



Coleman 83rd Regular Session Wrap Up

From the Desk of Representative Coleman:

The 83rd session was a productive one. Despite the multiple special sessions at the end, we can look back on the regular session with pride. Lawmakers from both parties got together and did the real work that Texans asked of them. It was a welcome relief from the previous session that was defined by unprecedented cuts to essential services such as healthcare and education.

This session, we continued to push for civil, equal, and women's rights, appropriated additional money to both Texas Southern University and the University of Houston, passed much-needed mental health bills, and worked on initiatives that will make county government more efficient. Here is a recap of my work this session:

Fighting "Stand Your Ground" Laws

In the wake of Trayvon Martin's tragic killing, I made it a top priority to repeal the state's "Stand Your Ground" law. The law in Texas is nearly identical to the Florida law that allowed Trayvon Martin's killer – George Zimmerman – to go unpunished. My bill, **HB 3773**, would have reinstated the duty to retreat in most circumstances if safe to do so. My bill would make it illegal to do as George Zimmerman did: walk around with a gun looking for trouble and "playing cop" when that trouble is found. While my bill did not pass, I will continue to file legislation to fight these unfair, discriminatory laws that grant armed vigilantes the right to be judge, jury, and executioner.

LGBTQ Equality

I continued my push for equal and civil rights for all. Just some examples of my efforts this session are as follows: **HJR 78** would have repealed the constitutional ban on marriage equality in Texas. **HB 3230** would allow people to make sure their state-issued ID's reflect their correct gender identity. **HB 3232** would repeal Section 21.06, the provision of the Texas Penal Code that criminalizes homosexual conduct. **HB 3322** would modify the state's "Romeo and Juliet" law– the affirmative defense to prosecution that, provided both parties agree, allows for consensual sexual relations between a heterosexual minor and adult as long as they are within three years of age – to apply to homosexual relationships as well.

Extending the Women's Health Program

In 2011, Texas Republicans refused to allow providers such as Planned Parenthood to participate in the Women's Health Program, knowing that this would end federal funding for the program. In addition to writing a [letter to CMS](#), I worked with Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee to meet with federal officials both here in Texas and in Washington. We successfully convinced the federal government to extend funding for the program for an additional nine months. This effort established a bridge to care, allowing low-income women to continue to receive health exams and family planning counseling while providing for additional time to seek other providers.

Mental Health

Some of my biggest successes this session were in the area of mental health. I am honored by [the words](#) of Bill McKenzie of the Dallas Morning News highlighting my efforts this past session. Entering the session, Texas was 49th in mental health spending per capita. Fortunately, the Legislature made mental health a priority. Mental health funding received a historic \$300 million boost to expand mental health services. This funding set the stage for a historic session on improving mental health care in Texas.

Expanding “Priority Populations”

One of my main priorities going into this session was to address the barriers created in 2003 to populations eligible to be seen by Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHA’s), and I’m proud to say we were able to do just that. My mental health omnibus bill, **HB 3793**, adds a list of “priority populations” that LMHA’s may treat if the resources are available after treating the big three “target populations. Prior to 2003, LMHA’s treated patients based on their level of functioning, regardless of their mental health diagnosis. That changed in 2003, when LMHA’s were limited to treating only those patients presenting with 1) major depressive disorder, 2) schizoaffective disorder, and/or 3) bipolar disorder. This limitation combined with a lack of funding meant that many people with significant impairments – such as those with post-traumatic stress disorder, severe anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and more – saw their opportunities for help disappear. HB 3793 will increase the range and scope of LMHA’s, allowing them to treat Texans with a wide array of mental illnesses.

Mental Health First Aid

One growing aspect of mental health treatment is the concept of “mental health first aid,” the ability to recognize and respond to individuals showing signs of mental distress. Working with Representative Lois Kolkhorst and Senator Charles Schwertner, I included a provision in **HB 3793** that allows LMHA’s to solicit and receive grants from the Texas Department of State Health Services to train employees and teachers in mental health first aid.

Jail Diversion and State Hospital Beds

I included language contained in Representative Ruth Jones McClendon’s **HB 205**, which requires the Texas Department of State Health Services to develop a procedure to ensure that courts are aware of all commitment options available for those who are subject to a forensic commitment. Further, DSHS and the Health and Human Services Commission are to develop and biennially update a plan for state hospital bed allocation.

