



Representative Garnet F. Coleman's 85th Session Wrap Up

From the Desk of Representative Coleman:

This session was one of my most productive, and I have you to thank for it.

My highlights of the session were passing the Sandra Bland Act which will help reform our criminal justice system, and improving our Child Protective Services (CPS) system by inserting important budget riders to address the root cause of 2/3rds of CPS placements — substance abuse. I was also able to address mental health in our state by helping pass a total of \$92.5 million to fund healthy community collaboratives, which help divert people suffering from mental illness or substance abuse out of the criminal justice system and in to treatment.

But, beyond that I was able to accomplish so much more. Please see below for a record of my accomplishments this session.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Garnet F. Coleman".

Garnet F. Coleman
Texas State Representative - District 147

Criminal Justice Reform

The Sandra Bland Act. My number one priority this session was passing the Sandra Bland Act. I am proud that with the help of many stakeholders that a version of the Sandra Bland Act passed which will act as a foundation for additional criminal justice reform in the future. The Sandra Bland Act as passed will ensure all officers receive de-escalation training, traffic stop data will be more robust and clear, where to make a complaint will be on each traffic ticket, outside investigation of jail deaths, improvements to inmate safety in jails, requiring a good faith effort to divert individuals suffering from mental health to treatment instead of jail,. These are just a few of the many policies that is the Sandra Bland Act.

Improving Law Enforcement and Community Relations. I was honored to be a joint sponsor with Representative Senfronia Thompson of Senate Bill 30 by Senator West, which requires all

high school students, future drivers, and law enforcement to learn civilians' rights, the duties of law enforcement, and proper behavior during interactions.

The State Budget

I was able to secure funding for several important initiatives through working with the Budget conference committee. Portions of the Sandra Bland Act is reliant on making sure we have Community Collaboratives to divert people to ensure they can get the help they need instead of going to jail. In this year's budget I helped secure a total of \$92.5 million to help fund current Community Collaboratives including the one in Houston, and fund new Rural Regional Community Collaboratives around the state. Additionally, part of the Sandra Bland act includes a million dollars to retrofit county jails with technology to keep inmates safer. I made sure Houston got the funds it needs. I was also a joint author/sponsor on HB 10 by Representative Price and SB 292 by Senator Huffman, which are the enabling legislation that will allow the new money for Community Collaboratives to be implemented.

Furthermore, I secured \$2 million in funding for the Harris County Leadership Academy which will help get troubled youth back on the right track. Additionally, I helped secure more funding for both Texas Southern University (TSU) and the University of Houston for this upcoming biennium despite the total state budget being decreased from last biennium. Through the budget I helped guarantee that the University of Houston can begin the process of adding a medical school that will prepare future doctors to serve the surrounding area. During the upcoming interim, the Texas Legislature will look into how "formula funding" may be having a disproportionately negative effect on some schools, such as TSU.

Moreover, I helped make sure that several important health initiatives were included. For example, new federal funds from President Obama's 21st Century Cures Act which will help fund screening and treatment of postpartum depression. Importantly, the 21st Century Cures Act will treat the opioid epidemic which is a factor in about 2/3rds of the child removals done by CPS. Additionally to help fix CPS I filed HB 4041 to help fund family drug courts across Texas, though this bill did not become law I am working with private organizations to acquire funding to start family drug courts across Texas. I also protected Clubhouses that give people with mental illness or intellectual and developmental disabilities a place to go and be part of something continue to receive funding from the State.

Better Healthcare for all Texans

Easing End-of-life Care. When a loved one dies, time should be spent grieving and celebrating the life of the deceased. Unfortunately, death also requires the family of the deceased to get affairs in order, which includes completing paperwork. Before this session, Texans were only able to acquire death certificates signed by physicians. This led to unnecessary delays for Texans who could not reach their physician or get their physician to complete this task in a timely manner. To ease this burden, I filed House Bill 3857, which authorizes Physician Assistants and Advance Practice Registered Nurses to sign death certificates. This will ease the paperwork associated with a loved one's passing so that Texans can spend more time with friends and family and less time on administrative paperwork. This bill ultimately passed as Senate Bill 919, which I sponsored in the House. I would like to thank Senator Rodriguez for supporting this effort and collaborating with me to achieve this legislative goal.

Treating HIV More Effectively and at a Lower Cost. Texas spends a significant amount of money treating HIV through anti-retroviral therapy. This treatment prevents HIV from becoming full blown AIDS and produces significant savings over the life of the patient. It decreases rates of transmission and complications associated with HIV. These treatments are provided by the state to impoverished children, the elderly, and disabled patients. In order to ensure that we are providing this treatment in the most cost-effective manner, I introduced and passed House Bill 1629. This bill requires Medicaid health plans to report viral load data to the Health and Human Services Commission. This will increase the Legislature's ability to target HIV prevention programs to areas of the state with high rates of HIV and underperforming treatment programs. Gathering this information will reduce any waste associated with HIV prevention programs and raise the quality of care for vulnerable Texans.

