

# 2023 STATE AFFAIRS FORUM PROPOSAL BOOK

March 2nd – 5th  
Austin, Texas



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



TEXAS YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT



**TEXAS YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT**

**Proposals of the  
2023 YMCA Texas Youth and Government  
State Affair Forum**



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**Author:** Matthew Wooton  
**School:** Imagine International Academy of North Texas  
**YMCA:** McKinney YMCA **City:** McKinney

**2022 STATE AFFAIRS FORUM PROPOSAL**

**Title or Purpose:**

Gerrymandering in Texas

**Major Area to be Affected:**

Texas State Senate Districts, Texas State House of Representative Districts, and US Congressional Districts

**Justification:**

Gerrymandering is the act of redrawing district borders in order to bias it toward a political party. It is a system that serves to undermine a founding principle of our country, the right to representation. In Texas, Democrats have not won a statewide election since 1944. This is caused by Republican-ran redistricting commissions that create districts that are near-impossible to be won by other party candidates, as they have historically controlled Texas's government. This leads to a situation in which the only true political voice that is represented in Texan elections are those that vote in primaries. In the 2022 primaries, this was only 18% of registered voters. This has impacted all facets of the electoral process to the federal level, with Texas's 38 congressional seats as a result of the latest U.S. Census.

Texas has 31 state senate districts effective January 2013, with each district having an ideal 2020 census population of 940,178 people; 150 state representative districts effective January 2021, with an ideal 2020 census population of 194,303; and 38 federal congressional districts effective 2020, with an ideal 2020 census population of 766,987.

Partisan drafters shape districts with surgical precision with two main methods called packing and cracking. A packed district is drawn to include as many of the opposing party's voters as possible. This weakens surrounding districts, because they lack opposition voters, diluting them, which can be defined as cracking. Examples of this include the 33<sup>rd</sup> congressional district, the most gerrymandered district in the state with a Reock degree of compactness at .044. Defined by the National Atlas as mathematically more likely to be gerrymandered, the 33<sup>rd</sup> congressional district is 98.6% more "squiggly" than other U.S districts across the country.

This has a particular impact on communities of color, as the 2020 census shows that 95% of the 4 million increase in population over the past decade. According to the Princeton Gerrymandering Project, there has not been a reflection of this in redistricting, citing the elimination of a Latino electoral opportunity in Congressional District 23. Redistricting removes voters' choices, undermines public opinion, and makes government less responsive and less respected as it slips out of the control of its citizens.

**Proposal for Action:**

This proposal aims to establish new provisions for solving this issue of gerrymandering, first by establishing an IRC, or an Independent Redistricting Commission, where a panel of two Democrats, two Republicans, and an independent chairperson will oversee the reorganization of congressional districts from scratch. This will ensure that districts will be roughly equal in population and be drawn in consideration to the Voting Rights Act.

Districts will then be drawn using computer algorithms based on existing algorithms, such as one proposed by Brian Olsen, to establish districts algorithmically, which would ensure that human interference will be minimized. Usage of political data, such as voter registration records, will be prohibited. These districts will be evaluated by the Reock Degree of Compactness and the Polsby-Popper test, which essentially evaluates the area of the district, considering the landscape of the area itself. These have been used by district reevaluation committees to ensure that districts will be in order.



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**Author:** Nicole Patel and Amulya Ganta

**School:** Legacy High School

**YMCA:** Midland YMCA

**City:** Midland

## **2022 STATE AFFAIRS FORUM PROPOSAL**

**Title or Purpose:** Plastic Bag Ban in Texas Businesses

**Major Area to be Affected:** Grocery stores, shopping centers, the environment

**Justification:** Plastic bags have been used for decades, but not without harmful consequences. They are costly and difficult to recycle and most end up in landfill sites, taking around 300 years to photodegrade. However, the consequences don't stop there as plastic bags become micro plastics that absorb toxins and continue to pollute the environment. The Texas Environment states, Texas residents use over 9 billion check-out bags each year, or 25 million each day. Over 95% of these single-use, disposable bags end up in our landfills or escape to become pollution and litter. Nearly 34% of sea turtles have decreased due to plastic pollution and almost 1,800 animals were killed by plastic bags in the coastal waters. The issue continues as greenhouse gases are the major cause of depletion of the ozone layer, thereby allowing for no protection for the earth from dangerous ultraviolet radiation. The chemicals that plastic bags contain generate the poisonous gases methane and ethylene when exposed to sunlight. 3.8 percent of greenhouse gas liberation is from the consequence of plastic usage and these gases are said to be damaging to human health. Texas is one of the largest contributors to plastic bag pollution, making it imperative for our proposal today.

