



# Policy Recommendations

*for the* **TEXAS 88<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

**In the 88th Legislative Session**, Texas lawmakers have the opportunity to propose and pass policies that will have meaningful impacts on Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) across Texas. With an anticipated budget surplus and the highest number of AAPI legislative lawmakers in Texas history, Asian Texans for Justice is optimistic for the progress that can come out of this session.

**AAPIs are the fastest growing racial group in Texas and nationwide.** Representing more than 50 ethnic groups and speaking over 100 languages, AAPIs make up 6.6% of Texas' population—more than 1.9 million Texans—and face unique challenges such as the increasing anti-AAPI hate incidents, barriers to civic participation, inadequate representation in school curricula, and lack of language access and affordable healthcare.<sup>1</sup>

Taking into account the stated policy preferences of AAPI Texas voters, Asian Texans for Justice makes the following recommendations:

## ABOUT US

Asian Texans for Justice (ATJ), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was founded to be a voice for our state's diverse Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community — to claim our space and inspire Texas to invest in our stories. We envision a future where all people feel bold in their belonging. We connect Asian and Pacific Islander Texans with civic action to build personal and political power.

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## VOTING RIGHTS

Legislation passed in 2021 (SB1) led to disproportionate impacts on AAPI Texans' ability to engage in elections. Increased hurdles to voting included new ID requirements for voting by mail and additional steps for voters who need language support. A Brennan Center for Justice analysis found that SB1's ID requirements most impacted AAPI voters, of all racial groups in Texas, in the 2022 primary election. Overall, **19% of AAPI Texan requests for a ballot by mail were denied.**<sup>2</sup> We recommend the 88th Legislature reform voting laws to eliminate SB 1's burdensome mail-ballot restrictions.

SB 1 also created barriers to vote for the 82% of Asian American adults who speak a language other than English at home, and 34% are Limited English Proficient (speak English less than "very well").<sup>3</sup> Texas lawmakers should **improve access to language support in voting** to ensure all Texans have equal access to the ballot.

## PUBLIC EDUCATION

With over 5 million students in Texas' public education system, data regarding students' ethnic identity, English language status, and other identities should be captured by school districts to inform policies. Legislation is needed to disaggregate data on AAPI students to best identify how to meet the needs of all students.

Asian Americans have been an important part of United States and Texas history. Representation and inclusion are critical parts of ensuring all students receive an accurate and quality education. Texas lawmakers should encourage the **inclusion of Asian American history, cultures, literature, and languages** in school curricula at all levels.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the leading cause of death for Asian American youth, ages 14-24.<sup>4</sup> The 88th Legislature should **expand investments to mental health resources** in public schools to provide all youth, including vulnerable AAPI youth, access to the mental healthcare they need.

## HEALTH

As the fastest growing racial group in Texas, AAPIs exhibit diverse needs, resources, and levels of access regarding healthcare. To identify and adequately address health disparities, the Legislature should **invest additional resources to data disaggregation in healthcare**, particularly around issues of mental health, reproductive health, and LGBTQIA+ and gender-based violence.

Polling data has shown that AAPI voters believe that there are inadequate language resources for non-English speakers in Texas. Texas lawmakers should **support increased access to in-language care and in-language educational resources** so that AAPI Texans are able to access the healthcare they deserve.

The majority of AAPI Texans (77%) support the expansion of Medicare. Texas lawmakers have continued to deny Texans access to additional healthcare options, leading to billions of dollars lost in eligible Medicaid funding from the federal government. The 88th Legislature should revisit the **expansion of federal healthcare programs for eligible Texans.**

<sup>1</sup> As reflected in a 2022 report by Asian Texans for Justice, AAPI voters in Texas also express policy priorities regarding the economy, access to reproductive healthcare, and gun safety legislation. The Deciding Margin: How AAPI Voters Will Shape the Future of Texas, Asian Texans for Justice, September 2022, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/619d5e6e0ee499016360dc2c/t/6332673bdd27f9693d1b96b7/1664247641102/The+Deciding+Margin.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Kevyn Morris & Coryn Grange, Records Show Massive Disenfranchisement and Racial Disparities in 2022 Texas Primary, Brennan Center for Justice, October 20, 2022, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/records-show-massive-disenfranchisement-and-racial-disparities-2022-texas>

<sup>3</sup> 2022 AAPI Voter Demographics by State: Texas, AAPI Data, <https://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Texas.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Amelia Noor-Oshiro, Asian American young adults are the only racial group with suicide as their leading cause of death, so why is no one talking about this?, The Conversation, April 23, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/asian-american-young-adults-are-the-only-racial-group-with-suicide-as-their-leading-cause-of-death-so-why-is-no-one-talking-about-this-158030>