



SENATOR MOLLY COOK

Senate District 15 • Capitol Report



Dear Neighbors,

When you elected me to represent Senate District 15, you entrusted me with the responsibility to hold fast to your values and get things done. As an emergency room nurse for over a decade, I brought that same sense of urgency and purpose to the Texas Capitol. I carried those ER experiences into every vote, every hearing, and every bill we worked on.

Last session was challenging in many ways, but my team stayed focused on advancing a "Nurse First" agenda, grounding every issue in compassion, public health, and evidence-based thinking.

We passed seven bills into law and helped secure over \$100 million in state funding for the district. Our office worked tirelessly to provide constituent services throughout the session, helping connect families across the district to the resources and solutions they needed.

Throughout this year, my team will be back in the neighborhoods, hosting community events, knocking on doors, meeting with folks face-to-face, and proactively reaching out to our communities. That's where the best ideas come from.

Please stay in touch, whether through social media, email, or by calling our office. It remains the honor of my life to serve as both your State Senator and a nurse for our community. Thank you for your trust and partnership in this important work.

Cuando me eligieron para representar al Distrito Senatorial 15, me confiaron la responsabilidad de defender sus valores y de lograr resultados. Como enfermera de sala de emergencias por más de una década, llevé ese mismo sentido de urgencia y propósito al Capitolio de Texas. He llevado esas experiencias del hospital a cada voto, cada junta y cada proyecto de ley en el que trabajamos durante la última sesión.

La sesión pasada fue un reto en muchos sentidos, pero mi equipo se mantuvo enfocado en avanzar una agenda de "Enfermera Primero," basando cada tema en la compasión, la salud pública y el pensamiento basado en evidencia.

Aprobamos siete proyectos de ley que ahora son ley y ayudamos a asegurar más de 100 millones de dólares en fondos estatales para el distrito. Nuestra oficina trabajó durante toda la sesión para ofrecer servicios a la comunidad, ayudando a conectar a las familias con los recursos y soluciones que necesitaban.

Durante este año, mi equipo volverá a los vecindarios: organizando eventos comunitarios, tocando puertas, reuniéndose cara a cara con las personas y conectando de manera proactiva con nuestras comunidades. Ahí es donde nacen las mejores ideas.

Por favor, manténganse en contacto, ya sea por redes sociales, correo electrónico o llamando a nuestras oficinas. Sigue siendo el honor de mi vida servir como su Senadora Estatal y como enfermera para nuestra comunidad. Gracias por su confianza y por acompañarme en este trabajo tan importante.

Sincerely,

Senator Molly Cook



Escanee el código para leer este informe en español.

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE 89TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILLS BY THE NUMBERS

94 Bills filed

15 Constituent bills filed

16 Bills heard in committee

7 Bills signed/filed by the governor

4 Bills passed as an amendment/other law

1 Bill effective immediately

My Legislative Achievements

Last session, seven of the bills I authored and sponsored were passed into law. Each bill represents a significant policy change that will affect lives across the State of Texas:

- **SB 1307** - directs the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) to develop a consumer reference guide to help navigate the health insurance market in Texas.
- **SB 1313** - prohibits smoke shops/e-cig retailers from using signage that may appeal to young children, like depicting cartoon-like characters or images, photos of celebrities, and pictures resembling food products.
- **SB 1316** - prohibits e-cigarette advertisements within 1,000 feet of a school or church.
- **HB 3801** - creates the Statewide Health Professions Workforce Coordinating Council (HPWCC) to plan and dedicate resources toward healthcare workforce needs.
- **HB 694** - improves transparency, fairness, and parental rights in the foster care system by improving notification of the children's guardians and attorneys.
- **HB 713** - streamlines reporting processes of maternal mortality and morbidity data to save lives and improve pregnancy outcomes.
- **HB 3151** - allows Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to be credentialed more quickly so that health care providers are timely paid, and FQHCs can serve more people and keep their doors open.

