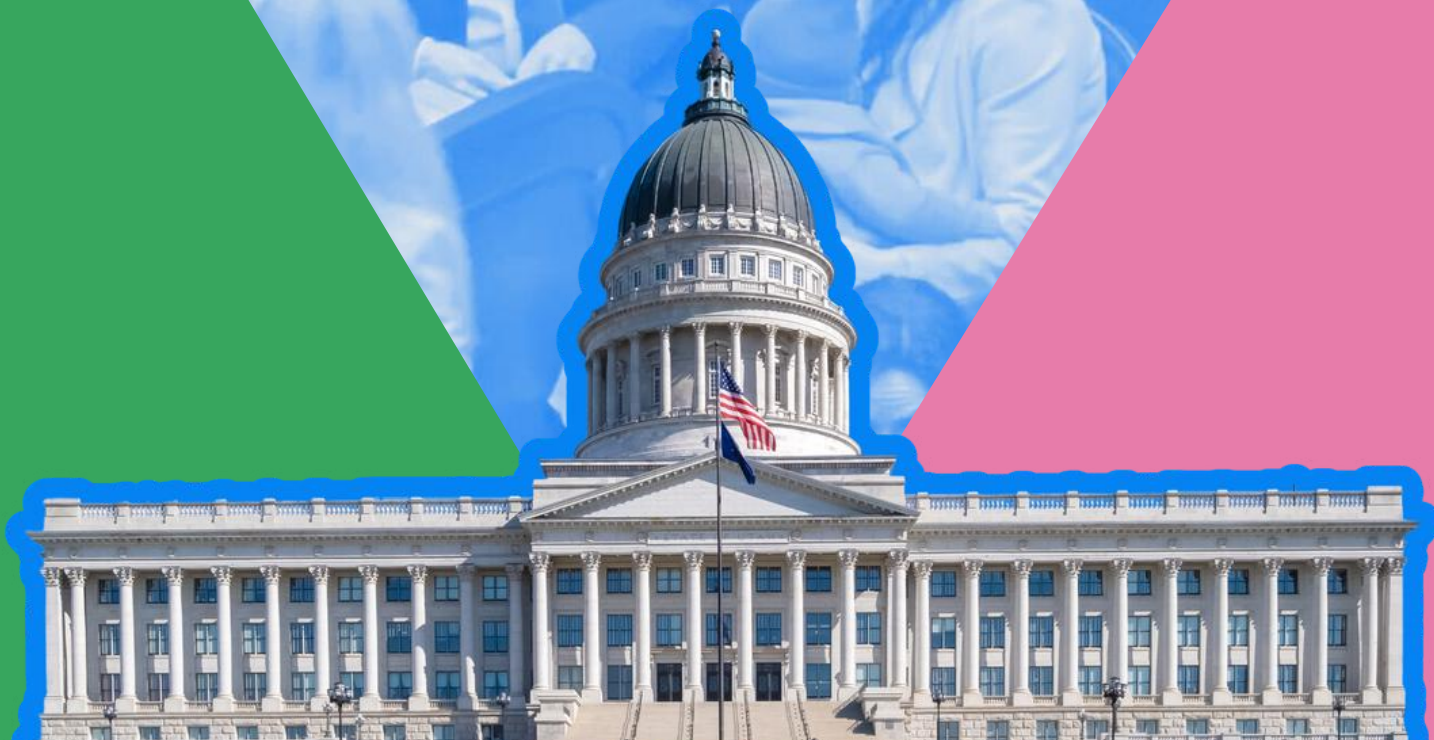




VOICES FOR
UTAH
Children

2024

**LEGISLATIVE
RECAP**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The advocacy work we were able to accomplish during the 2024 legislative session could not be done without our many passionate partners, fellow advocates, and community members that took the time to use their voices to advocate for Utah kids.

We thank you for your continued support and work to help us push for policies that will positively impact the lives of our children for years to come.

We encourage your continued involvement and partnership as we further our advocacy efforts in the new year.

Thank you from the Voices Team!

