



88th Legislative  
Session, 2022-2023

# GIRLS EMPOWERMENT NETWORK LEGISLATIVE BRIEF

# OUR POLICY PLATFORM AND MISSION

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We support policies that promote girls' well-being so they can thrive in achieving their goals and advocating for a world where girls are unstoppable.



**MENTAL HEALTH**



**HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**



**SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS**



**EQUITY**

*We center girls' experiences and teach them the skills to speak truth to power.*



## Our Policy Journey

Since 2020, Girls Empowerment Network has hosted a Mental Health Policy Fellow through the Hogg Foundation's generous award.

Lead with Your Voice and Unstoppable Activist Spark Kits curriculum was created with the help of our first Policy Fellow. The curriculum aimed to help girls develop critical self-awareness, gain confidence in their ability to exercise leadership, and apply key decision-making skills to generating progress on real-world issues affecting their communities.

In 2022, we implemented a new lobbying policy, giving us both freedom to engage advocacy work while protecting our status as a 501(c)3 organization. We also began outreach efforts for our Spark Change Program, and hired our third cohort of facilitators in 2023.

**2017**

In March 2017, Girls Empowerment Network hosted the first annual Girl Advocacy Day at the Texas Capitol. This event inspires youth to be civically engaged, helps them with developing their unique voice to advocate for themselves and the wider community. In 2021, this program was incorporated into the Spark Change Project and renamed Spark Change Day

Vanessa and the Spark Change Project peer facilitators provided testimony on 17 occasions during the 2021 legislative sessions, with several peer facilitators stepping up for testimony on multiple distinct issues.

In July 2022, Ana O'Quin, LMSW, joined our team as the next Mental Health Policy Fellow, and partnered with the facilitators to take action on more than 50 bills during the 88th Legislative Session.



# Organization Highlights

## Took Action on 53 Bills

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- 5 written testimonies
- 5 verbal testimonies
- 3 invited testimonies
- Resolution filed in honor of our organization - [HR 461](#)
- Active member on 5 legislative coalitions

## Grassroots Advocacy Team Established

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- Five strategic action alerts
- 109 sign ups on advocacy and action alert news letter

## Spark Change Project Highlights

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- Testimony on 3 bills: [HB 45](#), [HB 4199](#), and [HB 567](#)
- 15 office visits and more than 4,000 steps walked for [HB 98](#) and [HB 2095](#)
- [Interview with KVUE](#)
- Speaking opportunity at Austin Area Urban League
- 71 youth in attendance on Spark Change Day
- 19 power chat advocacy leaders and 3 Representatives at Spark Change Day
- 11 attendees at Spark Change Camp; three full days of insightful speakers, advocacy lessons, and connection



# Bills We Supported



## MENTAL HEALTH

Bill	Status	Impact on Youth
<u>HB 98</u> , Relating to the administration, provision, and Medicaid reimbursement of mental health or behavioral health services provided to certain public school students.	Did Not Pass	Would expand mental health access in schools through partnerships with Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHA's), as well as reimburse services under Medicaid.
<u>HB 1157</u> , Relating to excused absences from public school for certain students to attend mental health care appointments.	Did Not Pass	Would allow mental health appointments for students to be excused absences at schools.
<u>SB 948</u> , and other bills, Relating to the permissible uses of the school safety allotment and the creation of a mental health allotment under the Foundation School Program.	Did Not Pass	Would give school districts dedicated funding for mental health services for students, including preventative mental health measures.
<u>HB 1599</u> , Relating to implementation of an express lane option for determining eligibility and enrolling certain individuals in Medicaid or the child health plan program.	Did Not Pass	Would give eligible youth access to health coverage under Medicaid or CHIP.
* <u>HB 4777</u> , Relating to the model training curriculum for school district peace officers and school resource officers.	Did Not Pass	Would expand training for school peace officers on grief and trauma, reducing the impact of the school to prison pipeline and helping school peace officers respond to the needs of students.

\*High priority bill: A bill that will have high impact on youth that we prioritized our advocacy work around

# Bills We Supported



## HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Bill	Status	Impact on Youth
<u>SB 855</u> , Relating to judicial training requirements regarding family violence.	Signed by Governor	Continued training for judges regarding survivors of family violence and domestic violence, leading to improved outcomes in cases for families and youth.
<u>SB 806</u> , Relating to the duties of peace officers regarding interactions with victims of sexual assault	Signed by Governor	Training for peace officers interacting with survivors of sexual assault, leading to more referrals to resources, positive interactions with peace officers, and higher levels of reporting.
SB 1402, Relating to the composition, continuation, and duties of the Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force, compensation for task force members and certain other task force participants, and establishment of a mandatory training program for persons responding to reports of and treating survivors of child sexual abuse and adult sexual assault.	Signed by Governor	Additional community representation in the Sexual Assault Survivor's Task Force and more robust training requirements for adults regarding trauma-informed practices.
* <u>HB 3788</u> , Relating to school district policies on dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment; providing an administrative penalty.	Did Not Pass	Would require schools to adopt expanded policies regarding dating violence, stalking, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment in schools and develops comprehensive training for school staff and school peace officers.
* <u>HB 2095</u> , Relating to the restrictions that may be included in a protective order on a person found to have committed family violence.	Did Not Pass	Would require survivors of family violence to be given information on protective orders in court proceedings to allow for more informed decisions.
HB 4016, healthy relationship education in public schools.	Did Not Pass	Would provide age-appropriate healthy relationship education to Texas students through the State Board of Education, and implement parental consent.