Budget

The Legislature approved SB 1 and HB 500, the state's \$338 billion two-year spending plan, allocating much of it to important programs. A large chunk of the budget, around \$51 billion, will maintain and add to the state's property tax buydowns. A new \$8.5 billion will go to public school funding, \$4.2 billion of which is for teacher pay raises specifically. \$2.5 billion will go to current water infrastructure spending, with \$1 billion more per year allocated if Texas voters approve Proposition 4 this fall. \$1.8 billion is allocated to support microgrid deployment and keep the lights on at hospitals, nursing homes, water treatment plants, police and fire stations, and other critical facilities across the state

What This Looks Like for SD 15

I'm happy to share that money was set aside in the budget for several key SD 15 funding initiatives. I'm most proud of \$54 million that has been allocated for the Cypress Ditch Regional Flood Mitigation Project. This will update flood infrastructure and planning in Bellaire to benefit our entire region. Additionally, I secured over \$5 million in funding for various parks in SD 15, including Agnes Moffitt Park Pool, Doss Park, and Bordersville Park.

If you want to advocate for funding for your neighborhood, reach out to our office. The 90th Legislative Session is just around the corner, so now is the time to start planning!



Senator Cook with her team on the north steps of the Texas Capitol after the passage of her first bill, SB 1307.

during extreme weather events.

The state budgeted close to \$20 billion for policing and incarceration. In comparison, the state budgeted less than \$5 billion for the foster care system this cycle. Another large chunk of money is spent on Operation Lone Star, the Governor's state-run border security program. Finally, \$5 billion was allocated to the Texas Energy Fund to encourage dispatchable energy (which does not include wind or solar energy) to locate and expand in Texas.

The approved budget is also missing some important funding opportunities for Texas, like Medicaid expansion and increasing state employee retiree pensions. Additionally, Governor Abbott vetoed parts of the budget that would have allocated funding for the Summer EBT Program, which would have given low-income families \$120/child to feed them during the summer months.

What This Looks Like for SD 15

SB 1313 and **SB 1316** are two pieces of legislation that came directly from constituents. Parents were concerned about a smoke shop located just next door to an elementary school in our district. These bills will require smoke shops to avoid signage and marketing techniques that may appeal to young children and prevent them from advertising e-cigarettes at all within 1,000 feet of schools and faith homes.



Fourth-grade students from Wharton Dual Language Academy in Montrose visited the Capitol to learn about SB 1313 and SB 1316, legislation shaped by the advocacy of Wharton parents and Montrose neighbors concerned about youth vaping and advertising near schools.

HB 3151 means that federally qualified health centers, such as Legacy and Spring Branch Community Health Center, in **SD 15**, will be able to achieve expedited credentialing, save money, compensate their doctors, and serve more patients in our community.

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE 89TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Education

Texas's education system was at the forefront of discussions last legislative session.

SB 2 will allow families to apply for an "education savings account," or voucher, of upwards of \$10,000/child/year. While state leaders appropriated \$1 billion for the biennium to get the program running, the long-term costs of the program remain to be seen. **I stand firmly against private school voucher programs and believe that public funds should remain in our public schools that serve every child, regardless of ability or background.**

Additionally, Texas made significant investments in the public school finance system with **HB 2**, which allocates \$8.5 billion to long-overdue raises and targeted relief for districts. Teachers with at least three years of experience should expect a \$2,500 - \$8,000 raise, depending on district size and total years of service. Investments were also made to cover everyday expenses (like transportation, utilities, insurance, etc.), special education, early education, and career and technical education. While these investments are a step in the right direction, I consistently advocated for raising the basic allotment, which would provide lasting, equitable support to every school district.

State leaders continued to push legislation last session impacting public school culture, with **SB 12** (prohibiting DEI in K-12 hiring), **SB 13** (refining book bans in public schools), and **SB 10** (requiring the Ten Commandments to be displayed in classrooms).



Senator Cook welcomes Aldine ISD leaders and students to the Capitol during the legislative session to discuss education priorities.