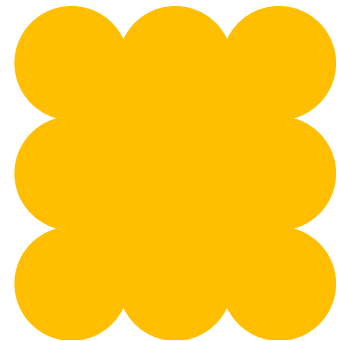


TABLE OF CONTENTS



1 INTRODUCTION



7 IMMIGRANT FAMILY POLICIES



2 HEALTH



9 JUVENILE JUSTICE



3 FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY BUDGET & REVENUE



11 VOICES LOBBY DAYS



5 EARLY CARE & LEARNING



12 OTHER BILLS



13 REFERENCES



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WAS IT GOOD FOR KIDS?

How was the 2024 legislative session for Utah kids? Well, it was not as bad as it might have been and nowhere near as good as it should have been.

If this seems similar to what we say about most recent sessions, there are good reasons for that. At Voices for Utah Children, we believe that "good" is not good enough for the children in our state. We can always be doing more to support the health, well-being and foundations of opportunity for Utah children.

So, it's unlikely, in general, that we will ever consider a legislative session having done "enough" for our kids.

Specifically, during this past session, Utah kids - and the families they live in - dodged several very dangerous "policy bullets" leveled at them by their state leaders.

Not only did legislators take very little positive action to help children, advocates also had to work hard to keep them from doing active harm.

Yes, the 2024 session was as terrible as you may have heard. For a helpful overview, we recommend [this opinion piece](#) from the Salt Lake Tribune editorial board.

This is not a partisan reflection on political actions with which we philosophically disagree.

It is an accurate portrait of a legislative branch that seems largely unconcerned with solving any of the day-to-day problems with which Utah families are struggling.

One important thing to note about the 2024 session is the constant double-speak and misinformation regarding our state budget and raising revenue to meet state needs.

On one hand, legislative leaders complained about having a tight budget, with no extra money to do anything beyond the bare minimum - regardless of how much help Utah families need.

On the other hand, it was painfully obvious that there is always funding for the things that legislative leaders care about (stadiums, tax cuts), which are also things requested by the very wealthiest people in Utah.

Within that troublesome context, we did indeed see some distinct wins and losses for Utah kids in our primary issue areas.

We've condensed our major priorities by policy areas. Priority bills are listed first, and other bills we followed included at the end.



CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Our biggest win in this area—maybe in the entire session—was the non-passage of HB463, “Medicaid Funding Amendments,” sponsored by Rep. Brady Brammer (R-Pleasant Grove).

Rep. Brammer is an attorney who hasn’t served on any health-related legislative committees during his six years in office.

Based on the false premise that the U.S. government will run out of funding for Medicaid, this bill threatened critical health services for children, pregnant women, people with disabilities and rural communities. HB463 would have allowed the legislature to trigger massive cuts to life-saving services for these groups.

A broad and seasoned advocacy coalition worked together to educate legislators about HB463’s vast negative implications.

Frighteningly, the bill passed out of the House Business and Labor Committee (yes, that is an inappropriate committee for a bill targeting

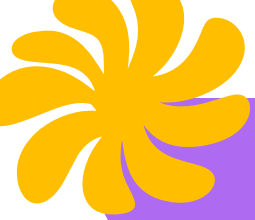
a health and human service program) with a favorable recommendation; only four representatives voted against it.

Advocates kept the bill from getting any further - for now. HB463 was one of several bills that attempted to address the manufactured issue of imminently lapsing funds for this popular health program. We fully expect similar efforts to remain on the legislative agenda, throughout the interim and into the next session.

Voices staff originally planned to support a couple of proposals that would have extended Medicaid coverage to more pregnant women and new mothers, but neither materialized, unsurprisingly, with such a concerted legislative effort to label any such proposal a “Medicaid Expansion.”

Proposals to improve care and coverage for children with disabilities met a similar fate for the same reason.