**Proposal for Action:** Plastic bags serve as a prominent indicator of harm in our environment and society, but their negative impacts are often overlooked. It is important to take drastic steps that will ensure that corporations don't overlook the issue and that small businesses are protected. California and several other states such as Oregon and New York have also taken significant action in this regard which serves as a great model for a plan of action for Texas. There are three aspects that need to be addressed to effectively solve the issue: adjustment, penalties, and regulation.

To be more specific:

- Fines of up to \$1,000 per day for the first violation, \$2,000 per day for the second violation, and \$5,000 per day for the third. Subsequent violations will include a shutdown of businesses until the issue is resolved.
- Phasing out period of 2 years so businesses can adjust to the changes
- The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality will send out inspectors periodically to ensure that these regulations are being ensured and will develop a report box for consumers to report businesses that aren't complying

**Results to be Expected:** By eliminating plastic bags in Texas, humans, animals, and the environment are guaranteed to survive and thrive. Plastic bags bring a plethora of harm into our society including pollution, carcinogens, and an increase in greenhouse gases. However, these issues can be greatly reduced when removing these harmful plastic materials that Texans use in immense amounts. In turn, we will see a reduction of river pollution and residential waste as a whole. And, we will see a brighter and greener Texas!



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**Author:** Vyoma Patel & Divya Dumpala  
**School:** Imagine International Academy of North Texas  
**YMCA:** McKinney YMCA      **City:** McKinney, Texas

# STATE AFFAIRS FORUM PROPOSAL

1. **Title or Purpose:**

2. Homelessness in Texas

3.

4. **Major Area to be Affected:**

5. Counties of Wichita, Archer, Parker, Collin, Travis, Bexar, Fort Bend, Harris, Leon, Dallas,  
6. El Paso, Young, Waco, McLennan, and 217 others

7.

8. **Justification:**

9. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) defines a homeless individual  
10. as someone "who lacks housing, including an individual whose primary residence during  
11. the night is a supervised public or private facility (e.g., shelters) that provides temporary  
12. living accommodations, and an individual who is a resident in transitional housing." In  
13. Texas, over 27,000 people are homeless– or approximately 9.4 for every 10,000 people.  
14. Many areas with a high cost of living, especially high housing costs, consequently, have  
15. higher rates of homelessness. Since 2012, Texas housing prices have risen 99.6%,  
16. equating to an annual home appreciation rate of 7.15%. Homelessness puts people at a  
17. higher risk for poor health, victimization, loneliness, and depression, which lead to  
18. chemical dependency, crime, and several other problems. With rising housing costs,  
19. lower wages, and the ineffective policies of our local and federal governments, the  
20. number of people experiencing homelessness has been steadily growing for the past  
21. decade by more than 5.3% per year. As a result of the pandemic, this situation is only  
22. worsening.

23.

24. **Proposal for Action:**

25. The Housing First approach prioritizes providing permanent housing to homeless  
26. individuals, thus ending their homelessness and allowing them to pursue personal goals  
27. and improve their quality of life. This is based on the belief that basic necessities, such as  
28. a place to live and food, must be fulfilled before attending to anything less critical, such  
29. as getting a job, budgeting emergency hospitalization bills, or managing substance  
30. abuse. Additionally, Housing First is guided by the understanding that client choice is  
31. essential in housing selection and supportive service participation, and that exercising  
32. that choice is more likely to make a client successful in remaining housed and improving  
33. their overall quality of life. Already-existing Continuum of Care (CoC) programs have a  
34. high barrier of entry compared to the Housing First approach; homeless people are  
35. currently required to make progress on any mental health issues, entailing a long process  
36. of at least 6 months prior to passing a certain standard to be housed. In contrast,  
37. Housing First immediately provides clients with a home and subsequently addresses other  
38. issues, acknowledging that factors such as addiction and job security are difficult to  
39. manage without stable housing. Housed clients gradually begin to make payments  
40. towards their housing at the discretion of their case manager. In other words, housing is  
41. the starting point, not the endpoint.

42.

