



Serving the counties of District 2: Fannin, Delta, Hunt, Hopkins, Rains, Rockwall, Kaufman, Van Zandt, and part of Dallas County

Passed and Passed Up: A Final Recap of the 85th Texas Legislative Session

During the five months of the 85th Texas Legislature, legislators discussed and debated a plethora of issues, many of which ended up in the political graveyard. Approximately 6,800 bills were filed, and of those, over 5,500 bills from both the House and Senate died in committees or as the result of a floor vote. Only 511 Senate bills completely passed both chambers.

Despite this, Team Hall had a very successful session on the Senate side, being the original author or sponsor of numerous resilient bills that successfully made it through this chamber. However, many pieces of good legislation passed the Senate, only to languish in House committees.

Transportation

We were very fortunate to have provisions of our transportation legislation incorporated into other successfully passed bills this session. One of our bills to crack down on ploys used by TxDOT to create more toll roads in the state was amended onto the must-pass TxDOT sunset bill, SB 312.

The TxDOT sunset bill also included our highway-naming provision memorializing Staff Sgt. Jeremie S. Border, a courageous Army Special Forces veteran from Mesquite, Texas who died during combat operations in Afghanistan.

We were also honored to co-author SB 1001 which was recently signed into law by Governor Abbott. This bill increases the maximum gross weight for required trailer inspections so that large trailers are inspected but most boaters and small trailer owners aren't swept up in the system.

Election Integrity

The bills we filed on election integrity to safeguard Texas voters and to preserve the fairness of Texas elections did not make it through the process. However, Senator Huffman filed and passed a measure to address the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals' concerns with our voter ID laws. I was honored to co-author that measure.

We also co-authored legislation, which did not pass, to require clear ballot language that does not mislead voters, and to allow a court to rewrite ballot language if the court finds that the language is inaccurate or confusing. Election integrity will always remain a priority for me.

Grid Security

Late in the session the Senate passed SB 83, to address the Texas electric grid's vulnerability to Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) threats. We worked extensively with stakeholders to introduce effective and robust legislation.

This legislation did not pass the House, but we have spoken with Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick about the opportunity of doing an interim study on grid security, and have been assured that this will come about in the future. We will continue fighting for all Texans on this critical issue.

Local Bills

We partnered with Representative Lance Gooden on 4 local bills, 2 creating new fresh water supply districts in Kaufman County, and 2 dissolving non-functioning special purpose and levee improvement districts. We were pleased that all of these bills cleared the legislature and will soon be in effect.





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Education

SB 7 by Senator Bettencourt was a priority bill this session in the education category. The purpose was to crack down on the rising number of improper relationships between teachers and students by criminalizing a school administrator's failure to report such conduct and automatically revoking a teacher's license if he or she receives a deferred adjudication. This bill was sent to the governor's desk.

We also authored several education-related bills from our office, one of which would give the University Interscholastic League authority to make determinations about participating students using steroids under a doctor's care, and another to prohibit collective bargaining by charter school employees under state law just as public school employees are prohibited from doing. Both of these bills passed the Senate with wide support.

Unfortunately, the legislature failed to pass meaningful school finance reform. It is past time to address the school finance formulas.

Pro-Life

A total of 6 pro-life bills were passed that would solidify the prohibition on partial-birth abortion, address the disposition of fetal remains, regulate the use of adult stem cells for terminally-ill individuals, and protect doctors from being sued on charges of wrongful birth of a child. We were honored to co-author each one of these courageous bills protecting the unborn.

CPS Reform

The legislature placed a top priority this session on much-needed reform to the broken child welfare system. We are honored to co-author SB 11 which will require the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to implement a new community-based care system. This new system would make changes such as requiring that children under conservatorship receive medical exams within three days of entering the system, and requiring that DFPS prioritize child placements in homes with the fewest foster kids.

The bill also makes sweeping changes to how the Department of Family and Protective Services handles data. Department officials would be required to retain abuse and neglect records for longer periods of time, and analyze data on recurring reports of abuse or neglect.

Sanctuary Cities/Immigration

The governor recently signed SB 4, banning sanctuary cities in the State of Texas. This bill requires local government entities and law enforcement officials to comply with federal immigration laws and detainer requests, and creates criminal penalties for entities that do not enforce the law.

This is a major victory for law enforcement, and we were honored to co-author this legislation to protect Texas citizens against the adverse effects of those who do not respect state or federal immigration law.

In addition, Senator Schwertner filed and passed SB 23, mandating E-Verify for all state contractors, and requiring all state contracts to include a paragraph specifying that they must participate in the program. We were honored to co-author this measure despite its falling short of passage in the House.





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Law Enforcement

On the law enforcement front, 4 bills were filed to equip and support law enforcement officials and their families as they daily sacrifice for the safety of all Texans. One such bill signed by the governor creates a grant program to assist law enforcement agencies with purchasing new body armor, another bill creates a "blue alert" system to aid in catching individuals suspected of killing a law enforcement officer.

Finally, for law enforcement families, SB 798 officially designates July 7th as Fallen Law Enforcement Day, and SB 15 creates a tax exemption for the surviving spouse of a first responder who is killed or fatally injured in the line of duty. It is an honor to co-author these excellent bills for our brave law enforcement officials.

Eminent Domain

We co-authored Senator Schwertner's SB 627 which strengthens private property rights by ensuring that both landowners and condemners understand their obligations and duties regarding surveys. We also co-authored a similar Schwertner bill that allowed landowners to be better informed by updating the Landowner's Bill of Rights and requiring clear purchase offers. Both of these good bills passed the Senate but died in the House.

Sunset Legislation

During the regular session, must-pass "sunset" legislation didn't make it to the governor's desk, jeopardizing several government agencies, including HB 3040, continuing the life of the Texas Medical Board (TMB).

Another sunset bill, known as the "Consolidation" bill for its inclusion of multiple boards including the Board of Examiners of Psychologists, the Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors, the Board of Marriage and Family Therapists, and the Board of Social Worker Examiners, also failed to pass during the regular session.

Most agencies undergo sunset review every 12 years, thus requiring that each agency survive a periodic review by the Legislature or be forced to shut down. Both the TMB bill, and the Consolidation, as well as several "safety net" bills extending the lives of those five agencies, failed to garner the required votes to pass both chambers.

Governor Greg Abbot has already issued a call for a 30-day special session to bring legislators back to address the sunset of the Texas Medical Board. Stay tuned for a full report on the additional items added to the call for the upcoming special session.