Bill	Sponsor	Impact	Our Position	Fate of Bill
HB324 Disability Services Amendments	Rep. Steven Lund (R- Manti)	Creates Coordinated Care Services for Children with Disabilities Grant Program to support disabled people living in their homes instead of institutions.	SUPPORT	FAILED
HB463 Medicaid Funding Amendments	Rep. Brady Brammer (R- Pleasant Grove)	Threatens vital health services for children and others.	OPPOSE	FAILED
SB181 Native American Health Amendments	Sen. Luz Escamilla (D- Salt Lake)	Allows traditional Native medicinal practices to be covered by Medicaid	SUPPORT	PASSED



FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY BUDGET & REVENUE

This year was Utah’s fourth consecutive “Year of the Tax Cut,” compliments of legislative leadership, who announced months before the session that they would be passing yet another income tax rate reduction.

The move initially will leech nearly \$190 million of public revenue from the state budget, which would have otherwise been used to support public education and popular social programs.

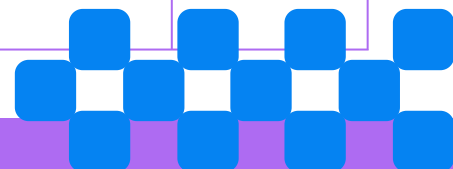
Analysis from the Institute for Tax & Economic Policy shows that nearly two-thirds of the \$168 million would go to wealthy Utahns in the top 20% income bracket, with the remaining 80% of taxpayers splitting one-third.

The cumulative impact of the four years of tax cuts will be an average cut of more than \$10,000 a year for the top 1% of earners, but less than \$250 a year for a middle-income family.

While great enthusiasm was shown for reducing the tax burden of the very rich, tax relief for regular Utah families was hard to come by.

A proposal from Rep. Marsha Judkins (R-Provo), HB149, Earned Income Tax Credit Amendments, sought to make Utah’s current EITC refundable.

Bill	Sponsor	Impact	Our Position	Fate of Bill
HB149 Earned Income Tax Credit Amendments	Rep. Marsha Judkins (R-Provo)	Extends Utah’s Earned Income Tax Credit to currently excluded low-income families in greatest need of support.	SUPPORT	FAILED
HB153 Child Care Revisions	Rep. Susan Pulsipher (R-West Jordan)	Slightly expands Utah’s nonrefundable Child Tax Credit, inappropriately coupled with a lowering of licensing standards for child care.	OPPOSE	PASSED
SB30 Property Tax Transactions	Sen. Dan McCay (R-Riverton)	Creates a more transparent assessment of commercial property values, to ensure appropriate revenues are being collected.	SUPPORT	FAILED
SB69 Income Tax Amendments	Sen. Chris Wilson (R-Cache Valley)	Reduces Utah’s income tax for the fourth straight year, from 4.65% to 4.55% - leeching up to \$196 million in public revenue out of the state budget in FY25, and beyond.	OPPOSE	PASSED



This change would have benefited tens of thousands of children in low- and middle-income households.

It was killed by the House Revenue and Tax Committee, during which legislators made clear how they felt about the “worthiness” of the poor to receive such tax relief. Contrast these remarks with the public statements of Rep. Kay Christofferson (R-Lehi), as to why the top 1% deserved to pay less in taxes, and how such a cut would see benefits trickle down to other Utahns.

Additionally, only the most minimal of expansion of Utah’s Child Tax Credit (CTC) to 4-year-olds, in HB153, managed to survive the

legislative session, and even this came at the cost of an extremely unpopular rollback of licensed childcare standards. This expansion will make the credit available to 0.4% more families, benefiting 1.1% more children, with an average annual tax savings of \$456 per eligible family.

Utah’s CTC is also non-refundable, which has been justified by the assertion that “lower-income people can just get child care subsidies.” However, only 14% of eligible children in Utah actually receive support from the Child Care Assistance Program.

Who Benefits from the Proposed Tax Cuts?

The proposed tax cut will help the richest 1% more than anyone. Our analysis shows the proposal will save the bottom 80% of Utah earners between \$24 and \$107. While the top 1% of Utah earners will save a whopping \$2,676. These tax cuts will not provide real help to working families.

