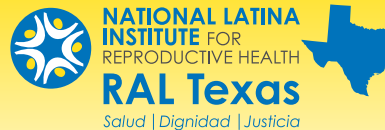


WHO'S WHO? in Texas Politics



Voting is a public way of saying, "Our families count, and all of our lives matter!"

Civic participation means getting everyday folks involved in the decisions that affect our families and communities. Election season is an especially important time for us to speak up, and there are many ways we can all get involved in the process, regardless of our citizenship status or whether we can vote.

Elections matter because elected leaders can make decisions that can either help or hurt our families. Politicians pay more attention to communities who participate in elections. Voting is a public way of saying, "Our families count, and all of our lives matter!"

To make it easier to vote, Texans can vote on Election Day, before Election Day at Early Voting Locations, or by requesting a Vote-By-Mail (or Absentee) ballot to be mailed to a home residence. You may vote early in person for any reason, but there are limitations on voting by mail.



Sign up at NLIRH.TURBOVOTE.ORG to register to vote or receive reminders about upcoming elections.

NATIONAL ELECTED POSITIONS

US CONGRESS • Congress is made up of two separate bodies: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Together they form the legislative (law-making) branch of the Federal Government. There are no limits on the number of terms that a member of Congress can serve.


US REPRESENTATIVE


There are 435 members of the House of Representatives. All seats in the House are up for re-election every two years. The number of representatives from each state is based on population. Currently Texas has 36 representatives as of 2014.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Makes and passes federal laws.
- Allocates money to federal programs in yearly budget.
- Determines federal tax guidelines.
- Can propose changes to the Constitution.
- Has the power to declare war.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

 Chooses how programs such as Head Start, Medicaid, Cash Assistance, Social Security, relief for victims of natural disasters, military spending, child care, healthcare, and domestic violence services are funded or cut.

 Creates all federal-level policy, including laws governing immigration, healthcare, education, criminal justice, student loan interest rates, labor and environmental protections.

US SENATOR

There are 100 US Senators, each serving a 6-year term. Each state elects two senators in a statewide election. Senate races are staggered so that only one senator in a state is up for election at a time.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Same as House of Representatives (see page 1).
- In addition, the Senate approves the President's appointments to important positions, including the US Supreme Court and the Cabinet (the board that advises the President and holds offices in key departments).

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Same as US House of Representatives (see page 1).

TEXAS STATEWIDE ELECTED POSITIONS

GOVERNOR

The governor heads the state executive branch, and is elected every four years.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Makes policy recommendations.
- Signs or vetoes bills passed by the Legislature.
- Sends proposed budget to the Legislature for approval.
- Can grant pardons and commutations of death sentences or prison terms.
- Appoints nearly 3,000 positions to state agencies, boards, and commissions. Makes cabinet appointments, including the Secretary of State who oversees elections.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU



Sets policy and budget priorities for the state including education, social service funding, and reproductive healthcare.



Can call a special session of the Legislature to address urgent issues that reflect his/her agenda.



Decides who is in charge of how border crossing is handled.

LT. GOVERNOR

Runs for office separately from the governor, and serves as the president of the Senate. Elected by the public every four years.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Assigns Senators to committees and determines committee chairs.
- Sits on the Legislative Budget Board which develops the state budget.
- Casts the final vote when there is a tie in the Senate.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU



Can increase the likelihood of a bill being approved by assigning it to a committee that is likely to approve it.

WHAT IF I CAN'T VOTE?

You must be 18 and a US citizen to vote. If you have a past felony conviction, you may re-register after completing the sentence and any parole, supervision or court ordered probation, or if you have been pardoned. Regardless of your voting status, you can still make a difference!

- Encourage and educate people who can vote.
- Share this guide at your church or with your neighbors.
- Write letters to your local paper about issues you care about.

Photo: Jennifer Whitney



TEXAS ATTORNEY GENERAL

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Heads the state's chief legal and law enforcement office, and is elected every four years.

- Enforces health, safety, and consumer regulations.
- Collects court-ordered child support.
- Enforces laws under colonias regulation and prevention programs.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU



Represents the state's position in all legal matters in court.



Issues opinions and interpretation of Texas laws or proposed laws including voting rights, immigration, and the Affordable Care Act implementation.



Helps ensure that orders of protection in domestic violence cases are enforced across the state.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Texas State Board of Education is made up of 15 members who are elected from districts across the state.

In 2014, six of seven incumbents are seeking re-election.

- Decides curriculum standards and textbooks/instructional materials for public schools (K–12) in the state.



Decides what is taught in science classes (including deciding if creationism or evolution is taught) and health classes (including what is taught about human sexuality).



Will adopt social studies textbooks in 2014, determining what information students will receive on civil rights, Mexican-American history, multiculturalism, etc.

TEXAS STATE LEGISLATURE • The Texas Legislature is divided into two houses: the Texas State Senate and the Texas State House of Representatives. Texas Legislators meet every other year in odd-numbered years for 140 days, and special sessions can be called, as needed.

STATE REPRESENTATIVES

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

There are 150 State House Districts. Each district elects one representative. All State House seats are up for election every two years.

- Enacts state laws in areas such as state taxes, education, child care and conservation of natural resources.
- Shares budget-making responsibilities with the Governor.



Makes decisions about funding for Texas public schools and CHIP/Children's Medicaid.



Can expand Medicaid programs, determining whether low-income Texans can receive federal subsidies for health insurance.



Can change regulations governing healthcare clinics, including requirements to operate reproductive healthcare centers.

STATE SENATORS

The state is divided up into 31 State Senate Districts and each district elects one senator. State Senate seats are up for election every four years and are staggered so that half of the Senate is up for election at a time.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Same as Texas House of Representatives (see page 3).

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Same as Texas House of Representatives (see page 3).

LOCAL ELECTED POSITIONS



LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD

There are 1,031 Texas school districts, and each one has a locally elected school board. Generally, school board members serve staggered terms so that the entire board is not up for election at the same time.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Adopts policies to guide the school district.
- Hires and evaluates the superintendent for the district.
- Approves the annual budget.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

-  Decides what is taught in local public schools, including health education and family planning.
-  Makes decisions about school district police security.

THE NATIONAL LATINA INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (NLIRH)

is the only national reproductive justice organization dedicated to building Latina power to advance health, dignity, and justice for 26 million Latinas, their families, and communities in the United States through leadership development, community mobilization, policy advocacy, and strategic communications.

STRONG FAMILIES is a program of Forward Together. NLIRH is a member of Strong Families, joining more than 125 groups working to change how we think, feel, act, and make policy about families.

THE TEXAS LATINA ADVOCACY NETWORK (TX LAN)

operates as an extension of NLIRH, serving as the voice and advocacy presence in Texas. The TX LAN works with activists throughout Texas to organize our communities around issues-based campaigns that impact our families and our lives.

For more information, contact: NLIRH TX Latina Advocacy Network at 956-579-1371.

 Like us on Facebook at [FB/NLIRH](#) or [FB/StrongFamilies](#)

 Follow us on Twitter at [@NLIRH](#) or [@StrongFams](#)



Photo: Jennifer Whitney