



# FORGING A PATH TO POWER

---

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**MY TEXAS** is full of strong, compassionate fighters for social justice who love our neighbors—from Amarillo to Brownsville. We uplift everyone—transgender youth and their families, Texas kids in public schools, neighbors in our border communities, people seeking reproductive healthcare, including abortion, and people of faith and non-faith fighting for religious freedom while preserving the separation of church and state.

These are the values of my Texas—of our Texas.

Yet, in 2023, our state's leaders did everything they could to demolish our shared values, rip apart our communities for their political gain, and project an image of Texas to the rest of the world that screams hate and cruelty while telling vicious lies about who we are and what we need to thrive.

I've been an organizer and advocate in Texas for almost three decades, and I can tell you plainly that our state's leaders have eagerly embraced authoritarianism. Their flagrant disregard for democracy is evident from our legislative session and the specials that followed.

The regular legislative session dealt losses we will be grappling with for decades to come—a ban on lifesaving gender-affirming care for trans youth, violations of religious freedom as well as church and state separation, book censorship, and countless attacks on LGBTQIA+ Texans.

Overwhelming us is their mission—but we cannot let them win. The unmatched fierceness of the powerful grassroots movement built by the staff and supporters of the Texas Freedom

Network keeps me going, and through it all, it is our strength that will carry me into 2024.

We created community and joy in the face of the far-right's attacks—our radical acts of resistance.

Thousands of advocates, community members, clergy, congregants, young Texans, and allies flocked to the Capitol each time we called upon them—lobbying elected officials, raising our voices at sing-ins, rallies, and press conferences, testifying, and dropping cards.

As we close out 2023, I want to thank our supporters for making our vital work possible. You are the people we do this work for, and you are the people we cannot do it without.

For almost 30 years, Texas Freedom Network has been the watchdog of the religious right—protecting schools from censorship, defending religious freedom, and preserving the separation of church and state.

With supporters like you alongside us, I know we will never back down from this fight.

Val

Val Benavidez  
TFN President  
(she/ella)

## TFN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Katrina Mendiola, *Chair*  
James Aldrete  
Rabbi Neil Blumofe  
Emma Brockway  
Dr. Mark Chancey  
Stephanie Chiarello  
Joni Cohan  
Odus Evbagharu  
Olac Fuentes  
Rabbi Neal Katz  
Nicole LeFave  
Dr. Annie Linebarger  
Colleen Loper  
Cecile Richards



# JUST TEXAS

*Bridging connections and unity through advocacy among people of faith*

## PROGRESSIVE FAITH LEADERS IN ACTION

Just Texas clergy mobilized Texans of faith and non-faith from across the state for a Sing-In at the Texas Capitol to raise their voices in song and uplift a message of love and celebration of transgender youth and adults. The Sing-In served as a peaceful protest against SB 14 – the bill banning transgender healthcare for minors. Organizer Shan Shaffer stated: “This event showed the importance of advocating against hateful legislation, but also repairing the harm that has been caused by those who weaponize faith.”



Just Texas clergy, faith leaders and partners from the Equality Coalition gathered outside the House Gallery to proclaim: Texans will never stop fighting for the freedoms of the LGBTQIA+ community.

## EXPANDING REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM CONGREGATIONS

Since 2016, Just Texas has engaged and educated hundreds of faith leaders and congregations in support of reproductive freedom. Reproductive Freedom Congregations vow to trust and respect people who can become pregnant and believe access to comprehensive and affordable reproductive health services, including abortion, is a moral and social good. This year we added three more! Through this program, congregants are creating houses of worship that are free from stigma and shame.



2023 Faith & Justice Award recipients Robbie & Tom Ausley led efforts at FUMC Austin to become a Reproductive Freedom Congregation. Pictured with Board member Stephanie Chiarello at TFN's Liberty Luncheon.

# SECURING EDUCATION QUALITY AND EQUITY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

## RESISTING BOOK BANS

Books are magic. They teach, inspire, comfort, guide, and entertain us. They can challenge our worldview, and transport and connect us to realities that aren't always our own. They build us up, and sometimes, they can reveal our truest selves without judgment. TFN believes this to be true, so as Governor Abbott and the Republican-controlled legislature targeted books that told the stories of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, we resisted by reading those books inside *our* Capitol.