Out of the proposed \$170 million tax cut, \$40 million will go to the top 1% of Utah's wealthiest individuals. In contrast, the bottom 80% will split about \$61 million.

The Utah Legislature's \$170 Million Income Tax Cut: How much would you get?

Bottom 20%	Lower-mid 20%	Middle 20%	Upper-mid 20%	Top 6-20%	Top 2-5%	Top 1%
Up to \$33,000	\$33,000 - \$61,000	\$61,000 - \$99,000	\$99,000 - \$150,000	\$150,000 - \$308,000	\$308,000 - \$808,000	\$808,000+
Child Care Educator or Restaurant Worker	Police Officer or Teacher	Nurse or Accountant	Lawyer or Engineer	Surgeon or Chief Executive	Business Consultant	Tech CEO or College Football Coach
\$24 Tax Cut	\$43 Tax Cut	\$67 Tax Cut	\$107 Tax Cut	\$174 Tax Cut	\$374 Tax Cut	\$2,676 Tax Cut

‘People who add to the economy are the ones that benefit,’ Utah GOP lawmaker says of tax cut aimed at top 1%

The Legislature is on the verge of dropping Utah's income tax rate from 4.65% to 4.55%, meaning those Utahns with the highest incomes will benefit the most.

(Trent Nelson | The Salt Lake Tribune) The Utah Capitol in Salt Lake City on Thursday, Feb. 22, 2024. The Legislature is once again on the verge of cutting income taxes this year.

By Bryan Schott | Feb. 27, 2024, 7:03 a.m.

EARLY CARE & LEARNING

Once again, because the situation is only getting more difficult for parents and child care providers, Utah’s child care crisis was a major focus of our efforts during the session.

Despite the urgent need for meaningful childcare solutions, legislative leadership's focus on expanding unlicensed child care capacity—which is not shown to improve child care access or affordability—left advocates having to spend considerable time playing defense against HB153 and educating lawmakers on the importance of child care licensing and safety.

With federal stabilization funding due to be exhausted in June, public investment in Utah’s child care system was a top priority.

Neither of the two proposals related to continuing child care stabilization grants were approved by the legislature.

A \$240 million proposal from Rep. Andrew Stoddard (D-Sandy), to continue the stabilization grants at 50% of their original scale, never even received a committee hearing; luckily, Rep. Stoddard took the time to present his proposal to the Social Services Appropriations Subcommittee so there is a record of his bold request.

A proposed grant program, to assist child care programs with paying their employees a “competitive wage,” was stripped out of HB461 Child Care Wage Stabilization Amendments from Rep. Ashlee Matthews (D-Kearns).

Bill	Sponsor	Impact	Our Position	Fate of Bill
HB461 Child Care Grant Amendments	Rep. Ashlee Matthews (D-Kearns)	Allows child care workers to qualify for the state’s Child Care Assistance Program regardless of income.	SUPPORT	PASSED
HB541 Child Care Grant Amendments	Rep. Andrew Stoddard (D-Sandy)	Appropriates \$240 million over two years to continue successful child care stabilization grant program.	SUPPORT	FAILED
SB176 Child Care Services Amendments	Sen. Luz Escamilla (D-Salt Lake)	Creates a Salt Lake County pilot program to retrofit empty state buildings to accommodate new, employer-supported child care programs.	SUPPORT	FAILED
SB220 School Readiness Grant Program Modernization	Sen. Ann Milner (R-Ogden)	Streamlines Utah’s current High Quality School Readiness program; additional requested funding to offer the program to more children was denied.	SUPPORT	PASSED

Fortunately, the other half of HB461, which would allow child care workers to qualify for child care subsidies regardless of income (based on this [Kentucky model](#)), did successfully pass. Implementation is contingent upon approval to use federal money to pay for it; members of the House Business and Labor Committee made it clear that they were not willing to invest any state funding in this creative workforce recruitment and retention approach.

