



# Editor's Choice



Mounsef al-Mkhayar, 22, an Islamic state fighter of Moroccan descent and Italian citizenship, gestures during an interview with Reuters, in Qamishli



Protesters from the climate change pressure group Extinction Rebellion demonstrate by sitting in the road after pouring fake blood onto the ground outside Downing Street in London



Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó attends a rally against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas



A man walks beside a water canal filled with garbage around agricultural land on the outskirts of Cairo



Demonstrators carry a placard mocking President Aleksandar Vucic during a protest against his government in central Belgrade, Serbia, March 9, 2019. REUTERS/Marko Djurica



Opposition supporters take part in a rally against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas



Mar 9, 2019; New York, NY, USA; New York Knicks point guard Dennis Smith Jr. (5) drives between Sacramento Kings shooting guard Buddy Hield (24) and small forward Harrison Barnes (40) during the third quarter at Madison Square Garden. Mandatory Credit: Brad Penner-USA TODAY Sports



Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó attends a rally against President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas

# More Than 90 Texas Children Died From Abuse In 2018, A Six-Year High

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

AUSTIN — More than 90 children died in Texas last year from abuse — a six-year high, according to a state report released Friday.

The jump led to an overall rise in the number of children who died of abuse and neglect in the 2018 fiscal year, raising questions about the state's efforts to improve safety.

Last year, 211 children died of abuse and neglect, up from 172 in 2017. Most died before reaching their third birthdays, the report said, having been abused or neglected by parents or caregivers.

The report comes two years after the Texas Legislature poured millions of dollars into child protection, prompted by several high-profile child deaths. As a result, front-line investigators were given hefty raises in an effort to curb turnover and reduce case-loads, which the agency has said is working. State data shows investigators' case-loads have steadily declined since 2010. Caseworker turnover dropped sharply in 2016, then ticked up slightly last year, data show.

The issue has garnered much less attention this legislative session, as state lawmakers set their sights on property tax relief and school finance reform.

A spokeswoman for Republican Gov. Greg Abbott — who made child protection a priority during his first term — said he will keep working with the child welfare agency and the Legislature to “improve upon early intervention and prevention programs and ensure that future fatalities are prevented.”

“Gov. Abbott has made it clear that his goal is to see no more child deaths in Texas,” spokeswoman Nan Tolson said in a statement.

In a positive trend, child deaths last year due to drowning and unsafe sleep decreased — a sign that public awareness campaigns may be working, according to the Department of Family and Protective Services, which issued the report.

Of the 92 children who died from abuse, the agency said common factors included domestic violence, substance abuse and mental illness.

The report offers few details about the children's circumstances, including the 24 who died even as CPS was intervening in their families.

Under former Commissioner John Specia,



A participant wears a pin as members and volunteers of Texas CASA, Court Appointed Special Advocates, gather for a rally in front of the Bexar County Courthouse during Child Abuse Prevention Month, Monday, April 12, 2010. (Photo/expressnews.com)

the agency's Office of Child Safety began reviewing child deaths with recent CPS involvement and making their findings public. While the practice has continued with Commissioner Hank Whitman — who took over in mid-2016 — the pace of releasing the reports has slowed.

There's only one review posted online from 2017, when a child drowned during an open CPS investigation, and none from 2018.

In a 2017 state Senate committee hearing, Whitman declined to answer specific questions about the child protection agency's involvement with the 3-year-old, citing an ongoing criminal investigation. But he said the agency made policy changes after her death.

It's not clear what is driving the rise in abuse, which claimed the lives of 92 children last fiscal year. The state had been involved with 24 of the children within two years of their deaths, according to the report. Forty-eight others had never been

flagged for the agency before they died. In the remaining 20 cases, CPS had contact with the family more than two years before the child died. (Courtesy expressnews.com)

**Related**

Nearly 90 Texas children died in day care over the last decade, Statesman reports. More than 450 others were sexually abused, according to the Austin newspaper's investigation of the state's oversight of child care facilities. Gov. Greg Abbott's spokesman said lawmakers should address the issue next year.



