



Coleman 84th Regular 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. While I passed (and helped pass) some great bills this session, our biggest victories came because I was able to leverage my position and seniority to secure significant funding for important initiatives for our district as well as steer policy in the right direction. I was also able to kill legislation that is bad policy for both our city and state. Here's a brief rundown:

Victories for District 147 and Houston

The Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston

One of my biggest accomplishments this session – I pushed for and acquired \$4.4 million dollars over the course of the biennium to create a brand new graduate school of public policy at the University of Houston – right here in District 147. As the 2nd most populous state in the nation, Texas has long wanted for more flagship institutions of higher learning – UH is clearly poised to join Texas A&M and the University of Texas and is deserving of a respected graduate school of public affairs. From a personal standpoint, I am so proud of this because this creates a legacy. This school will continue to attract and train some of the best leaders not just in state, but hopefully the country and the world. To have that right here in Houston is a privilege, and it is deservedly named after former Lt. Governor Bill Hobby – my mentor and one of the best public servants this state has ever seen. I am so proud to help ensure that his great influence on Texas is hardly over; it is just beginning.

Preserving Management Districts

Over the past two decades, one area I am extremely proud of is the resurgence and development of my district. One of the primary reasons for this resurgence is the success of the various management districts we have created that supplement infrastructure and repairs to areas such as Third Ward, Sunnyside, Downtown, Montrose, East Downtown, and Midtown. This session, however, HB 3094 was introduced and threatened to eliminate and make harder to create the very organizations that have helped us so much. I killed the bill on the House floor by pointing out a substantive error: the bill's analysis incorrectly described the bill in a way that was materially misleading to members. My "point of order" was sustained, stopping the bill in its tracks.

Protecting Houston Schools

Over the past few years, the Harris County Department of Education has been under attack. This Department supports 25 school districts in the Houston area, helping students with

behaviourally and disciplinary issues. SB 1216 threatened to abolish this department with no backup plan. I helped make sure that this bill would never make it to the House floor – it remained in committee where it belonged.

I helped work the votes to kill HB 1798 that would have allowed simple petitions to bypass and lower the standards for our schools. This was a surprise victory toward the end of session, with many advocates resigning themselves to trying to figure out how to make the best of this bad bill. Those who were watching, however, saw what happened when concerned members of the Legislature leveraged their experience on the floor to change bad policy for the better.

Marriage Equality

For the first time ever, Americans can marry whomever they love, regardless of gender. No, I cannot claim credit for this fact, but I can claim that this fact represents one of the biggest victories of my service to the people of this state. For over two decades I have been fighting for LGBT rights. When Texas instituted its constitutional ban on marriage equality in 2005, I immediately began filing a constitutional amendment to repeal it. But with this recent court decisions, that amendment joins other bigoted but unenforceable laws on our books. I will still fight to take them off, but the battle has already been won, and I could not be more proud.

Texas Southern University

Our district has the privilege of being home to TSU, one of the nation's premier historically black colleges/universities. One of the reasons there is such a thriving black middle class in our city is because TSU has educated countless Houstonians, paving the way for us to become doctors, teachers, lawyers, and more. I successfully advocated for higher funding for this great university, the only HBCU to be recognized by Forbes Magazine's Top Colleges.

Improving Vistas Along Texas Roads

If you have lived in Texas for a little while, you may have noticed that the scenery along our roads has been getting much better. This is due to one of my favorite accomplishments as a Texas Legislator: creating the "Green Ribbon Project." This initiative make our whole state look better by requiring a percentage of highway funds to be used to establish regionally-appropriate plants and artwork along our roads. This session I worked with Representative Darby to enact additional guidance to ensure that these funds are used to best improve the scenery along our highways. This legislation establishes that our new right-of-ways accompany regionally appropriate vegetation.

LGBT Rights

I used my position as Chair of the Legislative Study Group to garner unlikely allies to squash a vast number of anti-LGBT legislation filed this session. I was able to make a deal with Big Oil and they agreed to help squash so many of the hateful bills that were filed this session. As for the one bill that was able to get out, we Democrats worked together to make sure it would never be

considered on the House floor. It was later added to one of my bills in the Senate, but no one expected me to do what I did: kill my own bill. The language was D.O.A from the start, and the bad actors now have only themselves to blame for ruining what would have been good policy for so many across the state.