Child Care Advocacy Day

Utah Care for Kids, a project of Voices for Utah Children, organized the second Child Care Advocacy Day, rallying 100 parents, childcare providers, and kiddos at the Capitol. Attendees connected with fellow advocates, enjoyed a play area in the center of the Rotunda (thank you, Lakeshore!), and listened to compelling speeches from providers and parents highlighting the critical role of child care. Many parents and providers also met with their legislators, and some even joined lawmakers on the floor of the House and Senate!



NEWSROOM

March 04, 2024

What Happened With Child Care During the 2024 Legislative Session?

As we entered the 2024 session, supporting families with young children remained a top policy priority for Voices for Utah Children. At the forefront of our advocacy efforts is the urgent need to address the child care needs of these families.

We worked closely with several legislators to propose much-needed public investment in the child care sector. We also supported multiple early care and education bills that were championed by other legislators and organizations. Here's what passed (and what didn't):

Child Care Priorities



IMMIGRANT FAMILY POLICIES

Another big win for the session was the absence of anticipated attacks on undocumented immigrants in our communities. An abhorrent proposal by Rep. Trevor Lee (R-Davis County), leaked early in the session, suggested that Utah ban undocumented immigrant children from attending public school.

Rep. Lee, who regularly shares misinformation and conspiracy theories on social media, rolled back his resolution to simply focus on a “border crisis” that was also exploited by Governor Cox and House Speaker Mike Schultz (R-Hooper) with dramatic trips to the Texas-Mexico border.

These displays of anti-immigrant rhetoric by state leaders made many advocates, including us, fearful about potential legislation targeting undocumented immigrants.



Bill	Sponsor	Impact	Our Position	Fate of Bill
HB165 Federal Law Enforcement Amendments	Rep. Trevor Lee (R- Davis Co)	Increases the likelihood of immigrant children becoming separated from adult family members through heightened coordination between law enforcement entities.	OPPOSE	PASSED
HB172 Immigrant Student Athlete Participation Amendments	Rep. Jordan Tesucher (R-South Jordan)	Allows students to use alternative documentation other than birth certificates, etc, to participate in public school sports.	SUPPORT	PASSED

We nonetheless hosted a vibrant and positive Immigrant Day on the Hill, featuring dancers and nonprofit partners from multiple immigrant communities across Utah.

In addition, HB172, “Student Athlete Participation Amendments,” sponsored by Rep. Jordan Teuscher (R-South Jordan), successfully passed. This bill amended a law passed last year that required birth certificates or other identifying documents from high school students seeking to participate in sports.

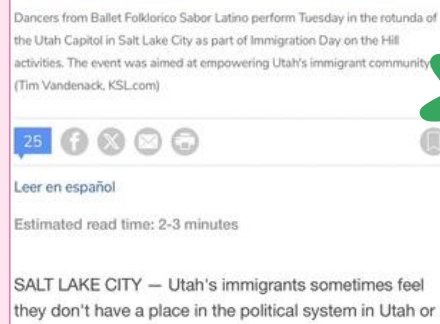
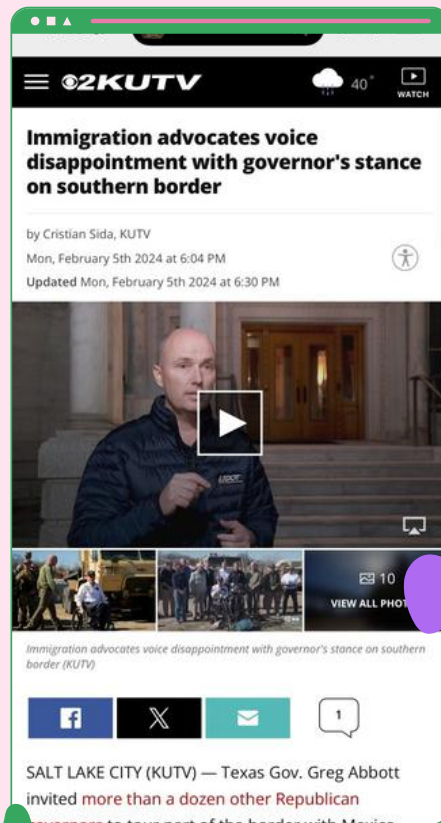
Originally meant to exclude transgender students, the new requirement created a serious barrier for immigrant and refugee students, as well. HB172 changes that, allowing for flexibility in the required documentation for homeless, immigrant and refugee students.