Advocates read in the middle of the Texas Capitol rotunda to protest book bans.

## PROMOTING CLIMATE CHANGE STUDIES

TFN collaborated with the National Council for Science Education (NCSE) on a new report, **Grading the Textbooks**, which evaluates the treatment of climate change and evolution in proposed instructional materials submitted by publishers for adoption by the SBOE. A panel of scientists and educators found that nearly all of the new materials – in varying degrees – address these two topics adequately. In November, the State Board of Education considered science textbooks from 22 publishers for adoption in Texas and approved most of them. Eight publishers ultimately failed to get their products on the board's final approved adoption list after Republican members raised personal objections to content related to bias against the fossil fuel industry. Even so, many adopted textbooks will teach students that climate change is real and note the role of human activity, including the burning of fossil fuels. In addition, all of the adopted high school biology textbooks offer a factual account of evolution.

*"It is critical to teach students the truth about climate change, what's causing it, and what we can do about it. This is a crisis they will inherit and have to deal with, both in their personal lives and as voters and leaders, in the decades ahead."*

— CARISA LOPEZ, TFN SENIOR POLITICAL DIRECTOR

## KEEPING PRAGERU OUT OF TEXAS

Since TFN's founding in 1995, we've been the resource of record for monitoring the religious right in Texas. In 2023, we once again sprang into action the minute we found out that a newly elected extremist State Board of Education (SBOE) member was in talks to bring the ultra-right-wing propaganda company PragerU to our schools. We took to our trusted media sources to spread the facts about the company masking its propaganda as educational material, and we filed a request to see all communications between PragerU and any SBOE members. As this controversy continues to unfold, TFN will be there every step of the way.



TFN Political Director joins SBOE members to denounce controversial PragerU curriculum materials.

## MOBILIZING AGAINST VOUCHER SCHEMES

Neighborhood public schools are the heart of every community. They accept all students, regardless of who they are or their background. Instead of supporting our public education system, Governor Abbott chose to push forward his school voucher schemes that divert essential funding to subsidize tuition at unregulated private and religious schools. TFN advocates and legislative champions defeated voucher schemes in the regular legislative session, and the next four special sessions called by Abbott. But we know it's not over as Abbott has promised to endorse pro-voucher candidates and push more legislation attempts to erode our public school system. TFN has stopped vouchers before, and we'll continue our work to do it again.



TFN organized a press conference before delivering close to 5,000 petitions against voucher schemes to legislators.

# TEXAS RISING

*Building a movement for young Texans, by young Texans*



## ACCESS TO THE BALLOT

Texas Rising fought to recover polling locations at Texas A&M, Huston-Tillotson and Texas Southern University. They secured these wins by testifying at Commissioner Court meetings, lobbying local officials and mobilizing their chapter bases. In Dallas, they worked with partners to ensure polling locations at the county jail, expanding voting rights for those who are eligible to vote. Members are building out the roadmap for democracy from the ground up, registering more than 100,000 young voters since 2016.

## YOUTH JUSTICE AGENDA

Texas Rising mobilized activists for Advocacy Day at the Texas Capitol in support of what matters most to our movement: reproductive freedom, voting rights, LGBTQIA+ equality, religious freedom, climate justice, freedom from censorship in education, and more.

## LOCAL ADVOCACY

Texas Rising activists organized in cities and communities across the state. In El Paso they helped pass progressive resolutions such as International Drag Day and the pro-choice GRACE Act. In Houston, Texas Rising worked closely with coalition partners to increase the budget for the HART program - a win for criminal justice reform.



*“Camp Texas Rising is our flagship leadership development training for young leaders, created by young leaders. Seeing our student leaders lead thoughtful and insightful discussions around social issues that affect their lives, like reproductive justice and immigrant justice, was inspiring.”*

