

March 31, 2026

To: Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education and Care

Chairman Holt and honorable members of the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education and Care,

My name is Becky Calahan, Managing Director of Philanthropy Advocates, a membership association of grantmaking foundations across Texas.

As a new mom myself, I'm deeply grateful to Governor Abbott for establishing this task force, to Senator Campbell, Representative Schoolcraft and the Texas Legislature for passing legislation that created this opportunity, and to each of you for your service on this task force and to our youngest Texans.

Texas philanthropy is deeply engaged in early learning because access to quality early education yields meaningful returns for children, families, and the broader Texas economy. We have seen what community leadership can accomplish: in Fort Worth, where philanthropy helped centralize multiple early childhood functions under a single administrator, and in the Panhandle, where start-up funds helped launch the first Education Service Center-operated early childhood center in Texas. These local bright spots give us real hope.

Texas grantmakers came to commission this landscape scan I'll review today out of necessity. As funders worked toward understanding where to best deploy grant funding to support solutions, there were some successes. But overwhelmingly, there was such a lack of publicly available data and information upon which to make decisions. It was clear that dollars alone could not solve some of the most intense challenges.

Today I'm grateful for the opportunity to provide y'all with context of the early childhood system at large that I hope supports you in delivering a governance framework that expands Texans' access to affordable, high-quality childcare and prekindergarten learning environments.

My testimony centers on the problem we are collectively trying to solve, the structural root cause behind it, and a vision for where this task force can lead.

1. You will hear from many invaluable perspectives throughout this process: parents, providers, school leaders, and advocates. You will likely discuss the cost of infant care, burdensome regulations, and the tension between public and private Pre-K. These are real, persistent challenges in our current system. But rather than tackling them independently, we encourage you to look beyond silos and opt to design an ecosystem that ensures each child can seamlessly transition year-over-year, in a system designed to ensure cohesion for the kid and families, and produce strong, age-appropriate outcomes.
2. **Take a look at SLIDE 6**
3. Texas is home to over 2.3 million children age five and under. 66 percent of children under age 6 have both parents in the workforce – many of whom struggle to afford full-time care. The state controls significantly

funding to serve these young children. And yet, Texas loses more than \$9 billion from its economy every year due to child care breakdowns, clearly signaling a growing economic problem. Nearly one in three Texas parents has left, turned down, or changed a job because of child care — and more than half do so when their child is two or younger.

4. And our long-term outcomes are uneven: Only 52% of third graders are meeting grade-level expectations in reading, and 46% in math.
5. Ultimately, this points to a good government problem. Texas controls billions in early childhood funding and is still ranked among the ten least coordinated systems in the nation. For a state that values efficient and effective government, we have real room to improve here.

So what is contributing to this problem?

1. Take a look at **SLIDE 13**. There are roughly ten state entities responsible for pieces of the early childhood system — each with its own rules, standards, and accountability structures. TEA sets quality expectations for Pre-K in school settings; TWC sets them for child care — even though both serve four-year-olds. HHSC oversees early intervention for children under three; TEA takes over at age three. Families and providers struggle to navigate all of it.
2. **SLIDE 15**: And the misalignment extends regionally. TEA works with 20 Education Service Centers; TWC works with 28 Local Workforce Development Boards, and HHSC oversees 34 regulatory offices across the state. Different boundaries, different mandates, different constituents. Even the most committed local leaders are hamstrung by this structural complexity.
3. **SLIDE 16**: On the funding side, billions of dollars flow through upward of ten distinct streams — each administered by separate state and local entities, on separate timelines, under separate rules. Coordination is nearly impossible, and efficiency often slips through the cracks.
4. The result, as I'm sure you'll hear today, is: overburdened families, unsupported employers, a broken child care market, ineffective data, and inconsistent experiences for children that depend entirely on their zip code.

IDEAL STATE

But if we've learned anything at Philanthropy Advocates over the years, it's that it doesn't have to be that way. We believe there's an ideal state within reach, which you can see on **Slide 25**.

What we are asking this task force to consider is what it would take to get to a Texas with a single vision, aligned regional coordination, consistent quality standards, and connected data. We want every dollar of public investment aimed at the same goal.

States like Arkansas, Louisiana, and Virginia have already made this shift, moving dramatically up national efficiency rankings as a result. These states can provide a **helpful reference** as Texas seeks to simplify and align our current system.

No single community, funder, or provider can solve the fragmented early childhood ecosystem on their own, no matter how hard they work. But this task force has a rare and generational opportunity to build on recent progress made by the Texas Legislature in this policy area. Members of this task force can recommend a governance framework that gives every stakeholder the alignment they need to succeed.

Twenty-three organizations signed the letter we've provided you, which echoes much of what I've shared with you today.

Philanthropy Advocates is a ready partner in this work. We are grateful to Governor Abbott and to each of you for keeping our youngest Texans...and their families... at the center of everything you do here.

Thank you and I'm happy to take any questions.

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