For higher education, the state made unprecedented moves with **SB 37**, which gives the state broad authority to intervene in the curriculum and hiring practices of our public universities and colleges. These changes are deeply concerning, and we will monitor them closely. **I spoke out and voted against all of these measures.**

Key legislation that fell short includes **HB 4**, which would have replaced STAAR with three shorter tests given throughout the year.

Property Taxes and Housing

Texas increased the allowable homestead exemptions for property owners with **SB 4** (\$140,000 homestead exemption) and **SB 23** (additional \$60,000 homestead exemption for those 65+ and/or with a disability).

The Legislature also passed **SB 38**, a bill framed as addressing 'squatters,' but one that could also oust legitimate renters from their homes without due notice. While the final version of the bill is an improvement from the original, concerns remain, and my office will closely monitor its implementation. As we work to address housing inequality and homelessness, we must always remember that the biggest risk factor for homelessness is an eviction.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS



The Texas Senate recognized the Memorial Park Conservancy with Senate Resolution 130, as they celebrated the 100th anniversary of this beloved Houston green space landmark.

Environment

Major investments were made in our statewide water supply. **HJR 7**, which will be on the November 2025 ballot as Proposition 4, asks voters to dedicate \$1 billion/year through 2035 for water infrastructure projects.

Additionally, several attempts were made to limit investments in renewable energy, though most failed. **SB 388** (requiring 50% of new energy to be natural gas), **SB 715** (enacting new, burdensome fees for wind and solar), and **SB 383** (prohibiting offshore wind) all failed. **Recognizing the link between environmental health and public health, I strongly support renewable energy. Renewables are essential to maximizing homegrown energy sources, preserving natural environments, creating good-paying jobs, and addressing the health impacts of pollution.**

Other important legislation passed included **SB 763** (more regular protectiveness reviews of the standard permit for concrete batch plants), as well as **HB 517** (prohibiting HOAs from fining homeowners for discolored lawns following local water restrictions).

Criminal Justice and Public Safety

The infamous **SB 3**, which would have banned the sale of all THC-related products, passed the House and Senate, but it was ultimately vetoed by Governor Abbott. The Governor asked the Legislature to come back in a special session to reconsider how to balance protecting minors with protecting the autonomy of responsible adults.

Texas also expanded access to firearms, rather than enacting a data-driven, common-sense firearm safety policy. **SB 1362** (prohibiting extreme risk protection orders, or red flag laws, in civil cases) and **SB 1596** (legalizing

I authored **SB 1310** to address issues our constituents encountered at unregulated "senior retirement communities" in the aftermath of Beryl. This legislation would have required senior retirement communities to develop and implement an emergency preparedness plan (not currently required) so that residents and families of loved ones simply know what to expect when disaster strikes. We worked extensively with stakeholders to pass SB 1310 out of the Senate, but it failed to receive a hearing in the House due to external pressures.

Hurricane Beryl was not a one-off, and SD 15 residents deserve to feel safe in their homes during emergencies. I will continue to fight for greater emergency preparedness requirements for companies housing our most vulnerable.

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE 89TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

short-barreled firearms without registration) both passed. Some leadership priorities did fail, though, such as **HB 1794** (permitting the concealed carry of handguns into polling places during election season) and **HB 2470** (lowering the age required for handgun licenses from 21 to 18). Unfortunately, **SB 1657** (raising the age to purchase a firearm) never even received a hearing. **I voted against every bill that would have expanded access to firearms, and I will continue to advocate for common-sense measures, including background checks, extreme risk protective orders, safe storage requirements, and early mental health interventions.**

Additionally, bail and pre-trial detention were considered in great detail last session. **SB 9** requires judges to deny bail in more cases and give prosecutors greater authority to hold people in jail before trial. **SJR 5**, is on the November 2025 ballot as Proposition 3, allows voters to expand the offenses for which a judge may outright deny bail. However, **SJR 1**, which denies bail for anyone who meets a broad definition of “illegal alien,” failed to pass. Meanwhile, Texas failed to mandate air conditioning in state prisons.

Overall, there was a general trend of legislation leading to greater incarceration and strain on our public justice system and counties.