43. **Results to be Expected:**

44. If our proposal were to be enacted, our results to be expected would follow a similar  
45. manner to Finland, the European Union, Canada, New York, and Colorado, all of which  
46. are using the Housing First approach. In these places, the rate of homelessness  
47. decreased between 40% and 70%. Given the increased stability that comes with this  
48. solution, previously homeless individuals are less likely to be replaced or fall back onto  
49. the streets.



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**Author:** Catherine Dixon  
**School:** Homeschool  
**YMCA:** Richardson YMCA

**City:** Dallas

## **STATE AFFAIRS FORUM PROPOSAL**

1. **Title or Purpose:**
  2. To educate and advise high schoolers on harmful and abusive relationships
  - 3.
  4. **Major Area to be Affected:**
  5. The Texas Education Agency, Texas State school boards, citizens of Texas, all high
  6. school students in Texas.
  - 7.
  8. **Justification:**
  9. According to the Oxford dictionary, sex education is defined as "A program for school
  10. children, sometimes for adults with instruction on the anatomy and physiology of sex
  11. and discussion of human sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy and
  12. how to avoid it when it is unwanted." Generally, there are 6 topics that are taught within
  13. most sex education programs. These include: "how to say no to sex", methods of birth
  14. control, STDs, where to get birth control, how to prevent HIV/AIDS, and how to use a
  15. condom. None of these topics even attempt to address the prevalent issue involving the
  16. devastating effects of abusive relationships. In fact, more than a quarter of Texas teens
  17. and adults express an interest in learning more about sexual assault and abusive
  18. relationships. One of the dangers of such relationships is sexual assault. Peter Gordon,
  19. author of Sexuality Education and the Prevention of Sexual Assault states that
  20. "sensitizing children... to the nature and extent of sexual violence and giving permission
  21. to discuss it are essential steps in tackling it." Another danger is catfishing and
  22. inappropriate solicitations. A survey found that 1 in 5 children (ages 10-17) received
  23. unwanted sexual solicitations online. If we want to even dream of eradicating sexual
  24. crime among students, then we have to take the necessary steps toward education.
  - 25.
  26. **Proposal for Action:**
  27. The Texas Board of Education will create a class in which safety and caution are taught
  28. in regard to romantic relationships (whether they be heterosexual or homosexual). This
  29. class will be mandatory and will last for 1 semester. Students can take it in any of the
  30. four years of high school. The course curriculum will be decided by a committee within
  31. the Texas State Board of Education. One or more of the members of this committee will
  32. be employees/volunteers of the non-profit organization RAINN.
  33. This class will aim to teach the following:
  34. - The meaning and implications of sexual consent
  35. - What rape and sexual assault mean and the legal consequences that may result
  36. - The signs and red flags associated abusive relationships
  37. - How to set boundaries safely and effectively whether those be physical or mental
  38. - How to safely navigate a relationship online
  39. - The most safe and effective way to report sexual assault (including same-sex
  40. assault)
  41. - How to defend yourself physically in case of an encounter
  42. Furthermore, the class will meet one to two days a week for a maximum of 45 minutes.
  43. If a student is unable to attend the class due to religious/moral concerns, they may be
  44. exempt from taking this class.
  45. The instructor of this course must be over the age of 25. Additionally, they must have a
  46. teaching certificate and additional training. This additional training will be determined by
  47. the committee and may include: social work degree, child psychology degree, social
  48. justice degree etc.
- If this class is not offered in a school, it is within the State's jurisdiction to punish the school accordingly (decreased funding, etc).



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Author: Anusha Narway
School: Coppell High School
YMCA: Coppell YMCA

City: Coppell

STATE AFFAIRS FORUM PROPOSAL

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Title or Purpose: Strategies surrounding Pathogen Containment Protocol

Major Area to be Affected: Texas Legislature, Texas residents, Hospitals, and Research Facilities

Justification:

With the rise of COVID-19, cases have grown rapidly, triggering policy responses to this global health threat. While it is known there are a number of recommended guidelines, there is not a distinct mandate. The response to a new pandemic, such as COVID 19, is typically based on four key pillars: 1) surveillance and detection; 2) clinical management of cases; 3) prevention of the spread in the community; and 4) maintaining essential services. Actions across the four pillars complement and closely interact and support one another. For example, containment measures based on identification of cases and contact tracing heavily depend on excellent surveillance and detection infrastructures. In the absence of effective drugs and vaccines, containment and mitigation measures are the key public health interventions currently available to minimise the dramatic health consequences caused by COVID-19.