A Better Healthcare for all Texans

Preserving Health Agencies. Coming into this session, there was a lot of talk about combining all of the state's healthcare agencies into one, a move to which I was very opposed. I see no reason why rolling all these agencies into one big one under one leader will lead to greater efficiencies; in fact, I see the opposite. I was one of the first lawmakers to call for the resignation of Dr. Kyle Janek – a friend of mine – because believed it to be the best course for the Health and Human Service Commission, the largest agency in the state. My work both in the public sphere as well as behind the scenes helped ensure that this state did not follow the poor recommendations made by the Sunset Committee. The agencies have currently maintained their current status as the entire structure remains under review.

Eliminating Health Insurance Prejudice. When House Bill 1514 was filed, it threatened to brand working-class Texans who receive federal subsidies when purchasing their health insurance to have that fact “branded” on their insurance card. This was clearly a way to unlawfully discriminate against those of us who could least afford this discrimination. I worked with the author of the bill, knowing the effect of his legislation was not his intent. I successfully amended the bill in a way that all but gutted this harmful effect. Today, there is no way for anybody to discern from your insurance card the means with which you purchased your insurance card. That is a good thing – it is no one else's business.

Protecting Sick Children. As soon as HB 2835 was filed, this legislation put numerous children at risk by making their eligibility for these services dependent on their citizenship status. I worked with the author of the bill to include my amendments, which turned the effects of the bill upside down. Eligibility will not be conditioned on nationality; it will first be conditioned on the severity of the child's illness and how long that child been on the waiting list for these services.

HB 2068 would have given certain hospital districts - including the Harris Health System - more control and flexibility over the implementation of their retirement plans. Unfortunately, this bills was vetoed by Governor Abbott due to a seemingly mistaken interpretation of this legislation.

SB 1999 was filed by Sen. Menendez and changes the name of the Adult Day Care to "Day Activity and Health Services." This is a more appropriate and accurate name that will encourage participation in this program for those who will benefit.

I was also a proud joint sponsor for **SB 339** by Senator Eltife and Representative Klick. This bill

will allow for the growth and dispensation of cannabidiol (CBD) oil, an oil extracted from the cannabis plant, for use in treating Texas residents diagnosed with intractable epilepsy. These individuals are at a higher risk for a shortened life span, excessive bodily injury, neurophysiological and mental health impairment, and social disabilities. They experience dozens or more severe seizures each week. By making this low-THC oil available to the estimated 149,000 Texans living with this illness, SB 339 puts much-needed relief within reach.

Improving Mental Health for Texas

Loan forgiveness for mental health professionals. HB 2434/SB239 contained one of the recommendations from an interim report conducted by my committee that will help increase the number of mental health professionals in Texas. Senator Charles Schwertner authored the senate bill, and I joined Rep. Zerwas as a joint author on it. This legislation will encourage mental health professionals to practice in areas of Texas that desperately need their services by assisting in loan repayment.

Mental Health Peer Support Reentry Pilot Program. I added a rider to our budget that directs up to \$1,250,000 for the Department of State Health Services to implement a mental health peer support re-entry program for mentally ill Texans who are trying to reintegrate into society after their incarceration. "Peer support" is an incredible model that involves partnering the individual with a peer who has "been there before." That peer understands the challenges associated with juggling a mental illness while trying to get their life back on track after imprisonment. The program will reduce recidivism as well as maintain a continuity of care for the individual with a mental illness. One major problem faced by individuals leaving our jails is that their access to services is cut off. They must quickly find a new provider or way to get care and treatment - many people find this difficult or even impossible to do. These peer support re-entry should greatly help former prisoners get back on their feet.