Mental Health Training for Teachers

One of my great accomplishments in the 2011 session was my suicide prevention/anti-bullying bill, **HB 1386**. This bill directed the Texas Department of Health and Human Services and the Texas Education Agency to develop a list of mental illness and bullying detection best practices that school districts may implement to train teachers. This session, we turned that “may” into a “shall” with **SB 460**. I want to thank Senator Deuell for filing the bill as well as Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst and Speaker Straus for their support for this bill and commitment to the children of the state of Texas. SB 460 includes mental health training in the requirements to obtain and maintain a teacher’s certificate. I also included language from **SB 1352/HB 2477** by Senator Letitcia Van de Putte and Representative Carol Alvarado. This language directs local school health advisory committees to include mental health recommendations in their recommendations for coordinated health curricula.

Building Upon Early Mental Health Intervention, Suicide Prevention, and Anti-Bullying Legislation

I and Senator Larry Taylor passed **SB 831**, which builds upon HB 1386 by adding “substance abuse” and “early childhood intervention” to the list of best practices programs for schools to implement.

Healthy Community Collaboratives

After the 81st session, my committee – The House Committee on County Affairs – proposed a model for community health collaboratives and recommended that these centers – such as San Antonio’s **Haven for Hope** – be established across the state. Chair John Davis – a former member of the County Affairs Committee – led the effort to secure \$25,000,000 over the biennium to fund this statewide model. This money will help fund community centers that provide healthcare, shelter, and services to homeless Texans.

Higher Education

The University of Houston

We appropriated over \$42 million in additional money to the University of Houston. Further, I succeeded in one of my most important priorities: a rider that appropriating \$500,000 for a public policy graduate school at the university. Like Texas A&M’s Bush School of Government and Public Service and the University of Texas’ LBJ School of Public Affairs, the Hobby School of Public Policy will be a first-rate graduate institution attracting and producing leaders who want to dedicate their lives to public policy and improving government. This is an example of why the University of Houston is a Tier One university.

Texas Southern University

We appropriated over \$2,000,000 to TSU through the biennium. Further, I directed over \$2.5 million additional dollars to TSU’s Academic Development Initiative over the next biennium. Finally, I and Senator Ellis passed **HB**

3792 and **SB 1810**, which will allow students at Texas Southern University to continue to vote for an athletic fee that continues an appropriation of \$2.2 million to the program.

Assisted Living Facilities

More Efficient Approval Process

Assisted living facilities are a critical component of the state's healthcare system, allowing elderly and disabled Texans a place to live and be treated with dignity. Obtaining a license to build and operate these facilities, however, is often difficult. **HB 3729** allows for entities that already operate quality assisted living facilities in the state to more easily obtain a "provisional license" so that they can get their facility up and running before the more lengthy official licensing process is completed.

Improving County Government

Maximizing County Healthcare Dollars

Counties are eligible for state funding when they spend more than 8% of their tax levy on indigent care. In order to encourage counties to invest in the newly created "delivery system reform incentive" (DSRIP) projects, **SB 872** (Deuell/Coleman) provides that county funding for DSRIP projects may count up to half of that 8% cap. This makes it easier for regional health partnerships to partner with counties for healthcare projects that improve the quality of care.

Improving County Efficiency

I also passed a number of bills that will allow counties and county services to operate more efficiently. **HB 3795**, which I worked on with Senator Hegar, allows for more than one County Assistance District per county precinct, which will allow for more county infrastructure improvements. **HB 3764**, which I worked on with Senator Hinojosa, allows smaller Emergency Services Districts to submit an affidavit with their financial reports instead of an audit. The expense of a full blown audit can be crippling for smaller ESD's, so this bill will allow those districts to operate without diverting a substantial amount of their resources to financial reports.

Senator Hinojosa and I also passed **HB 3798**, which streamlines the ability of emergency services districts to make payments. This bill allows the majority of the district's board to vote to make a payment or simply allow the board's Treasurer, countersigned by the President, to sign off on the payment.

HB 3800, again with Senator Hinojosa, organizes the way that property owners' association management certificates are organized. These certificates were required to be filed, but there was no standard method for filing them. This bill makes sure that all future certificates are filed and indexed the same way.

Senator West and I passed **SB 194**, which requires large neighborhoods to have more than one way of entry for emergency vehicles in the case of an emergency. This bill was in response to instances where the single entrance to a neighborhood was blocked during a fire, making it hard for fire trucks and ambulances to arrive at the scene.

Finally, Senator Ellis and I passed **SB 560**, which allows counties to pay its justices, judges, and district attorneys on a biweekly – as opposed to a monthly – basis. Most county employees are already paid on a biweekly basis, but previous law prohibited counties from paying certain positions in this manner. This bill corrects that provision.