— OFELIA ALONSO, TEXAS RISING DIRECTOR

# THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS!

Fueling TFN's mission through generosity and activism

## FREEDOM COUNCIL\*

360 MD Integrative Primary Care  
Naomi Aberly  
Alex W. Albright & Clint Parsley  
Elma & James Aldrete  
Ruth Alhilali  
Alex Andrade  
Anonymous (7)  
David K. Arctur  
Paula S. Arnold & Theo Pinson  
Association of Texas  
Professional Educators  
Robbie & Tom Ausley  
Bonnie Bain  
Carol M. Barger & William Elliott  
Linda & David Bartley  
Cynthia Beard  
Hon. Rebecca Bell-Metereau  
Rosalie & Jim Boldin  
Mary Brandt & Stacey Berg  
Russell Bridges & Ralph Salinas  
Andrea Briggs-Smith & Chad Smith  
Suzee & Greg Brooks  
Suzanne Bryant & Sarah Goodfriend  
Kaki & Larry Buck  
Mary Kay & Gene Buinger  
Marilí & Craig Burbes  
Butler Family Fund  
Catena Foundation  
Judy & Patrick Cantilo  
Ms. CK Carman & Ms. Aralyn Hughes  
Donna Carter & Michael Gagarin  
Victoria Chu  
Jennifer Clark  
The Climate + Clean  
Energy Equity Fund  
Joni & Bob Cohan  
Dr. Melvin Cohen  
Collaborative for Gender +  
Reproductive Equity  
Tom Connelly  
Shelby Corradino  
Mary Jo Culver  
Aimee & Ed Cunningham  
Kathleen Curry & Scott Sawtelle

Jan Demetri & Jim Davis  
Democratizing Philanthropy Project  
Libby & Hon. Lloyd Doggett  
Lucile & Clarence  
Dragert Charitable Fund  
Robbie Edwards & Bob Kendrick  
Emergent Fund Action  
Energy Action Fund  
Energy Foundation  
Rae Eversmann  
Amy & Lee Fikes  
Hon. Lulu Flores, Hon. Vikki Goodwin,  
Hon. Gina Hinojosa and  
Hon. Donna Howard  
Marion T. Flores  
Floyd Fund  
Ford Foundation  
Dr. Gabe Fried  
Friedel Family Foundation  
Frontline Justice Fund  
Dr. Catalina E. Garcia  
Rachel E. Gelman  
Gender Equity Action Fund  
Cheryl & Jim George  
Glast Family Charitable Fund  
Lili & Sam Glast  
The Glast Family  
Suzan & Julius Glickman  
Melanie Gray & Mark Wawro  
Angie & Brad Harrison  
Nancy & John Hathaway  
Marcy Helfand & Robert Book  
Paul Heller  
Jacob & Terese  
Hershey Foundation  
Hive Fund for Climate &  
Gender Justice  
Horizon Unitarian  
Universalist Church  
Houston Endowment Inc.  
Houston in Action  
Diane Ireson & Rowland Cook  
Rusty & John Jaggars  
Christina Jonsson

Tom Kearns  
Harris & Eliza Kempner Fund  
Alice Kleberg Reynolds Foundation  
Cindy & Greg Kozmetsky  
Lisa & Peter Kraus  
Michael & Alice Kuhn Foundation  
Liberate Abortion Fund  
Lindauer Law Group PLLC  
Dale Linebarger  
Margery & Robert Loeb  
Susan & Collin Loewen  
Judy & Bruce MacKenzie  
Elena & Kenneth Marks  
Elizabeth Matthews  
Virginia McDermott &  
William Schleuse  
Sally McIntosh  
Brett Merfish &  
Christina Gorczynski  
Sherry & Gerald Merfish  
Marjorie Meyer  
MFI Foundation  
Kathy Miller & John Bender  
Susan Moffat & Nick Barbaro  
Marie & Ronald Moore  
Mosaic  
Melanie & Kamran Mouzoon  
Movement Voter Project  
Kelley Murrell  
The Neavel Family  
NEO Philanthropy, inc.  
New American Majority Fund  
Linda S. Norris & H. Lee Norris  
Cecilia & Tim Norwood  
Pat O'Connell, Jeanine & Jay Brim  
Open Society Policy Center  
Deedee Ostfeld  
The Overbrook Foundation  
Justice Jan Patterson  
Janis & Joe Pinnelli  
Macey & Harry Reasoner  
Janet Redeker  
Hon. Alec Rhodes  
Kathy T. Rider, LCSW, BCD