Greater Cornerstone Academy in north Dallas on Oct. 9, 2018. (Photo/The Texas Tribune)

More than 450 children were sexually abused and 88 others died of abuse and neglect in Texas day care facilities in the last decade, according to an Austin American-Statesman investigation published Thursday. In the same time period, the newspaper found, 88 children died of abuse and neglect.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott pledged to address day care safety during the upcoming legislative session.

“Governor Abbott's top priority has always been the safety of Texans, especially when it comes to our children,” Abbott's former spokesperson, Ciara Matthews, told the Statesman. “Any allegation of child abuse or neglect must be taken seriously, and the governor will not tolerate it in Texas. He will work with the Legislature and key stakeholders to identify strategies and solutions to prevent these tragedies from occurring in the future.”

The paper reported that Shawna Diaz, whose 3-month-old son died in a Houston day care in 2016, is

working with state Rep. Ana Hernandez, D-Houston, on legislation that would require cameras in all child care facilities. But cameras can be a controversial solution. Some parents are uncomfortable with the idea of other parents having access to a video feed of their child in a group child care facility. And some child care workers feel that the constant surveillance adds an unnecessary amount of stress to their jobs.

“By providing important data regarding staff-to-child ratios and injuries at Texas day care centers, this bill would allow us to make well-informed, evidence-based policy decisions,” Zaffirini told the Statesman. “Our children are our most precious resource and ensuring their safety should be a top priority for the Legislature.”

But many of the child care centers operating in Texas are doing so under the radar, the Statesman reported. The Legislature approved funding for a 30-person investigative unit of the Department of Family and Protective Services in 2013 to crack down on illegal centers, which have higher incidents of injury and neglect than those registered with the state. But the unit was disbanded after just four years. The year after the unit's work was discontinued, the number of illegal child care facilities that the state found dropped by nearly half.



State Sen. Kirk Watson, D-Austin, told the Statesman that he's working with agency officials and the Senate Finance Committee, on which he sits, to re-establish the investigative unit.

The report identified other potential solutions to the issues faced by the day care industry that haven't yet been taken up by lawmakers. David Brown, professor of early childhood education at Texas A&M University-Commerce, told the Statesman that he recommends all child care facilities hold liability insurance, regardless of the size of the operation. More than just helping parents cover the costs associated with incidents of injury or death, Brown said insurance companies could demand stronger safety precautions, like additional fencing or pet restrictions. (Courtesy texastribune.org)

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*With Colorado Expected To Join, The National Popular Vote Compact Is About To Snag Its First Purple State*

**The Movement To Skip The Electoral College Is About To Pass A Major Milestone**



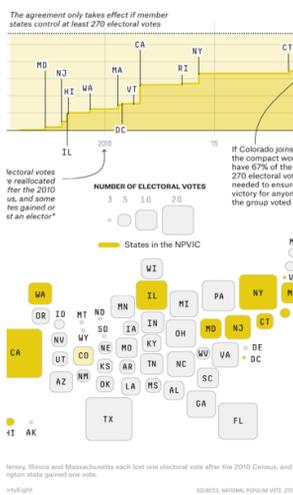
Colorado is expected to join an interstate agreement that would give an Electoral College majority to any candidate who won the national popular vote.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

When Donald Trump won the presidency in 2016, it was the fourth time in American history — and the second time this century — that a candidate won the Electoral College but lost the popular vote. Now a group of voting-rights activists is working to prevent any future presidents from taking office the same way. The National Popular Vote initiative seeks to set up an interstate compact that would effectively do an end run around the Electoral College without actually abolishing it, which would require the lengthy, laborious process of building broad, bipartisan support to pass a constitutional amendment. The logic behind the compact is that the Constitution already gives states the power to award their electoral votes how they see fit, so each state that signs on to the compact agrees to award its electoral votes to whoever wins the national popular vote — not necessarily the candidate who

wins that state. There's just one catch: The agreement only goes into effect when the states who've joined are worth a total of 270 electoral votes — enough to deliver an automatic victory to the popular vote winner. Currently, 11 states (plus the District of Columbia) representing 172 electoral votes have signed on to the compact, but Colorado and its nine electoral votes are primed to join in the next few weeks. (The state House and Senate recently passed the bill, and Gov. Jared Polis has said he will sign it.) That would bring the total number of signatories to 13 and the electoral-vote count up to 181 — two-thirds of the way to 270. Now the compact just needs to bring on enough new states to get 89 additional electoral votes and it would radically change how the U.S. picks its president. The million dollar question is, could it really happen?

