

Capitol Update 3-5-25

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! It's a busy time for us here at the statehouse in Austin. My staff and I are hard at work with committees starting to actively hear bills and the bill filing deadline rapidly approaching on Friday, March 14th. I have plenty to share in this edition of the Capitol Update, so let's dive right in.



Chairing my first Natural Resources Committee hearing for the session on 2/26/25. Pictured here with me at the dais are my Natural Resources Committee Staff.

Newly Authored Legislation

Since the last Capitol Update, I have filed an additional eleven pieces of legislation. As we approach the March 14th bill-filing deadline, my team and I are still working on some final pieces of important legislation and I will update you on those in the next edition. Here are some examples of legislation I have filed since the last update and all can be found online [here](#):

SJR 59: SJR 59 establishes a constitutionally dedicated, permanent endowment to fund the capital infrastructure needs of career and technical education programs offered by the Texas State Technical College System (TSTC). TSTC historically has no consistently adequate capital funding to allow for strategic growth in current or new campuses. With the record growth of employment rates in Texas, the skilled-labor shortage also continues to grow. TSTC has a long history of proven performance in training highly skilled workers. This is why a large group of associations and businesses have been pushing for the expansion of TSTC into the fastest growing regions of Texas for access to training facilities that produce the skilled workforce needed. SJR 59 creates a reliable source of capital funding for TSTC to expand technical training in order to meet the growing skills gap in Texas and place more Texans in great-paying jobs. This bill passed the Senate unanimously last session. I look forward to working with Rep. Stan Lambert and getting this to you to vote on this coming November.

SB 1570: This legislation would establish the Tarleton State University College of Osteopathic Medicine. Osteopathic medicine is considered a patient-centered medical practice that considers the whole person, including their physical, mental, and emotional health. The prominent goal in establishing a College of Osteopathic Medicine at Tarleton State University is to stimulate regional economic growth and job creation while enhancing quality healthcare access in rural communities. Texas currently ranks 47th in the nation in patient-physician ratio. Pleased to have filed the companion bill with Rep. Shelby Slawson.

SB 1571: SB 1571 would allow public notaries' contact information to be available publicly, and accessible through the Secretary of State's office. This has been common practice, but due to an oversight in a bill last session (2023), the Secretary of State's office was no longer allowed to share this information. This has caused issues for people being able to find notaries and this bill seeks to correct the issue.

SB 1572: This legislation will qualify steel as an authorized resource that can be transported while overweight and creates a new permit at TxDMV that would allow trucks to transport shipments up to 90,000 pounds on TxDOT approved roads and highways. Permit funds collected will primarily be used to repair Texas roads through the state highway fund. This bill assists steel producers in Ellis and Eastland Counties in the district.

SB 1573: The Brady List refers to a list of law enforcement officers whose credibility or reliability has been called into question. Currently, Brady Lists are formally or informally maintained under the sole jurisdiction of prosecutors and not subject to outside supervision or due process. Officers that are placed on a Brady List aren't given an opportunity to formally appeal their listing, making it impossible to be removed from the list. Additionally, being placed on a Brady List often limits an officer's assignments, advancements, job opportunities and can result in job termination. SB 1573 would give peace officers who are placed on a Brady List the opportunity to dispute the allegation by providing a means of due process to appeal such a listing and determination through a district court.

SB 1754: SB 1754 prohibits local tax abatements for renewable energy facilities under Chapter 312, Tax Code and Chapters 380 and 381, Local Government Code. These local tax abatements were originally made as an incentive for new businesses to come to Texas with the intended purpose to bring new jobs and revenue with them. Wind, solar, and battery facilities offer few jobs, depreciate in taxable value quickly, and distort the energy market as a result of the historic subsidies they have received from the federal government. As such, their inclusion in local economic development agreement statutes is not appropriate. This bill would remove wind and solar from eligibility in Texas for local tax abatements.

SB 1755: During the 88th interim (the time between last session and the current one), the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development, which I chaired, held hearings to explore ways to improve workforce productivity, including through enhanced access to childcare. One of the issues the Committee found was while the State has encouraged independent school districts (ISD) and open-enrollment charter schools to establish these partnerships since the passing of HB 3 (86R) in 2019, many private providers still face regulatory barriers that are often insurmountable. Most childcare providers maintain an Industry classification (Group I), which does not meet the requirement for providers to have an Education classification (Group E) when partnering with an educational institution. Group I classification allows for the provider to offer childcare services under HHSC licensing. The process of changing classification varies widely across municipalities and the statutory requirement forcing childcare providers to change their occupancy creates costs many providers can't afford, deterring partnerships without any clear benefit to safety or educational quality. As a solution, SB 1755 will simplify the process allowing educational institutions to partner with private childcare providers under the eligible certificate of occupancy the provider currently maintains.