Proposal for Action:

Based on the tier system of multidrug-resistant organisms (MDROs), the most effective strategies have proven to be under the healthcare investigation sector, contact investigation, and infection control measures. This proposal focuses on the implementation of 2 guidelines that have proven time and time again to reveal reduced attack rates.

- 1. Containment strategies aim to minimise the risk of transmission from infected to non-infected individuals in order to stop the outbreak. This will include actions to detect cases early on and trace an infected individual's contacts, and the confinement of affected persons. i.e. Contact Tracing
-> The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) will create a statewide database in which all healthcare providers will have to enter data about each case involving communicable pathogens.
2. Mitigation strategies aim to slow the disease, and to reduce the peak in health care demand. This may include policy actions such as social distancing, including a full society 'lock-down', and improved personal and environmental hygiene.
-> The DSHS may issue an appropriate mitigation strategy for high-risk regions within texas. Possible locations include "hot-spots" like supermarkets and restaurants.

As required by Texas Government Code Chapter 2056. These strategies will be included in the DSHS Strategic Plan under Goal 3:Protect the health and safety of vulnerable citizens.

Results to be Expected:

Modelling studies consistently conclude that packages of containment and mitigation measures, as opposed to individual policies are the most effective approach to reduce the impact of an epidemic. Depending on the methodology and the policy package evaluated, studies generally conclude that comprehensive packages can reduce the attack rate (i.e. the proportion of individuals in a population who contract the disease) by at least 40%, and possibly more. With this proposal, we move a step closer to be able to determine universal guidelines that can be mandated by the DSHS for the state of Texas.



**Author:** Nandini Potturi

**School:** Imagine International Academy of North Texas

**YMCA:** McKinney YMCA

**City:** Mckinney YMCA

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**2022 STATE AFFAIRS FORUM PROPOSAL  
(Template)**

**Title or Purpose:**

Reproductive rights in the state of Texas.

**Major Area to be Affected:**

Texas

**Justification:**

Based on Roe v. Wade of 1973, abortions have been made to support the rights of women. Countless court cases from 1973 to the present time all of the rules put by legislation to help women and give them safe and regulated rules. 3 out of every 10 female rape and incest victims become pregnant, 58 percent of them being under the age of 18. The supreme court decided that there should be no burden for the woman to choose what she wants to do with the fetus after Planned Parenthood v. Casey trial. The main idea is that the law intends to protect women's rights but offers limited to no options for women to choose from. Women make up 50.5% of the United States population, and of that percent, 24% have an abortion by the age of 45. This is affecting almost half of the women population in the country, and out of that 50.5%, 58% live in states with extreme restrictions or complete bans on abortions. The pre-NICU cut-off date to save the child is 23 weeks, and a premature child born before that date can not be legally saved even if the child is making a recovery.

**Proposal for Action:**

My proposal for action is to implement a law that states:

All biologically female persons have the right to an abortion until the 15th-week mark. All biologically female persons who are victims and have been raped and or victims of incest have until 23 weeks to get an abortion if a rape kit has been conducted. Victims of incest will have an amniotic fluid taken and matched to the aggressor's DNA.

**Results to be Expected:**

This gives women the chance to make decisions for themselves to better their future and the future of their child.





**Author:** Elise Bostian

**School:** Episcopal School of Dallas

**YMCA:** Semones Family YMCA

**City:** Dallas

## **2023 STATE AFFAIRS FORUM PROPOSAL (155)**

1. **Title or Purpose:**

2. Create Energy Consumption Limits for Cryptocurrency Mines Within the State of Texas

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7. **Major Area to be Affected:**

8. ERCOT (Electric Reliability Council of Texas)

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13. **Justification:**

14. In the year of 2020 within the US, Bitcoin mining created an estimated 40 billion pounds of

15. carbon emissions. The United States mines the most Bitcoin in the world, and Texas is

16. responsible for 14% of this mining, and is beginning to take the lead as more and more

17. cryptocurrency mining companies move to Texas because of the deregulated energy grid

18. in the state. Texas is predicted to become a global superpower in cryptocurrency mining.