Fighting the Prescription Opioid Crisis. The prescription opioid crisis is devastating our country and raising the rates of addiction. Illegal diversion of prescription drugs and over-prescribing must be stopped. To put an end to this dangerous trend, I joint-authored House Bill 3208 with Representative Gonzales, which raised data reporting requirements for prescribers and pharmacists. Now, these health care professionals are required to submit prescription information to the Prescription Monitoring Program. The Prescription Monitoring Program is a database that providers will have to access when prescribing or dispensing drugs to patients. This will allow providers to see if the patient is receiving prescriptions for addictive drugs from numerous prescribers in a short period of time, which is indicative of abuse or illegal diversion of drugs into the black market. It will also allow the State Board of Pharmacy to analyze the database for harmful or abusive prescription practices. The Board of Pharmacy can then send notifications to providers that they are engaging in poor practices. This bill gives the state a powerful tool with which we can fight the illness of addiction. The House Committee on County Affairs which I chair will continue to study this important issue during the upcoming interim.

I was also appointed to the House Select Committee on Opioids and Substance Abuse. That select committee will meet during the interim and create policy recommendations for the 86th Texas Legislature. The interim charges for the select committee include looking further into two issues I began to address this session as mentioned above in the State Budget section; the effect substance abuse has on our CPS system, and the effectiveness of specialty courts.

Extending Postpartum Depression Coverage. I filed House Bill 2135 aiming to help Texas moms receive the care they need and deserve after having a baby. In Texas, pregnant women may be eligible for perinatal coverage through CHIP and women enrolled are covered for two postpartum doctor visits within the first 60 days of giving birth. However, CHIP Perinatal does not cover mental health treatment for the mother. HB 2135 would expand CHIP Perinatal services to include screening and treatment for postpartum depression for the 12-month period after the date the enrolled woman gives birth to the child. Unfortunately, this bill ran out of time and died in Calendars after it was passed out of the Public Health committee. Nevertheless, I was a joint Author on House Bill 2466 by Representative Sarah Davis, which was sent to the Governor and will ensure that women in Texas will have increased access to treatment and screening for postpartum depression.

Allowing Hospitals to Maintain High Quality Care. I successfully amended Senate Bill 1148 that will allow Hospitals to continue to require physicians that they hire to do continuing education to maintain employment.

Improving Mental Health for Texas

Protecting Quality Psychological Care. In 2016, the United States Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals found that Texas' statutory definition of the practice of psychology was unconstitutionally overbroad. The Court found that the old definition would allow the state to restrict informal counseling and advice - even if the state did not use the definition to limit such speech, the potential for abuse was unconstitutional. The Court's ruling left Texas without the ability to enforce what is and is not psychological treatment. Thus, leaving Texas patients in a vulnerable position and making it possible for unlicensed people to pose as psychologists. To correct this legal problem, I filed House Bill 3266, which created a new, constitutionally sound definition. This language ultimately passed as an amendment on House Bill 3808. Texas patients can now rest assured that when they are treated by a psychologist, that psychologist is legitimately licensed by the state and competent to provide the high quality of care we demand in this state.

Improving Mental Health. This session I served as the senior member of the House Public Health Committee. In that committee we focused a significant amount of our time on reforming our state's approach to mental health treatment. We found significant gaps in our state's approach. These gaps often resulted in mentally ill Texans being sent to county jails during times of mental crisis. The law required that these patients lose state supported health benefits when placed in jail, even if their time in jail was brief and related to non-violent offenses. This meant that mentally ill patients would leave jail without medical coverage, which led to lost access to medicine, which led to further deterioration of mental health, which led to new mental health crises, which led to additional interactions with law enforcement and placement back into jail. This cycle cost the state significant sums of money that could be better used on treatment. In order to stop this wasteful and inhumane cycle, I joint-authored House Bill 337 with Representative Collier. This changed the law to suspend an inmate's benefits until release from jail rather than cutting off those benefits entirely. Now when mental health patients are placed in jail, their benefits will be suspended and reinstated upon release. Consequently, this will save the state money, increase quality of care, and reduce recidivism. Similar policies have led to significant savings and better outcomes in other states where it has already been implemented and will do the same for Texas.

I proudly helped guarantee a number of mental health legislation become law. I joint authored HB 1486 by Representative Price, which ensures Peer Specialists have a defined scope of practice, and allows for the potential reimbursement by Medicaid for the services they provide. Futhermore, I joint authored HB 3083 by Representative Price that adds chemical dependency counselors to the list of providers that can have part of their students loans forgiven if they serve a high needs area or population.

