expressing a position on ballot measures and other policies up for a direct public vote, provided they do not suggest support or opposition to any candidate.<sup>7</sup> The Alliance for Justice has additional [legal guidance](#) on federal and state-specific advocacy rules for nonprofits.



Photo credit: United Way for Greater Austin

## Acknowledgments

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- Alison Alter, former Austin City Council member
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- Cathy McHorse, coalition manager, Affordable Childcare NOW!
- Ashley B. Richardson, council policy strategist, Austin City Council
- David Smith, CEO, United Way for Greater Austin
- Mykle Tomlinson, president, Y Strategy
- Jeffrey W. Travillion, commissioner, Travis County Commissioners Court

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Dan Whitaker and Olivia Allen, “Five Communities Seek Dedicated Funding for Kids on the November Ballot,” *Updates*, Children’s Funding Project, October 23, 2024, <https://childrensfundingproject.org/update/five-communities-seek-dedicated-funding-for-kids-on-the-november-ballot/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Children’s Funding Project Work Group, *Strategies for Local Investment in Early Child Care* (Austin, TX: The City of Austin, 2024), <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=427076>.
- <sup>3</sup> Daniel Schroeder, Laura Marra, and Monica Faulkner, *2024 Texas Child Care Market Rate Survey: Final Report* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing, 2024), [https://txicfw.socialwork.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/TWC-2024-Final-Report\\_05Jul2024.pdf](https://txicfw.socialwork.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/TWC-2024-Final-Report_05Jul2024.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> David Smith, “Affordable Child Care Is In Our Hands: A Letter From Our CEO,” *Stories*, United Way for Greater Austin, October 30, 2024, <https://unitedwayaustin.org/affordable-child-care-is-in-our-hands-a-letter-from-our-ceo/#:~:text=Here%20is%20the%20current%20reality,list%20for%20state%20childcare%20subsidies>.
- <sup>5</sup> Messaging was particularly complex for this campaign, as there was a separate **Prop A**, also a Tax Rate Election, to raise funds for educators and staff of the Austin Independent School District.
- <sup>6</sup> Mina Shekarchi, “Travis County Voters Supported a Tax Rate Increase to Expand Access to Affordable Child Care. What Happens Now?” *Austin Monitor*, November 15, 2024. <https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2024/11/travis-county-voters-supported-a-tax-rate-increase-to-expand-access-to-affordable-child-care-what-happens-now/>
- <sup>7</sup> “501(c)(3) Public Charities and Ballot Measures,” Alliance for Justice, accessed January 22, 2025, <https://afj.org/resource-library/tools-for-effective-advocacy/toolkits/ballot-measures-toolkit/501c3-public-charities-and-ballot-measures/>.

Children’s Funding Project is a nonprofit social impact organization that helps communities and states expand equitable opportunities for children and youth through strategic public financing. [childrensfundingproject.org](https://childrensfundingproject.org)

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