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# Bills We Supported



## SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

Bill	Status	Impact on Youth
<b>*HB 567</b> , Relating to discrimination on the basis of hair texture or protective hairstyle associated with race.	Signed by Governor	Protects students of color from being discriminated against in school and in extracurricular activities in relation to their hair and hair protective styles.
<b>*SB 133</b> , Relating to prohibiting the physical restraint of or use of chemical irritants or Tasers on certain public school students by peace officers and school security personnel under certain circumstances.	Signed by Governor	Protects youth under the age of 10 from the trauma of being physically restrained or from the use of chemical irritant spray.
<b>*HB 45</b> , Relating to ethnic studies instruction in public schools.	Did Not Pass	Would expand ethnic studies instruction in public schools to increase student pride in their own cultures, histories, and heritage.
<b>HB 36</b> , Relating to the membership of a public school's threat assessment and safe and supportive school team and committee and the permissible uses of the school safety allotment under the public school finance system.	Did Not Pass	Would add a social emotional learning coordinator to school safety coordinator teams, increasing SEL interventions in schools.

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# Bills We Supported



## EQUITY

Bill	Status	Impact on Youth
* <a href="#">HB 12</a> , Relating to the duration of services provided under Medicaid to women following a pregnancy.	Signed by Governor	Extends postpartum Medicaid from 3 months to 12 months, increasing access to postpartum services, including behavioral health.
* <a href="#">SB 379</a> , Relating to an exemption from sales and use taxes for certain family care items.	Signed by Governor	Eliminates the "pink tax", tax on menstrual products, as well as maternity clothing, diapers, and baby bottles.
<a href="#">SB 412</a> , Protections and early registration for parenting students enrolled in higher education. And <a href="#">SB 459</a> , Relating to early registration for parenting students at public institutions of higher education.	Signed by Governor	Gives parenting students early registration for higher education and academic protections, increasing equitable access to higher education.
<a href="#">HB 1626</a> , Relating to a public school student's transition from an alternative education program to a regular educational environment, including parental rights related to that transition, and the admission of certain students with a criminal or disciplinary history.	Did Not Pass	Would streamline credit transfers, and include students and parents in transition process from alternative education programs, a key factor in reductant truancy and dropout rates.

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# Bills We Opposed

Bill	Status	Impact on Youth
<p><b>*SB 14</b>, Relating to prohibitions on the provision to certain children of procedures and treatments for gender transitioning, gender reassignment, or gender dysphoria and on the use of public money or public assistance to provide those procedures and treatments.</p>	<p>Signed by Governor</p>	<p>Prohibits gender affirming healthcare to trans youth, inhibiting and negatively impacting their physical health, mental health, and well-being.</p>
<p><b>SB 15</b>, Relating to requiring public institution of higher education students who compete in intercollegiate athletic competitions to compete based on biological sex.</p>	<p>Signed by Governor</p>	<p>Prohibits trans athletes from competing on teams that allows them to express their own gender identity.</p>
<p><b>SB 17</b>, Relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at public institutions of higher education.</p>	<p>Signed by Governor</p>	<p>Prohibits universities from establishing or maintaining DEI offices, closing down needed diversity and equity initiatives for higher education students.</p>
<p><b>SB 763</b>, Relating to allowing public schools to employ or accept as volunteers chaplains.</p>	<p>Signed by Governor</p>	<p>School chaplains do not have the same strict qualifications and trainings required for mental health professions in schools and could greatly harm students and their mental health outcomes.</p>
<p><b>HB 900</b>, Relating to the regulation of library materials sold to or included in public school libraries.</p>	<p>Signed by Governor</p>	<p>Similar bills regarding oversight of library books historically have targeted books related to LGBTQ and sex education, limiting representation and access to needed information for students. School librarians and staff already are able to censor and provide age-appropriate books to the students in their schools.</p>

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# Bills We Opposed

Bill	Status	Impact on Youth
<p><b><u>HB 20</u></b>, Relating to measures to ensure the safety and welfare of the border region of this state, including protection from ongoing criminal activity and public health threats and the establishment of the Border Protection Unit; creating a criminal offense; creating a civil penalty.</p>	<p>Did Not Pass</p>	<p>Would increase harsh penalties for students trying to safely migrate to the U.S. with their families.</p>
<p><b><u>SB 959/ HB 1149</u></b>, Relating to parental consent for certain activities engaged in by a school district employee or contractor with respect to the parent's child.</p>	<p>Did Not Pass</p>	<p>Although parental consent is already required for mental health intervention in schools, this bill would require parental consent for assessment, and due to its broad language would create unnecessary administrative burden on both schools and families, leading to less mental health services for students.</p>
<p><b><u>HB 1507</u></b>, Relating to prohibiting public school programs dedicated to celebrating or providing special instruction regarding a sexual preference; authorizing a fine.</p>	<p>Did Not Pass</p>	<p>Would effectively eliminate Pride events and extracurriculars regarding sexuality.</p>
<p><b><u>HB 890</u></b> - Relating to parental rights and public school responsibilities regarding instructional materials.</p>	<p>Did Not Pass</p>	<p>Would add "Don't Say Gay" provisions to instructional material, effectively banning pride events and student clubs such as the GSA.</p>
<p><b><u>SB 1515</u></b> - Relating to the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools.</p>	<p>Did Not Pass</p>	<p>Displaying the Ten Commandments in public schools would not give students of other religious and faith identities the ability to feel acknowledged and appreciated.</p>

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THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING  
GIRLS EMPOWERMENT NETWORK AND  
HELPING US CREATE A WORLD WHERE  
GIRLS ARE UNSTOPPABLE.

## Contact

Have questions or feedback for our  
policy team? Email  
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Want to be a member  
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