HB 2216 limits the question to ask only whether the applicant has a mental illness that affects their ability to drive. This brings the mental health inquiry into line with the physical health inquiry and brings Texas law one step closer toward the elimination of stigma against people with mental illness. Currently the application for a driver's license asks if you have been "diagnosed with, treated for, or hospitalized for a psychiatric disorder." Even if your diagnosis has no impact on your ability to drive, answering "yes" can delay an application for months, prolonging the time before the applicant can go on with a normal life

HB 2708 removes the requirement in Texas law that parents who want to teach their children to drive cannot be "disabled because of a mental illness." Not only is the term undefined and completely subjective, it is completely unnecessary because these parents are already required to have a valid driver's license, which they could not do if a mental illness severely impacted their ability to drive.

HB2218/SB674, companion bills authored by Sen. Campbell and I, align the existing mental health training requirements for new teachers with the requirements for current teachers, ensuring that new teachers are trained using the same evidence-based best-practice programs

available to current teachers. This important legislation will ensure that all teachers can identify and respond to the signs of an emotional crisis.

HB2220/SB133, companion bills authored by Sen. Schwertner and I, make the mental health first aid training program available for all school district employees, in addition to the teachers currently eligible. It also gives school districts more flexibility to find grant funding for the program, allowing access to districts that may not otherwise be able to afford it.

HB1924 alleviates the problem of insufficient availability of psychological professionals in the state by giving supervising psychologists the ability to bill insurance companies for the services provided by predoctoral interns. These interns already have years of training, and they already help patients; this legislation will simply allow them to bill through insurance plans. This will enable psychologists to hire more interns, directly increasing the number of qualified mental health professionals in the state. Since most newly-licensed psychologists choose to practice near the area where they intern, increasing the number of internships available in Texas will encourage more of our own graduates to practice here and help our state meet the high demand for care.

Improving County Efficiency throughout the State

HB 2521 will direct more money for county roads, especially for those currently getting torn up in counties with heavy fracking. It overturns a 1960 attorney general opinion that redefined the way oil and gas companies executed leases with local governments on county rights-of-way. HB 2521 alleviates the burden placed on the counties to rebuild and maintain roads that have been damaged by the exploration of oil and gas companies. While the state is benefiting financially from the leasing activity, local property taxpayers were paying for damages done to county roads by this activity. This important legislation returns the revenue derived under the mineral leases in a county right-of-way back to the county for road maintenance purposes.

HB 2525/SB 1517, companion bills authored by Sen. Seliger and I, address a gap in state law regarding which county is responsible to appoint counsel for an indigent person in custody on an out-of-county warrant. HB 2525 clarifies an area of confusion for counties regarding the appointment of counsel on out-of-county warrants and creates an incentive for counties to transport arrestees to the county where the warrant originated in a timely manner.

HB 2825/SB1353, companion bills authored by Sen. Hinojosa and I, change current statute to allow The Texas Indigent Defense Commission to provide grants to a collection of counties that are operating through an inter-local agreement to improve indigent defense services. The legislation promotes county collaboration and cost savings within counties by simplifying the grant distribution process and decreasing the administrative work. This collaborative effort amongst counties will improve the services provided to indigent families.

HB 3067 will allow Harris County and counties with a population of one million or more to

voluntarily donate upto \$100,000 to Crime Stoppers. HB 3067 allows Crime Stoppers of Houston and other counties to continue their mission to solve and prevent serious crime in the Greater Houston area in partnership with citizens, media and the criminal justice system.

HB 2522/SB 435 provide county treasurers with the ability to administer an oath. Additionally, HB 2522 changes the statute to allow a County Treasurer to begin required instruction for performing their office responsibilities the day they are elected to office instead of the day they start. Sen. Lucio's **SB 435** passed and I sponsored the legislation.

HB 2519 will allow Emergency Services Districts to have alternative options in order to better perform their administrative functions.

I also sponsored Sen. Zaffirini's **SB 1281** which allows local governments to enter into cooperative purchasing projects with local governments in other states. SB 1281 passed and went into effect immediately.

Reforming our Criminal Justice System

HB2060/SB308, companion bills authored by Sen. Whitmire and I, address a gap in the Texas Open Records Act. Though empowered with the same authorities and powers vested in Texas peace officers, private university campus police departments were not subject to the same information requests. SB308 designates private campus police departments as "government entities," making them subject to law-enforcement related information requests.