SB 1756: SB 1756 would close a loophole limiting all hotel and convention center projects, which rebate state sales, use, hotel occupancy, and other taxes for ten years back to the city, to one instance per legislative authorization in perpetuity. In my research over the last two interims on these types of projects, I found that cities over 175,000 in population could do multiple projects under one legislative authorization, which I don't believe to have been the intent of the statute. While these tools have been effective in creating positive economic development for both the State and local jurisdictions, the fiscal implications of these projects can be significant and financial stewardship must be carefully maintained. As such, the Legislature should play a decisive role in the creation of each hotel and convention center project for which state revenue is involved. Municipalities would still be able to have multiple projects, but would need to come to the Legislature to authorize each one rather than cities doing multiple projects with only one authorization.

SB 1757: This bill would create a new permit for aggregate production operations, such as rock quarrying, that encourages more neighborly practices to be followed. Permitting for these types of operations are rightfully based on public health protection. This new permit is optional to acquire as the requirements go beyond what is necessary for health considerations based on the Federal Clean Air Act and would allow for a larger amount of production to occur at the site as the incentive to use this more stringent permit. The growth of the State makes us dependent on our own natural resources to support that growth.

SB 1758: SB 1758 would create a pilot program for the University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology (BEG) to study vibrational impacts caused by aggregate production, such as cement production, when it is near semiconductor wafer manufacturing facilities. These manufacturing facilities represent massive investments in the Texas economy, while the state has never needed as much cement and concrete as it does now due to the population growth we are experiencing. This pilot program will help the legislature make an informed decision on how to protect the major investments by the wafer manufacturing industry while ensuring aggregate producers and refiners are able to provide the resources we need to build our infrastructure. This bill is the result of our interim charge from Lt. Gov. Patrick on a circumstance in Grayson County.

SB 1759: This would create a "Good Samaritan" type statute that would provide liability protection if an operator helps out with an "oil and gas emergency," which is a new term being defined in the bill for the Railroad Commission of Texas to trigger when the liability protection would apply. Currently, delays in help can often occur from company hesitation to become involved due to liability concerns. The intent is to provide liability protection for operators that are being a good steward and responsible business working to help the Railroad Commission clean up related environmental issues in a timely manner.

Senate Passes SB 26 (Creighton), Increasing Teacher Pay, Unanimously

Senate Bill 26, by Senator Creighton (R- Conroe), establishes a new teacher retention allotment to provide pay increases for teachers. SB 26 aims to elevate the teaching profession in Texas by establishing a strong compensation framework to reward teachers for their continued commitment to excellence through retention pay increases, with nearly 80% of teachers eligible.

Teachers with three to four years of experience in suburban and urban school districts (with 5,001 or more students enrolled) will receive pay increases of \$2,500 per year, while teachers with five or more years of experience will receive a pay increase of \$5,500 per year. It also aims to close the pay gap between urban and suburban teachers and rural teachers. Teachers with three to four years of experience in rural districts (with 5,000 or less students enrolled) will receive pay increases of \$5,000 per year, while teachers with five or more years of experience will receive a pay increase of \$10,000 per year.

Additionally, teachers will have an enhanced ability to earn additional money through the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA), which is a pay for performance program where teachers can earn additional pay for improved outcomes. TIA has proven to significantly increase retention and enhance student outcomes in districts that have been participating. The proposed expansion of TIA in this bill is designed to maximize these positive effects, with spill-over impacts extending beyond just TIA-designated teachers. Part of this expansion includes increasing the number of teachers eligible from 33% to 50% per district, including an additional TIA category designation for teachers to become eligible, and the ability for school districts to level up their TIA dollars by adopting new reforms.