takes a long time to change how we elect the president  
When states joined the National Popular Vote interstate compact and how many Electoral College votes they have



For the last few years, it has looked impossible. The compact had passed in 12 places, yes, but all of them were solidly blue — before the 2018 midterms, all of them were at least 11 points more Democratic-leaning than the country as a whole.<sup>1</sup> What's more, supporters had almost run out of low-hanging fruit to target; only one other state that blue (Delaware) has yet to sign on, and it is worth only three electoral votes. It seemed like the National Popular Vote campaign had hit a ceiling. Red states were (and still are) unlikely to join, given that both times the popular vote and electoral vote split in living memory — in 2000 and 2016 — the outcome favored the Republican candidate.<sup>2</sup> And purple states theoretically have little incentive to sign on; every four years, presidential candidates shower them with a disproportionate share of their attention (campaign visits, media buys) in an effort to snag some of those precious few swingable electoral votes. That would all go away if the only thing that mattered was the nationwide popular vote. But Colorado represents an important breakthrough. With a partisan lean of D+1, it's the first swing state to sign on to the compact. But like 10 of the other 12 jurisdictions to pass the compact, Colorado is doing so when Democrats have full control of state government, meaning the party is in power in both branches of the legislature and holds the governorship. And even in the other two instances, it was still possible for the compact to pass with only Democratic support.<sup>3</sup> That suggests that a state's willingness to pass a National Popular Vote bill may rely not just on its blues in presidential elections but also on whether its legislature and governor are Democratic. And in Colorado, most Democratic legislators voted for the legislation even as opponents argued it would eliminate Colorado's clout as a swing state. (Not a single Republican voted to support it.) So if we assume that these bills will only pass in states where Democrats can push them through without GOP support, what other states might join the compact in the next few years, and would those states be enough to reach 270? New Mexico, where the compact has already passed the state House, looks like the most likely next signatory, which would add five electoral votes. After that, there will be four remaining states that

have not yet signed on and where Democrats have full control of state government: Delaware, Maine, Nevada and Oregon, which would contribute a total of 20 more electoral votes. (All four states are considering bills that would have them join the agreement.) In addition, Democrats have a good chance to take full control of Virginia's state government after this fall's legislative elections, which could add another 13 electoral votes. But even if all these states pass a National Popular Vote bill, the compact would still sit at 219 electoral votes — 51 shy of the number needed for it to take effect. Democrats would then need to take full control of several more states for the compact to become a reality. And even if the party accomplishes that difficult task, it's not safe to assume that those states will automatically join the agreement; Delaware and Oregon have had Democratic-controlled governments for years and still have not joined (the campaign to ratify the compact kicked off in 2006). Opposition to the effort will likely ramp up, too, if the compact begins to look like a serious possibility. Right now, if the compact has any chance of being realized, it likely won't be for many years. Ultimately, the biggest challenge to the National Popular Vote agreement may be a legal one. Election-law expert Rick Hasen at the University of California, Irvine School of Law told FiveThirtyEight he expected there would be serious legal challenges to the compact if it crosses the 270-electoral threshold. Opponents may brandish the part of the Constitution that says that interstate compacts require the consent of Congress, or they may argue that it runs afoul of the Voting Rights Act because it may diminish the clout of minority voters. And, of course, there is the fact that it circumvents what the founders intended — the Electoral College was designed to be an indirect method of electing the president. So even if organizers somehow get states worth 270 electoral votes to join the compact, expect it to face a long fight in the courts challenging whether it can actually take effect. (Courtesy <https://fivethirtyeight.com>)



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