Immigrant Day on the Hill

This year, we hosted the inaugural Immigrant Day on the Hill in collaboration with national and community organizations, such as Utah With All Immigrants, The Center for Economic Opportunity & Belonging, I Stand with Immigrants, Holy Cross Ministries, and the Disability Law Center of Utah.

With 100 attendees present, the event celebrated, educated, and empowered community members about the legislative process and ways they can get involved.

The event highlighted the positive impact and diverse contributions immigrants have made to the growth and prosperity of Utah. Attendees had the opportunity to gain insight into the workings of the state legislature, the enactment of state policy, and how they can actively participate in the legislative process.



JUVENILE JUSTICE

The main themes of juvenile justice legislation during this past session were repeats from previous years: school hardening in response to high-profile school shootings across the county, and rolling back Utah’s nationally-celebrated juvenile justice reforms initiated in 2017.

The School Safety Task Force, formed by legislation passed just a year ago, produced multiple bills, including the far-reaching HB84, School Safety Amendments, from Rep. Ryan Wilcox (R-Ogden).

This effort included a proposal to allow staff and teachers to carry weapons in public schools, as part of a new “School Guardian Program.” Bringing a weapon into a public school remains a serious school safety violation if attempted by a student.

In what has become something of an annual event, Rep. Karianne Lisonbee (R-Clearfield) sponsored HB362, Juvenile Justice Revisions, aimed at making Utah’s juvenile justice system more oriented toward penalizing and punishing children who engage in misconduct.

Bill	Sponsor	Impact	Our Position	Fate of Bill
HB14 School Threat Penalty Amendments	Rep. Ryan Wilcox (R-Ogden)	Product of School Safety Task Force; allows for expelling and suspending public school students more easily.	OPPOSE	PASSED
HB84 School Safety Amendments	Rep. Ryan Wilcox (R-Ogden)	Product of School Safety Task Force; establishes a system for “school safety incidents,” including allowing public school staff to carry firearms in schools.	OPPOSE	PASSED
HB194 Child Placement Amendments	Rep. Christine Watkins (R-Price)	Broadens the definition of kinship care to include additional blood relatives, for children who need to be placed in a home other than that of their parent(s).	SUPPORT	FAILED
HB259 Juvenile Interrogation Modification	Rep. Marsha Judkins (R-Provo)	Allows a parent, guardian or trusted adult to be present virtually during a child’s interrogation by law enforcement.	SUPPORT	PASSED
HB362 Juvenile Justice Revisions	Rep. Karianne Lisonbee (R-Clearfield)	Annual attempt to roll back evidence-based and nationally-recognized juvenile justice reforms instituted in Utah in 2017.	OPPOSE	PASSED

Specifically, HB362 returns habitual truancy back to the purview of the juvenile courts, sliding backward from more evidence-based, school-focused interventions.

