

TMO Standing for Families Agenda

The Metropolitan Organization (TMO)
4141 Southwest Fwy. #650
Houston, Texas 77027
Phone: 713-807-1429 Fax: 713-807-7988

EDUCATION

Excessive focus on TAKS testing is undermining real teaching and learning in our schools. Teachers are leaving the system and students are being left behind. Test preparation should not be become the curriculum. Fifty percent of the Hispanic and African American students are dropping out in Houston.

Schools continue to be underfunded and schools lack the resources to adequately support our children.

Assessments

We support basing student promotion on multiple types of assessments rather than on a single test.

We support a state mandated testing system that is diagnostic and assess' how students progress over time.

We support limits on the number of days dedicated to state, district, and school testing.

We support making the state accountability system fair, transparent, and understandable to parents and community.

Teachers Wages

We support raising teacher salaries to the national average; provide professional pay increases.

We support adequate funding for teacher designed professional development, mentoring, and released time for collaborative planning and preparation.

Resources

We support investments in resources that improve a students' capacity to learn. This should include free full day kindergarten for three and four year olds up to 200% of poverty and free access to health care through CHIP and Medicaid for all children up to 200% of poverty and sliding scale access to CHIP for families up to 300%

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Harris County is spending \$192 million on detention costs this year. That represents a 24% increase from 2 years ago.

Fifteen to twenty percent of these detainees receive psychotropic medications indicating that they are suffering from mental illness. Treating the mentally ill in jail costs \$24 million annually.

There are 20,000 non-violent offenders currently on probation in Harris County, of which only 150 have had access to the successful "Drug Court" model where offenders are not only punished but sentenced to drug testing, therapy, and weekly check-in greatly increasing the possibility for rehabilitation. Only \$450,000 of the \$192 million detention budget is being spent on this proven program.

The Harris County jail is over capacity by 11,000 prisoners and is sending people to Epps Louisiana furthering their segregation from the community. This is costing the county \$9 million dollars.

Criminal Justice Reforms

We support effective legal counsel for limited or low income defendants through the creation of a public defender's office.

We support the expansion of jail diversion programs for non-violent offenders.

We support expanded funding for drug courts and mental health courts offering treatment and community supervision instead of incarceration to more eligible offenders.

We support a reduction in high fees for collect calls from Harris County Jail detainees.



HEALTHCARE

In Harris County, 1 in 4 people are uninsured, 1.2 million people.

The uninsured are a diverse group that includes people who cannot afford private health insurance; who work in small businesses that do not offer insurance; those who are eligible—but not enrolled—in government-sponsored programs such as Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP); and recent immigrants.

CHIP insures the children of working families who cannot afford private health insurance but earn too much to qualify for Medicaid. There are currently 96,000 children in Harris County enrolled in CHIP an increase of almost 30% from the same time last year. While efforts to enroll eligible children have intensified in the last year we still have children without access to health care and routine immunizations.

Last year the Harris County Hospital District patients visits dropped by over 40,000 visits. With a growing uninsured population this doesn't make sense.

Indigent Care

We support simplified application process for Harris County Gold Card.

We support increased opportunities for Gold Card users for those uninsured in the county up to 300% of poverty.

We support benchmarks for the most expedient start and completion of the Hospital District's new specialty clinic towers, including providing the necessary funding for this project.

We support specialty clinic referrals outside the Hospital District for patients suffering a life threatening illness and those for whom a specialty service is not available within 30 days.

We support decreased parking costs for Gold Card Holders or their visitors.

Ensure all residents of Harris County have access to primary and emergency health care services regardless of immigration status.

Children's Healthcare

We support a 12-month eligibility requirement for Medicaid recipients in parity with the current CHIP eligibility.

We support access to CHIP for families who earn up to 300% of poverty and buy-in options for families from 301% to 500% of poverty.

of the federal poverty level.

TAX REFORM

Tax policy should be fair and equitable for all taxpayers; provide stable revenues considering economic growth and the business cycle; reduce complexity while simplifying administration; and raise sufficient funds for vital public services.

Property Tax Reform in 2006 which created the "broad-based business tax" will be fully implemented in the 2008-2009 State Budget. There are indications that there will be pressure to severely modify or even revoke the 2006 reforms with a \$1 billion dollar shortfall projected. The system is not perfect and improvements may be warranted.

Property Taxes

We support alternative methods of property tax reform:

- Use a "circuit breaker" for those families with limited incomes that would freeze or reduce their tax burden
- Disclosure of property sales prices In order to have fair appraisals
- Modify and expand property tax exemptions, such as the homestead exemption or senior exemptions not deferrals
- And consider the creation of a state income tax

We oppose the expansion of the sales tax to further reduce property taxes or correct for any deficiencies in the business tax because this will cause working families to pay a disproportionate share of taxes.

We oppose the lowering of the appraisal cap which is currently 10%, or the creation of revenue caps which will hamstring local municipalities and harm critical public sector services

Gambling

We oppose any expansion of gambling as a revenue source, because it falls disproportionately on low-income families.

WORK AND WAGES

Families are under increasing economic stress. The Center for Public Policy Priorities Family Budget Estimator says a typical family of four needs to earn \$43,029 per year to make ends meet. But 50% of the jobs in Harris County pay less than \$10 per hour or \$20,800 per year.

Long Term Job Training

TMO's sister IAF organization in San Antonio created a job training project called Project Quest which has been replicated now in many cities. The IAF job training strategies graduate over 90% of the participants, and have wages of \$17 to \$20 per hour.

TMO will create a job training project in Houston that will prepare low-income and underemployed adults for careers. These jobs will be identified in advance through local businesses as jobs that provide living wages and benefits opportunities for future career advancement.

We support the creation of the Texas Adult Career Education Fund of \$10 million for these long term workforce development projects that would be administered by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Unions

TMO supports the efforts of workers to organize and unionize to secure living wages.



IMMIGRATION

For the last twenty years the US has implemented piecemeal measures to deal with its growing undocumented immigrant population. Border security alone will not solve the immigration problem in the US.

The Perryman Group recently conducted an analysis of undocumented immigrants in Texas and the US. They concluded that our Texas economy would lose \$69 Billion dollars per year if the 1.15 million undocumented immigrants in Texas were removed from our workforce

With a shrinking birth rate in the US, and baby boomer retirements, the US cannot supply all the needed workers to meet our economic demands in the future.

Federal Reform

We support comprehensive immigration reform that :

- Restores the rule of law and enhances border security,
- Provides a pathway to earned Citizenship,
- Protect workers from abusive employers and allows for job portability,
- Provides for Family Reunification,
- And create a guest worker program that recognizes our economy's demand for labor

Local Immigration Enforcement

We oppose using local law enforcement employees, sheriffs, deputies, or police officers to do the work of the Federal Immigration officials or to participate in workplace raids.

We oppose the use of profiling or road blocks to identify undocumented workers.

The Metropolitan Organization (TMO)
4141 Southwest Freeway Ste. 650
Houston, Texas 77027
Phone: 713-807-1429 Fax: 713-807-7988