Emergency Preparedness

Following the May 2024 Derecho and Hurricane Beryl last summer, emergency preparedness was top of mind for our community. Unfortunately, while several bills were filed by Houston-area legislators, very few substantive reforms passed.

HB 3595 (emergency preparedness procedures for assisted living) was one bill that did pass. However, there is a local pre-emption clause in the bill, which could undo Harris County’s backup power requirements for these facilities. We will monitor this bill closely to understand its impact on Harris County.

Women’s Health

Significant changes were made to abortion law regarding the “life of the mother” medical exceptions. **SB 31** makes several important changes: (1) clarifies that a life-threatening medical emergency doesn’t need to be imminent for a doctor to act, (2) mandates physician and attorney education on the nuances of the law, and (3) allows hospital and medical staff to discuss potential terminations of pregnancies with patients, among other changes. **While this is a step forward, as a nurse, I will continue to advocate for broader reforms that give doctors the freedom to practice medicine, protect maternal health, and provide lifesaving care.**

Additionally, **SB 33** (prohibiting public funds on abortion services) passed, while **SB 2880** (upping restrictions on medication abortion) failed.



Senator Cook joins Rep. Ann Johnson of Houston and Rep. Donna Howard of Austin to review legislation on women’s health in the Senate chamber.

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Every session, the Lieutenant Governor assigns members to Senate Committees. This decision is based on things like seniority, background and experience in a given area, and important issues in members’ districts. I was proud to be appointed to three committees last session: Health & Human Services, Local Government, and Administration.

Health and Human Services

The Senate Health and Human Services Committee is one of the legislature’s most consequential policy bodies, and **my work on this committee reflects my core belief: health policy should serve the people.** The committee is responsible for shaping legislation and oversight across a broad range of issues, including Medicaid, foster care, maternal mortality, public health, mental health services, long-term care, immunizations, and child welfare.

One of the most urgent and contentious debates of the 89th Session was the growing anti-vaccine discourse and its impact on public health. **I stood firmly against these measures, grounding my opposition in science, public health best practices, and the lived reality of preventable outbreaks.** Nothing in healthcare is without risk, but misleading and potentially harmful rhetoric targeting childhood immunizations, COVID-19 vaccines, and routine public health protocols made its way into several proposed bills. The work of our team helped stall multiple proposals that would have endangered community health and put immunocompromised children at risk.

Important legislation passed this committee, such as **HB 136** (adding lactation services to Medicaid coverage), **HB 3940** (improving health coverage of newborn babies), and



Senator Cook leads a CPR/AED training at the Capitol for staff and the public.

SB 25 (establishing recess requirements and improving nutrition education). Unfortunately, concerning legislation like **HB 1586** (easier exemptions for vaccines during school enrollment), **SB 1038** (punishing providers for Medicaid billing errors), and **SB 1257** (detering insurance companies from providing gender affirming care) also passed.

As a practicing ER nurse, my real-world experience gave voice to frontline healthcare workers, families in crisis, and vulnerable Texans often overlooked in political debate. In every hearing, I championed prevention, access, and the dignity of care.

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

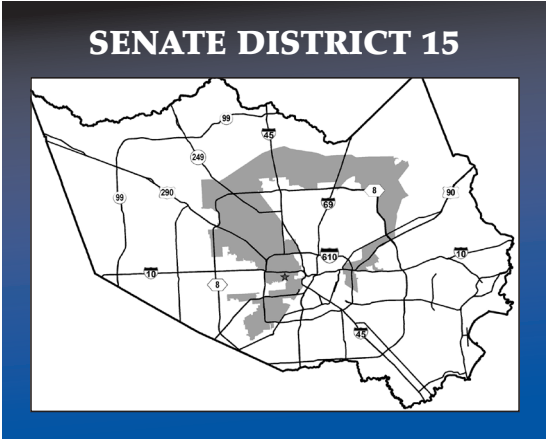
Local Government

The Local Government Committee is tasked with considering the issues of local governments, like counties, municipal utility districts, cities, and school districts. The committee also considered important issues like property tax cuts and housing affordability.