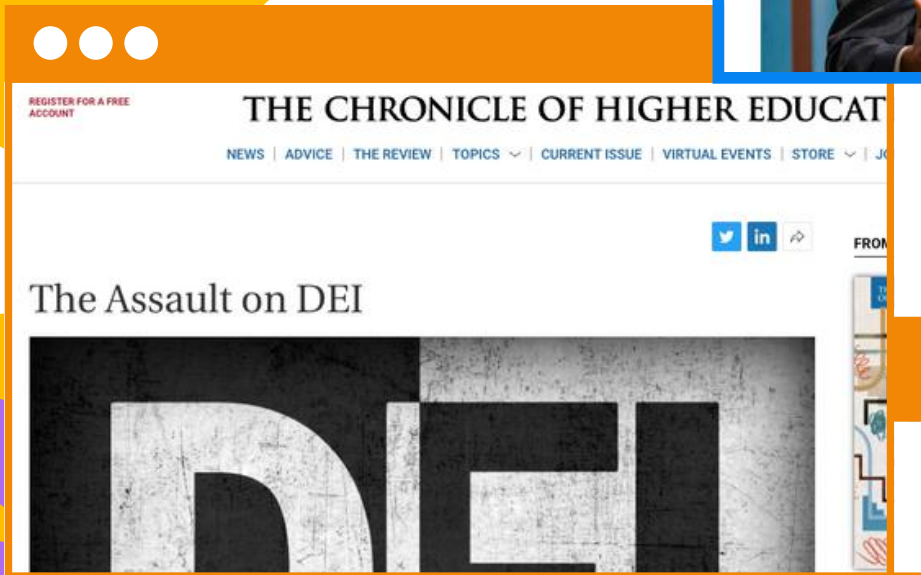
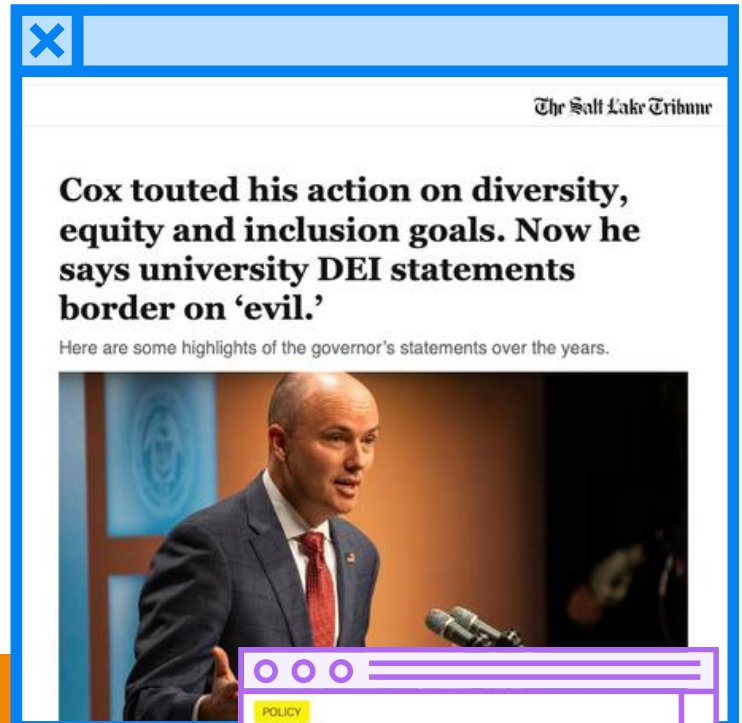
Casting a pall over the entire session was the legislature’s extreme attack on school- and college-based Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs that seek to support and welcome people from marginalized communities into educational programs.

HB261, misleadingly named “Equal Opportunity Initiatives,” is part of a concerted, national attack on programs that acknowledge the current impact of historical marginalization of various minority groups. Without much, if any, concern for how the anti-DEI directives in HB261 will practically impact Utah’s public schools and universities, the legislature rushed the bill through, giving Governor Cox the opportunity to sign HB261 as quickly as possible.

Governor Cox has recently decried DEI programs and initiatives, after starting his term in 2020 by celebrating them.

The misinformation and rhetoric employed in the passage of HB261 were indicative of a manufactured controversy, contrived by right-wing culture warriors like Christopher Rufo, who has been outspoken about the motives behind these efforts.

This is the most wide-ranging anti-DEI legislation adopted across the U.S. so far, and portends a future for our state that is less “Utah Weird” and more “Florida Crazy..”



VOICES LOBBY DAYS

In response to the evolving landscape of legislative engagement, Voices for Utah Children has strategically shifted focus to incorporate more community advocacy and public engagement in our campaigns.

Recognizing the challenges of direct lobbying, including limited access to legislators and growing hostility towards advocates, we have added to our work a concentration on more grassroots communication and engagement.

Reflecting on past victories, the pivotal role of public mobilization in driving legislative action has become increasingly clear to us.

