

# CAPITOL UPDATE

The 2013 Legislature in Review • Senator Jane Nelson



During the 83rd Regular Session of the Texas Legislature, lawmakers filed 5,868 pieces of legislation -- 1,437 of which were passed into law. The session was noted for cooperation and progress on several priorities, including public education, health care and protecting the economic recovery of Texas.

“We worked very hard this session to make sure Texas continues to lead the way in economic recovery — and to ensure that our grandchildren grow up in a state where they have the best possible opportunity to succeed,” said Texas State Senator Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound.

Following are some of the highlights of the 83rd Regular Session of the Texas Legislature.

### State Budget:

SB 1, the state’s appropriations bill for the 2014-2015 biennium, restores funding for education while continuing the policies of fiscal responsibility that have spurred Texas’ economic success. Senator Nelson, a member of the Senate Finance Committee, played a key role in shaping the budget, serving on the conference committee for the appropriations bill and as



Senator Nelson served on the conference committee for the state budget and as the lead negotiator for Article II funding health and human services.

the Senate’s lead negotiator on the health and human services budget for the second straight session. “We passed a fiscally responsible budget that bolsters education, meets our growing infrastructure needs and ensures that Texas continues to maintain the nation’s best

climate for business,” Senator Nelson said. “We made efficient use of our health and human services dollars, and prioritized preventive health services for women, mental health and programs to assist abused and neglected children.”

### Tax-Relief:

In addition to her leadership role on the state’s budget, Senator Nelson also served on the conference committees for HB 500 and HB 7 — both of which provide tax relief to the people of Texas. HB 500 establishes an across-the-board reduction in franchise taxes on Texas businesses and makes the exemption for businesses earning less than \$1 million permanent. HB 7 eliminates the surcharge on Texans’ electricity bill to support the System Benefit Fund, which has a significant fund balance after years of over-collections to fund this program for low-income Texans. In all, the 83rd Legislature passed nearly \$1.4 billion in tax and fee reductions. “By providing tax relief this session, we have made Texas even more attractive for businesses and people across the country,” Senator Nelson said.

### Education Reform:

The state budget fully funds enrollment growth and adds significant revenue for public education. In addition, the Legislature passed key pieces of legislation to improve Texas’

education system. HB 5, which Senator Nelson supported, reduces the number of end-of-course exams for students from 15 to five -- a move supported by parents and teachers concerned with the amount of testing. “We have reached the point at which testing is interfering with learning,” Senator Nelson said. “This bill will allow students to focus on the curriculum, not just the test, while maintaining high standards. I believe our students will rise to our level of expectations.”



Senator Nelson and her family on the opening day of the 83rd Regular Session.

### Long-Term Care:

Lawmakers approved SB 7, filed by Senator Nelson, to redesign Medicaid long-term care and improve the coordination of services for seniors and individuals with disabilities. The bill will improve efficiency, achieving an estimated \$12.5 million in savings in the next two years, according to the Legislative Budget Board, and allowing the state to extend services to 12,000 Texans with disabilities who are currently waiting for services.

“SB 7 will ensure that we are providing the best possible services to not only those who currently receive them, but Texans who are currently receiving no services at all,” Senator Nelson said. “Seniors and Texans with disabilities are living longer, more productive lives than ever before, and we need this bill to ensure we will be able to provide these services long into the future.”

### Medicaid Fraud:

Senator Nelson filed and passed SB 8 to enhance the state’s ability to detect and prevent Medicaid fraud by establishing a unit at the Health and Human Services Commission to identify anomalies and red flags, as well as confirming the Office of Inspector General’s authority to investigate fraud across all health and human services programs and strengthening policies against fraudulent practices. “Medicaid fraud robs us of resources we desperately need to help those who truly need them. SB 8 will help to ensure that every dollar we spend for Medicaid is going to honest providers who provide proper services,” Senator Nelson said. “It will also help us crack down on those who are defrauding the system and taking advantage of our Medicaid population. Texas cannot afford to let even one cent go towards fraud, waste and abuse.”



Senator Nelson spoke at a press conference with Lt. Gov. Dewhurst upon filing SB 7 and SB 8.