Rights, Faith & Democracy  
Action Fund  
Renee & David Rogers  
Adam Rosencruggs  
Amy & Ryan Rostvold  
Charles & Betti  
Saunders Foundation  
Scarlet Feather Fund  
Joyce & Amb. Arthur Schechter  
Celia & Larry Schoenbrun  
Susan & David Sheppard  
Dr. Peter S. Sherrod M.D.  
Shield-Ayres Foundation  
Judith Shure & James Mattingly  
William Sibley  
Lisa Simmons  
Chula Sims & Dick Lavine  
Nancy & John Solana  
Dale & Stephen Sonnenberg  
The Stanford & Joan  
Alexander Foundation  
Adam Stanley  
Luciana & Stefano Stefani  
Phyllis & Ron Steinhart  
Texas AFL-CIO  
Texas AFT  
Texas State Teachers Association  
Anna Trevino  
Jill van Voorhis  
Martha Vaughan  
Kristine & Stephen Wallace  
Sally M. Watkins  
Way to Win  
Ede & Bruce Weiner  
Pamela & Rom Welborn  
Wellspring Philanthropic Fund  
Rebecca White & Scott Brann  
Winkler Family Foundation  
Women Donors Network  
Women Donors Network Action  
Women SOAR  
Megan & Brady Wood  
Lorraine Wulfe  
Youth Engagement Fund

\*FREEDOM COUNCIL MEMBERS COMMIT TO AN ANNUAL GIFT OF AT LEAST \$1,000. TO LEARN MORE VISIT [TFN.ORG/FREEDOMCOUNCIL](https://TFN.ORG/FREEDOMCOUNCIL).

## 2023 TRIBUTE GIFTS

### IN HONOR OF

Arthur  
By Kelsey Kling  
Karen Ashworth  
By Emily &  
Kenneth Ashworth  
Robbie & Tom Ausley  
By Emily Buchanan  
By Bergan Casey  
By Terri Purdy  
By Jen Seibel  
By Rev. Cathy Stone  
Val Benavidez  
By Elizabeth Lippincott  
By Rosanna Martinez  
By National Council of  
Jewish Women

Stephanie Chiarello  
By Amy Lowrey  
Rhonda Gerson  
By Cindy Merrill  
Rachel Glast  
By Deborah Glast  
Laura Hyman  
By Janice Pierce  
Diane Ireson &  
Rowland Cook  
By Sharyn Reynolds  
Herb Kraus  
By Claudia Piper  
Melissa M.  
By Vivek Kulkarni  
Paloma Martinez  
By Elizabeth Wright

Adri Pérez  
By Tyler Richard  
Deborah Philbrick &  
Miles Baker  
By Friends & Family  
Toby Regbo  
By Stephanie Chiarello  
Cecile Richards  
By Deedee Ostfeld  
Dale Sonnenberg  
By Diane & Charles Radin  
TFN Organizers  
By Jennifer Longoria  
Sally Watkins  
By Terri Purdy  
Robert Zinn  
By Joe Pryzant

### IN MEMORY OF

Phil Durst  
By Elizabeth Colvin  
Picce Glast  
By Joni Cohan  
By Diana & Gary Edmiston  
By Sanford Friedman  
By Lili & Sam Glast  
By The Glast Family  
By Lady Chachi Hawkins  
By Margot Hirsch &  
Leif Guttormsen  
By Diane Ireson  
By Stacy Kaplowitz  
By Gary Levin  
By Jessica Malamuth  
By Donna Beth McCormick  
By Marci & Miles Nelson

By Jerry Newman  
By Dalia & Lavi Oud  
By Andree & David Rosen  
By Carole Stoker  
By Lynda Talve  
By Kathy Zarate &  
Amanda Mills  
Lois Gordon  
By Meryl & Scott Nason  
David Hall  
By Pamela Brown  
Jim Matson  
By Karen Matson  
Nadia  
By Sally & James Gavin  
Peggy Treibs  
By Glen Treibs



TEXAS  
FREEDOM  
NETWORK

P.O. BOX 1624  
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78764

UNION

Return Service Requested

Nonprofit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Austin, Texas  
Permit No. 1943

PROTECT OUR FREEDOMS  
AT THE BALLOT BOX  
[TFN.ORG/VOTE](https://TFN.ORG/VOTE)



VOTE FOR  
CHANGE