As a team, we hosted four lobby days, empowering community advocates to participate in the legislative process. Our lobby days focused on health care and child care as primary issues.

These events brought parents, practitioners, and advocates together to learn about the legislature, the issues impacting child care and healthcare, and community lobbying. Attendees had the opportunity to meet with their lawmakers to talk about the various bills impacting kids.



OTHER BILLS

Bill	Sponsor	Impact	Our Position	Fate of Bill
HB58 International Licensing Amendments	Rep. Cory Maloy (R-Lehi)	Immigrant Family Policies: Expands licensure through endorsement to include all license types for internationally-trained professionals, removing previous restrictions.	SUPPORT	PASSED
HB96 Child Care Program Sales Tax Exemption	Rep. Christine Watkins (R-Price)	Early Care and Learning: Creates a sales and use tax exemption for construction materials used to build or expand a child care facility.	SUPPORT	PASSED
HB137 Disability Coverage Amendments	Rep. Jennifer Dailey-Provost (D-Salt Lake)	Children's Health: Allows qualified disabled people to receive Medicaid wraparound services with a sliding fee scale.	SUPPORT	FAILED
HB261 Equal Opportunity Initiatives	Rep. Katy Hall (R-Davis, Weber Cos)	Multi-Issue: Attempts to destroy college and school programs and initiatives aimed at welcoming and supporting students of color and other marginalized community members.	OPPOSE	PASSED
HB284 Initiative Amendments	Rep. Jason Kyle (R-Morgan, Weber Cos)	Multi-Issue: Requires that any ballot initiative that relates to an increase in revenue collection must specify where the money to pay for the tax increase will come from.	OPPOSE	FAILED
HB257 Sex-Based Designations for Privacy, Anti-Bullying and Women's Opportunities	Rep. Kera Birkeland (R-Morgan Co)	Multi-issue: Creates complicated rules around how public facilities can and cannot be utilized by transgender individuals; invites public policing of the use of bathrooms, locker rooms, shower rooms and other sex-segregated facilities in public buildings.	OPPOSE	PASSED
HB506 Higher Education Residency Amendments	Rep. Marsa Judkins (R-Provo)	Immigrant Family Policies: Extends in-state tuition at Utah colleges and universities to more eligible students not born in the United States.	SUPPORT	FAILED
HCR9 Concurrent Resolution Celebrating Utah's History of Welcoming Refugees	Rep. Dan Johnson (R-Logan)	Immigrant Family Policies: Celebrates Utah's history as an established refugee resettlement state.	SUPPORT	PASSED
HJR12 Joint Resolution on the Illegal Immigration Crisis	Rep. Trevor Lee (R-Davis Co)	Immigrant Family Policies: Anti-immigrant resolution containing inaccuracies and harmful rhetoric about people living in Utah without proper documentation.	OPPOSE	FAILED
HJR Proposal to Amend Utah Constitution - Statewide Initiatives	Rep. Jason Kyle (R-Morgan, Weber Cos)	Multi-Issue: Makes it more difficult for public-backed ballot initiatives to be approved, by raising the threshold for a winning ballot initiative from a simple majority (50%) to 60%.	OPPOSE	FAILED
SB26 Behavioral Health Licensing Amendments	Sen. Curt Bramble (R-Provo)	Immigrant Family Policies: Reviews the licensing, renewal, reinstatement and licensure of internationally-trained behavioral health professionals	SUPPORT	PASSED
SB223 Youth Fee Waiver Amendments	Sen. Jen Plumb (D-Salt Lake)	Child Welfare: Waives certain government fees for children and young adults in the foster care system or experiencing homelessness.	SUPPORT	PASSED
SJR9 Joint Resolution Honoring Utah's Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Cultures and Communities	Sen. Karen Kwan (D-Salt Lake)	Immigrant family policies: Acknowledges contributions made by these vital Utah communities, and encourages all Utahns to promote understanding and appreciation of them.	SUPPORT	PASSED





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Bryan Schott

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Lisa Riley Roche

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