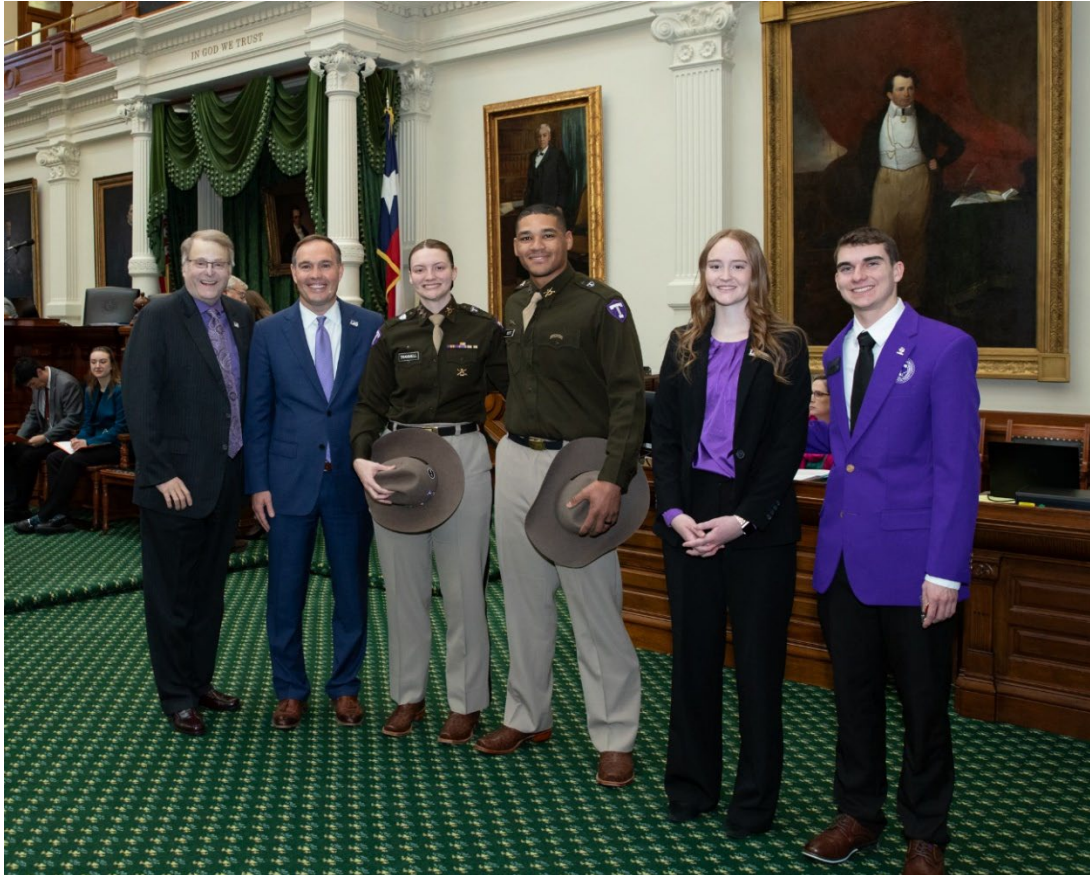
SB 26 also allows teachers to enroll their children in their school's prekindergarten program, if offered, for free, and includes optional statewide teacher liability insurance. I am happy to be a Co-Author on this important legislation.

Joint-Authored & Co-Authored Bills

With thousands of bills filed each legislative session, legislators are often unable to carry a particular piece of legislation due to their existing workload. Additionally, a colleague may file a bill with which a member has strong agreement or before that member is able to do so. In either instance, the option exists to "joint author" or "co-author" a particular bill. These terms mean essentially the same thing: a legislator is adding his or her signature to a bill, offering the bill author a seconding voice of support. In addition to SB 26 by Creighton laid out above, here is a summary of some of the bills I have joint authored/co-authored can be found below:

- **[SB 2](#)** (Creighton) – Establishes an education savings account (ESA) program that gives parents a broader choice to direct their child’s education. The Senate passed this legislation on Feb. 5th. (more information in my last [Capitol Update](#))
- **[SB 4/ SJR 2](#)** (Bettencourt) - Passed with bipartisan support on the Senate Floor. SB 4 and SJR 2 provide meaningful reduction in school district property taxes to Texas homeowners by raising the Homestead Exemption from \$100,000 to \$140,000. (more information in my last [Capitol Update](#))
- **[SB 9](#)** (Huffman) – Shifts the authority to set initial bonds for specific high-risk defendants, including those on parole, repeat felony offenders, and those charged with violent crimes or detained under immigration holds, from hearing officers to a Presiding Judge that is accountable to voters. SB 9 expands the list of offenses ineligible for personal bond to include unlawful firearm possession, violation of family violence protective orders, terroristic threats, and murder related to fentanyl distribution. SB 9 increases transparency in charitable bail organizations’ reporting, prevents magistrates from altering bonds set by a district court, mandates a judicial appearance before setting felony bonds, and provides a new appeal process for prosecutors to challenge insufficient bail. This is a part of a package of bail reform bills that passed the Senate with bipartisan support on Feb. 19th.
- **[SB 10](#)** (King) – Requires public school classrooms to display a copy of the Ten Commandments. This legislation passed the Senate last session and died on the House floor.
- **[SB 11](#)** (Middleton) – Establishes a framework that a school district or open-enrollment charter school may use when establishing a policy to provide students and employees the ability to participate in a period of prayer and reading of religious texts. Employees or a parent or guardian of the students participating would need a signed consent form and would have a choice to participate. This legislation passed the Senate last session, but did not receive a hearing in the House.
- **[SB 13](#)** (Paxton) – Provides increased structure and transparency to parents who find an inappropriate library book in their child's school library. This bill also gives a clear and transparent standard for school library book acquisition and review policies to ensure that school library collections are appropriate for their campuses based on developmental suitability for those grade levels and on community values.
- **[SB 17](#)** (Kolkhorst) – Prohibits the purchase of certain private property (agricultural land, an improvement on agricultural land, commercial property, industrial property, residential property, a mine or quarry, a mineral in place, or standing timber) in Texas by governmental entities, companies, and individuals that are domiciled in Russia, North Korea, China, and Iran. These prohibitions do not apply to United States citizens and lawful permanent residents, including dual citizens.
- **[SB 18](#)** (Hughes) – Denies state or other public funding to municipal libraries that host “drag story hours” or otherwise host events where persons presenting as the opposite sex read books to children for entertainment.
- **[SB 28](#)** (Hall) – Strengthens existing statutes that the Texas Lottery Commission has ignored, enabling bad actors from out of state and overseas to exploit our State’s lottery system. In 2023 the Commission allowed out-of-state couriers to come into the state to offer novel ways to play by facilitating the purchase of games via a mobile/internet application. This decision facilitated an anonymous, out of state player who won a \$95 million Texas lottery jackpot by purchasing all 25.8 million possible ticket combinations within 72 hours, raising questions about who was behind the win and how such a large-scale ticket purchase complied with Texas Lottery Commission rules. The winning ticket, which led to a \$57.8 million payout, was claimed by an anonymous private company. This legislation bans lottery couriers from operating in Texas by prohibiting the sale or purchase of lottery tickets on the Internet. The Senate unanimously passed this legislation on Feb. 25th.
- **[SB 40](#)** (Huffman) – Bans the use of taxpayer money by a political subdivision to fund nonprofit organizations that use public donations to pay bail bonds for defendants and allows taxpayers or residents to seek injunctive relief if this prohibition is violated. Part of the larger Bail Reform package of bills mentioned above.

- **[SJR 1](#)** (Huffman) – Requires the denial of bail for an illegal alien who is accused of a felony offense upon finding of probable cause, assisting the federal government in implementing the recently signed Laken Riley Act. This passed the Senate along with the other bail reform bills and is now awaiting a hearing in the House.
- **[SJR 5](#)** (Huffman) – Gives magistrates and judges the ability to deny bail to the most violent offenders who pose a dangerous threat to public safety. Specifically, individuals accused of committing violent offenses, first-degree felony sexual offenses, or continuous human trafficking. This passed the Senate 29-2 and is also awaiting a hearing in the House.



February 20th was Tarleton Day at the Capitol! On my left, Dr. James Hurley – Tarleton State University President, Amber Trammell-Coburn – Tarleton State Corps of Cadets Commander, Kore Scott – Corps of Cadets Deputy Commander, Lacey Malone – my office’s Tarleton Legislative Intern, and Gabe Day – Student Body President.



On Feb. 25th, I was able to present resolutions for Baylor Day at the Capitol with Baylor President Livingstone and her team on the Senate floor (pictured on the left) and for the Baylor Bullock Scholars who are interning at the Capitol this session (pictured on the right).

In closing, I want to thank you again for reading this update from 'Team Birdwell.' I hope you found it informative and that you'll share it with your friends, family, and colleagues in Senate District 22, who may subscribe to the Capitol Update [by clicking here](#). If you missed any of my previous Capitol Updates and want to read them too, you can find them [here](#)!

Thanks for reading, and God bless,



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