Additionally, I was a joint sponsor of SB 589 by Senator Lucio III, which creates a license for behavior analysts and assistant behavior analysts. As well as, I was a joint sponsor for SB 1326 by Senator Zaffarini which creates a jail based competency restoration program to help prevent cases where a defendant who is not competent to stand trial must wait in jail, thus not going to a

state hospital for treatment. SB 1326 will allow jails to implement programs that will help get defendants treatment while in jail instead of deteriorating to a worse state. I have been a long time champion of mental health first aid and, this session I was honored to be a joint sponsor on SB 1533 by Senator Rodriguez which expands the mental health first aid program to our Universities.

Expanding Access to Care. This session I helped pass several bills that expand access to care. One of my proudest accomplishments this session is joint sponsoring SB 1107 by Senator Schwertner which creates a new regulatory framework for telemedicine. The new framework in SB 1107 removes several unnecessary barriers to access telemedicine, while ensuring that patient safety is protected. This bill will permit Texans, especially in rural areas, much greater access to specialty doctors who could often be several hours away. Moreover, I joint sponsored SB 674 by Senator Schwertner which will expedite the process for doctors who have a specialty license in another state to be licensed in Texas. SB 674 will make it easier for Texas to attract high quality doctors that we are in need of.

Public and Higher Education

Increased Funding for District 147's Public Universities. As mentioned above in the State Budget section I helped secure more funding this biennium for both Texas Southern University (TSU) and the University of Houston despite the total state budget being decreased from last biennium.

Notification to Parents Regarding Certain School Personnel. HB 1847/SB 196 requires schools to notify parents in the event that the school will not have a full-time, nurse, counselor, librarian, or equivalent thereof, on campus for more than 30 days. This notification can be satisfied by posting on the school's website within 3 links and should be provided in a bilingual form. Senator Garcia and I worked diligently to pass this legislation, which I have filed since 2005. The state of Texas does not currently require schools to employ these personnel full-time. The least we can do for Texas parents is to encourage open communication, and inform them when these key educators may not be available to their children. Regrettably this bill was vetoed by the Governor.

University of Houston Medical School. As mentioned above in the State Budget section I helped guarantee that the University of Houston can begin the process of adding a medical school that will prepare future doctors to serve the surrounding area.

Texas Ecolab Program. I stopped Senate Bill 1006 from becoming law by knocking it off of the local and consent calendar. Senate Bill 1006 if passed would have damaged our Universities' ability to use land for needed science research and education.

Local Government

Fixing Houston's Pensions. Coming into this session Houston's pension plans for city employees, police officers, and firefighters were teetering on a disaster that could cause the city of Houston to go bankrupt. Thankfully through the leadership of Mayor Turner, an agreement was made where city employees, police officers, and firefighters all made a sacrifice to their pension plans for the greater good of the city of Houston. I am proud to have been a joint

sponsor on SB 2190 "the Houston Pension Plan" bill by Senator Huffman and Representative Flynn.

Clarifying Court Budgets. I authored and passed HB 4104 which clarifies that district judges have the authority to hire the individual court administrators and determine the salary within the range established by commissioners court. The purpose of HB 4104 is to provide clarification on the roles of commissioners courts and district courts in relation to the creation, budgeting, and hiring of court administrators consistent with SB 1913 from the 75th legislature.

Streamlining Salvage Yard Permits for Harris County. I authored and passed HB 4114 which allows the Harris County Commissioners Court to designate an employee to oversee licensing hearings for junkyards and automotive wrecking and salvage yards, administering the rules previously adopted by the Commissioners Court. This will allow permits to be administered more efficiently.

Increasing Affordable Housing. I was a joint author on Representative Collier's HB 3574 which will remove requirements for at least a two year period that prevent competitive 9% tax credits from being awarded to affordable housing projects in districts such as the Third Ward in Houston.

County Affairs Committee

During the 85th Legislative Session, the Committee on County Affairs which I chair is made up of nine legislative members: Representative Coleman - Chair, Representative Springer - Vice Chair, Representative Hunter, Representative Stickland, Representative Neave, Representative Uresti, Representative Thierry, Representative Biedermann, and Representative Roberts. The committee met a total of 22 times in a combination of public hearings, formal meetings, and organizational meetings. County Affairs received 94 bills for consideration, and voted 69 bill out of committee. Of those, 31 became law immediately or will become law on September 1, 2017. Governor Abbott did not veto any bills that came out of the committee. I am proud of the work the Committee did and I look forward to working on many issues during the interim.