### Mental Health Reform:

Following recent national tragedies, including the school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, Senator Nelson and other legislators worked to address the state’s mental health needs. In

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addition to adding nearly \$300 million in resources to mental health, Senator Nelson offered SB 58, which improves outcomes for mental health care by better coordinating services in a managed care setting. "SB 58 ensures that mental health services in Medicaid are provided in a coordinated manner, which will reduce costs and increase the quality of care," Senator Nelson said. "Improving these mental health services will also reduce the fiscal strain on our state and local governments, particularly within our prison system and emergency rooms. The Legislature made mental health care a top priority this session, and this bill will have a real impact in improving mental health services in Texas."

## **CPRIT Governance:**

Following serious breakdowns in oversight at the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, the Legislature passed SB 149 by Senator Nelson to strengthen governance of the institute and ensure it carries out its cancer-fighting mission in a fair, transparent manner. "SB 149 ensures the institute will operate with the utmost accountability and transparency. More importantly, it will allow us to resume our historic effort to fight cancer in a way that makes Texans proud," said Senator Nelson, who sponsored the legislation creating CPRIT in 2007.



*Senator Nelson with Denton County leadership on the floor of the Texas Senate for Denton County Days.*

## **Protecting Foster Children:**

Senator Nelson's legislative package to better protect children in foster care and help families through the Child Protective Services (CPS) system included SB 423, which creates an alternative response system for low-risk cases where families can be kept together safely. She sponsored

legislation to ensure the use of psychotropic medications by foster children is appropriate, necessary and monitored. She also ushered through the Legislature bills to increase community collaboration in child placement decisions and strengthen prevention programs. "This session I made it a priority to ensure our programs are creating good outcomes for our children in state care," Senator Nelson said. "These pieces of legislation will help to find our foster care children permanent, supportive homes, as well as keep families together where possible."

## **Addressing the Physician Workforce Shortage:**

Senator Nelson authored legislation to address critical shortages in our physician workforce. Her SB 143 was amended onto another bill and passed into law, increasing the number of residency slots for physicians in training with the goal of ensuring that we retain more of Texas' medical school graduates to practice in Texas. It also added incentives for medical schools that implement innovative programs to encourage primary care, and for physicians to participate in Medicaid and the Texas Women's Health Program. "The critical shortages we face in our health care work force are not going away," Senator Nelson said. "As our population continues to grow, we have to graduate and train more health care professionals in order to meet the health care needs of our citizens."

## **Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence:**

The Legislature approved several bills by Senator Nelson to better protect victims of domestic violence. SB 743 increases penalties for repeat violators of protection orders. SB 129 allows domestic violence victims to file protective orders in the county where the offense occurred, while they are currently only allowed to file them where they and the offender live. SB 946 allows victims of stalking and other domestic violence crimes to terminate their lease agreements under certain circumstances. "These bills will make it easier for victims of domestic violence to obtain protective orders and feel safe in their homes and elsewhere," Senator Nelson said. "The pathway for these victims to ensure their safety should be simple and clear."



*Senator Nelson, as the Senate's highest-ranking Republican, welcomed Republican women from around the state for TFRW Day.*

## **Child Credit Protection:**

SB 60 by Senator Nelson passed the Legislature and will better protect children from identity theft by allowing parents to place a freeze on their child's credit history. The bill requires credit reporting agencies, at the request of a parent, to create a credit record for a child under the age of 16; authorizes parents to place a security freeze once a file is created; and prohibits the release of information for credit purposes. In the past three years, 57,000 cases of child identity theft have been reported to the Federal Trade Commission. "By allowing parents to place a 'Do Not Enter' sign on their child's credit record, this legislation will help protect young Texans from identity theft," Senator Nelson said. "This crime can have a devastating effect on an individual's personal finances, and we should ensure that our young people can begin their adult lives with a clean financial slate."

## **Second Amendment Rights:**

Senator Nelson was a co-author of SB 1907, which allows students with concealed-handgun licenses to store guns in their cars in parking lots and on streets on college campuses. Senator Nelson also co-authored SB 182, which would allow students with concealed-handgun licenses to carry their guns with them on campus. Unfortunately, the bill was never brought up for debate on the Senate floor. "It always frustrates me when there is unfinished business at the end of a session," said Senator Nelson. "There were several bills with widespread support across Texas, including legislation to strengthen our second amendment rights, that stalled in the process. I look forward to continuing to fight for this legislation in the future."

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