19. Because cryptocurrency creates billions of pounds of carbon emissions, it is the

20. responsibility of Texas to create limits of energy consumption for mines in order to limit

21. Texas's carbon footprint. Crypto miners currently account for about 1.2 gigawatts of

22. electricity demand in Texas, according to the Texas Blockchain Council. That's enough to

23. power about 240,000 homes.

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28. **Proposal for Action:**

29. In order to encourage limiting the usage of energy for cryptocurrency mining, companies

30. that use more than 200 million watts to mine bitcoin must be fined and contribute payment

31. that would cover electricity bills of low-income households. The amount paid towards these

32. electricity bills would be directly determined by the amount of watts used. For example, if

34. a company were to use 300 million watts, they would have to dedicate payment towards

35. an additional 50 million watts for housing in low-income communities. The local govern-

36. ment would decide which households and areas need the electricity the most.

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41. **Results to be Expected:**

42. By forcing crypto mining companies to contribute such a significant fee for mining within

43. Texas, it would force companies to either limit their mining or donate a significant amount

44. of money that would help lower income communities acquire necessary power. Limiting

45. mining brings good to the environment, and funding low income communities helps close a

46. gap between the rich and the poor within Texas. Both of these effects would result in

47. common good for the people within the state.

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49.



# TEXAS YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT

**Author:** Lindsey Khuu and Khanh Hoang **School:** Garland High School

**YMCA:** White Rock

**City:** Garland

## STATE AFFAIRS FORUM PROPOSAL

1. **Title or Purpose**

2. Expanding the Right to Vote to Prisoners

3.

4. **Major Area(s) to be Affected**

5. Felons/Prisoners in the state of Texas

6.

7. **Justification**

8. If the person has been convicted of a felony, they are prohibited from voting until they complete

9. a sentence, probation or even parole. Texas automatically restores voting rights when an

10. ex-felon is entirely finished with their sentence and penalties.

11. A felony typically ranges from one to 10 years to life in prison. The average parole time is 19

12. months. During this phase, the person still cannot vote under Texas law and would be

13. committing a new crime if they attempted to do so. Currently, Texas's prison population is one of

14. the highest in the nation. Texas incarcerates 860 per every 100,000 people since 2020, and the

15. state operates the country's largest prison system. If the Texas prison population were a city, it

16. would be among the state's 15 largest.

17.

18. Telling prisoners they cannot vote is premised on the idea that convicts undergo a sort of

19. temporary "civic death"—a suspension of normal rights as citizens while they are behind bars.

20. However, the Supreme Court decided that prisoners cannot have their citizenship stripped as a

21. punishment for a crime. As Justice Earl Warren wrote in the 1958 case *Trop v. Dulles*:

22. "Citizenship is not a right that expires upon misbehavior."

23.

24. If prisoners remain citizens and retain their civic status throughout their sentences, then it

25. follows that prisoners should enjoy the most basic of their civil rights, the right to cast a ballot.

26. Disenfranchising them creates a class of people still subject to the laws of the United States but

27. without a voice in the way they're governed—similar to taxation without representation.

28.

29. Prisoners cannot vote, yet they're counted in the population for the legislative district of their

30. prison, the main factor that determines a state's number of representatives and its presidential

31. electoral votes. It's a practice the NAACP calls "prison-based gerrymandering." If that sounds

32. familiar, it should: Such a policy resembles the Constitution's notorious three-fifths clause, which

33. denied slaves the right to vote but counted them in the Census for the purposes of amassing

34. more pro-slavery representatives. In Texas prisoners are counted in their home districts, which

35. evens out the representation. But still, those prisoners are not voting for those representatives.

36.

37. **Proposal for Action**

38. All felons, inmates, and prisoners will be able to execute their right to vote regardless of whether

39. or not they are on parole, probation, or in prison. Our proposal for action is based on other

40. state's policies that allow felons and incarcerated individuals to vote.

41. Corrections officials will open the jail to visitors for monthly voter registration drives and civics

42. lessons. They also offer two weekends of early voting and provide voter education materials such

43. as informational videos about candidates, importance of voter turnout, and etc.

44.

45. **Results to be Expected**

46. 1. Prisoners will no longer be disenfranchised and will be able to execute their unalienable,

47. constitutional right to vote.

48. 2. A prison constituency with rights to vote and related rights of free speech can engage in

49. civic activism that will continue after release and help them reintegrate back into society.

50. 3. Increased voter turnout in elections

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