Unfortunately, there was also a concerning trend towards the erosion of local control. Several bills were offered in this committee that would limit municipal authority over charter amendments (**SB 1059** – failed), homelessness initiatives (**SB 241** – failed), and civilian oversight boards (**SB 1957** – signed into law). Additionally, there was a clear move to limit flexibility amongst local taxing units. Several bills tried to limit government financing structures for things like light rail (**SB 2519** – failed) and disaster relief (**HB 30** – signed into law).

However, one major piece of legislation that passed this committee was **HB 21**, which reforms property tax exemptions for housing finance corporations (HFCs). HFCs are used to incentivize a developer to produce affordable

housing, and in return, they receive a 100% tax exemption on the property. It was recently reported that some HFC developers were acting in bad faith and taking advantage of this lucrative offer. In response, HB 21 enacts more stringent affordability requirements, ensures better state monitoring, and requires greater transparency of these entities.



REPRESENTING SD 15 CONSTITUENT HIGHLIGHTS

From advocacy days to school visits, some of our most powerful moments last session came from meeting with constituents and neighbors who traveled to Austin to speak up for their communities. The highlights below spotlight just a few of the many groups, students, and leaders who brought the voices of SD 15 to the Capitol this year:

Acres Homes Community Advocacy Day

Students and volunteers from the Acres Homes neighborhood visited the Capitol for their first-ever Community Advocacy Day at the Capitol, sponsored by our office. Young leaders from Carver High School, YES Prep White Oak, and YES Prep Northline represented this historic Houston community, affectionately known as "The 4-4" after the METRO bus line that serves the area.



Preserving History at Olivewood Cemetery

I welcomed representatives from The Descendants of Olivewood, Inc., a nonprofit working to preserve Olivewood Cemetery, Houston's first incorporated African American cemetery.



Texas Streets Coalition

I met with advocates from the Texas Streets Coalition who visited the Capitol, representing more than 30 nonprofit and community organizations across Texas working to prioritize *people* in transportation planning.

The Capitol is stronger when constituents are in the building. Whether it was your first visit or one of many, thank you for showing up, speaking out, and bringing our district's voice to Austin.



**SIGN UP
FOR THE SD 15
NEWSLETTER**



IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Department of Family and Protective Services	
Texas Abuse/Neglect Hotline	(800) 252-5400
Foster Care and Adoption Information	(800) 233-3405
Texas Youth & Runaway Hotline.....	(800) 989-6884
Department of Housing and Community Affairs	
Eviction Help, Homeless Services &	
Home Repair.....	(800) 525-0657
Homebuyer Assistance & Education	(800) 792-1119
Department of Insurance	
Consumer Help Line/File a Complaint	(800) 252-3439
Department of Motor Vehicles	
Information Hotline.....	(888) 368-4689
Department of Public Safety	
Driver's Licenses.....	(512) 424-2600
Department of State Health Services	
Complaint Hotline.....	(888) 973-0022
Information and Referral Hotline	(888) 963-7111
Aging and Disability Resource Center.....	(855) 937-2372
Office of the Attorney General	
Child Support Division.....	(800) 252-8014
General Inquiry/Consumer Protection.....	(800) 621-0508
Railroad Commission of Texas	
Gas Utility Complaints.....	(512) 463-7164
Secretary of State	
Voter Information	(800) 252-8683
State Bar of Texas	
Texas Law Center.....	(800) 204-2222
Texas Public Utilities Commission	
Assistance Hotline.....	(888) 782-8477
Workforce Commission	
Unemployment Benefits & Claims	(800) 939-6631
Texas/United Way Help Line:	2-1-1

If you need assistance interacting with a state agency, you can always reach out to our District Office. Our excellent team has assisted constituents with many problems, including overcoming hurdles with licenses, issues with FEMA applications, and expediting permitting for businesses. We are here to assist you and connect you with the right people.

THE TEXAS SENATE IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER AND DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL ORIGIN, SEX, RELIGION, AGE OR DISABILITY IN EMPLOYMENT OR THE PROVISION OF SERVICES.



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