



Representative Garnet F. Coleman's 87th Session Wrap Up

From the Desk of Representative Coleman:

This session, the Texas Legislature faced many major challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, electric grid instability, and a need for criminal justice reform. Regrettably, Republican leadership in the Governor's office and Senate focused on red meat cultural issues that do not affect the everyday lives of Texans.

Despite the lack of focus on important issues, I am glad that my experience in the Texas House enabled me to pass a number of bills that will improve the lives of those in District 147, Houston, and Texas.

My highlights of the session include passing legislation to address the needs in our healthcare, higher education, and county governance systems.

Beyond that, I was able to accomplish more, and work with my colleagues in the legislature to prevent bad policy from passing. Please see below for a record of my accomplishments this session, and know that I could not have done it without your support.

Thank you,

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

Garnet F. Coleman
Texas State Representative - District 147

WORKING TO KEEP TEXAS HEALTHY

I have always worked to increase Texans' access to quality health care and to promote health equity. I filed several bills this session towards that end and contributed to others

that will improve health care for all Texans. I was also honored to serve on the House Committee on Public Health for the 15th consecutive session. However, this may have been one of the most challenging sessions on the Public Health Committee as we had to address and work through a global pandemic.

The Public Health Committee was made up of 11 House members this year: **Chair Stephanie Klick** (R-Fort Worth); **Vice Chair Bobby Guerra** (D-Mission); **Rep. Steve Allison** (R-San Antonio); **Rep. Liz Campos** (D-San Antonio); **Rep. Garnet Coleman** (D-Houston); **Rep. Nicole Collier** (D-Fort Worth); **Rep. Jacey Jetton** (R-Richmond); **Rep. Tom Oliverson** (R-Cypress); **Rep. Four Price** (R-Amarillo); **Rep. Reggie Smith** (R-Sherman); and **Rep. Erin Zwiener** (D-Driftwood).

Expanding Coverage

Medicaid expansion has been and continues to be a major component of my work on health care. In 2009, I was one of 32 members in President Obama's working group of State Legislators for Health Reform that helped develop and pass the Affordable Care Act. The issue was particularly urgent this session because the raging COVID-19 pandemic not only put people's health at risk, but also caused many to lose their jobs and employer sponsored insurance.



Rep. Garnet Coleman laying out Medicaid Expansion Amendment during House Budget debate, flanked by fellow House Democratic members

This session I continued my effort to increase the number of insured in Texas by filing **House Bill (HB) 4143** to expand Medicaid in Texas. I also offered an amendment during

the budget debate that directed Governor Abbott and the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to work with the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) on a Medicaid Demonstration Waiver that could help Texas expand Medicaid in a way that works for Texas. Regrettably, the vote on the amendment fell along party lines with the exception of San Antonio Republican **Rep. Lyle Larson**, who voted to support my amendment. Despite statewide Republican leadership opposing Medicaid Expansion, ***I would like to thank Texas Monthly for naming me to their Best Legislators, Honorable Mention list this session for my perseverance and “decades-long fight to improve health care for poor Texans.”***

Additional pressure was put on Texas' healthcare system this session as the federal government rescinded the extension of Texas' 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver in April. The 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver is not a permanent solution, but rather a way for states to receive funding to set up systems and innovative programs to smooth the transition to Medicaid expansion. In spite of its unsustainability without Medicaid expansion, it is important that the 1115 Transformation Waiver stay in place to provide federal funds to help cover the provider cost of Texans without insurance. To address this concern, I successfully amended the Texas Budget to add Rider #37 to direct the HHSC to work with CMS to get the 1115 Transformation Waiver extended.

This session I authored **HB 4144**, which would extend Medicaid coverage for qualified new mothers from 60 days to 1 year. I have filed similar legislation the past few sessions. With the passage of **HB 133** by **Rep. Toni Rose** (D-Dallas), I am happy to see coverage for new mothers extended from 60 days to 6 months statewide beginning in September. The House passed this bill with a full 1 year extension, but the Senate halved it to 6 months. However, this is still a major improvement which will lead to more healthy mothers and babies in Texas.

Local Health Needs

I passed **HB 1338**, which was sponsored in the Senate by **Sen. Borris Miles** (D-Houston). This bill extends the Harris County Local Provider Participation Fund (LPPF) for 2 more years and increases the assessment rate by 2% to help draw down additional federal funds. Since the passage of our bill last session (HB 2459, 86R) to create the Harris County LPPF, roughly 1.2 billion dollars have already been drawn down from the federal government to help the Harris Health System cover the expense of providing care to people without insurance. With the extension of the program to 2023, we will be able to draw down more than a billion dollars of additional funds to continue this effort for another 2 years. The governor signed HB 1338 into law on June 7.

Over the past several sessions, I have worked with my colleagues to develop state matching grant programs to help local governments provide services to veterans and individuals suffering from substance abuse, mental illness, and homelessness. This session I continued that work by passing **HB 3088** (sponsored by **Sen. Lois Kolkhorst** (R-Brenham)), which extends these grant programs, makes the requirements uniform, and makes it easier for local governments to pull down the state match to serve these people in need. Additionally, through the budget I helped ensure \$135 million has been allocated for these matching grant funds over the biennium. I also added a rider to the budget that puts an additional \$10 million one-time cash infusion needed by local governments to help get new Healthy Community Collaboratives off the ground or expand existing collaboratives.

Pandemic Response

This session I continued my work on addressing health disparities in Texas by passing **HB 4139** out of the House, which would have created the Office for Health Equity. HB 4139 was a featured bill in the Speaker of the House's Healthy Families, Healthy Texas legislative package. Even though the bill died in the Senate, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) was able to get federal grant funding from the CDC that I identified to create a similar office called the "Office of Health Equity Policy and Performance (OHEPP)," which will have a cross-system approach, work with local health agencies, and look at vulnerable populations (racial and ethnicity, women, children, elderly, rural, low socioeconomic, etc.) to take proactive steps to identify and intervene to promote health equity in Texas.



Rep. Garnet Coleman at the Speaker's Healthy Families, Healthy Texas Press Conference discussing his HB 4139: Office for Health Equity bill

I joint authored **HB 4** by **Rep. Price**, which expands the ability for providers to utilize telemedicine options for patients. COVID-19 made telemedicine crucial in preventing the spread of disease. Beyond such emergency situations, however, the expansion of telemedicine will improve access to health care for many Texans, particularly those in rural and medically underserved areas. It also creates more care options that are convenient and cost-effective for both patients and providers.

Mental Health

I am proud to have been a strong proponent for mental health since my first session in the Legislature. The COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying financial, health, and cultural uncertainties created and exacerbated mental health issues for many Texans. College and graduate students, in particular, sought out mental health services at a greater rate than before. **Senate Bill (SB) 480 (HB 1271) by Sen. Miles**, which I sponsored, will allow the University of Houston to utilize funds from their existing student union fee to provide additional mental health services and resources.

I authored **HB 3839**, which was passed as **SB 1808** by **Sen. Kolkhorst** (which I sponsored in the House). This bill updates state law in preparation for the implementation of a new federally approved state plan amendment that will provide those with intellectual and developmental disabilities in nursing facilities with services including independent living skills training and employment assistance. The programs will be federally funded and this bill will ensure that they can be put into effect without delay.

I joint authored **HB 2287 by Rep. Senfronia Thompson** (D-Houston) and sponsored by **Sen. Beverly Powell** (D-Fort Worth) in the Senate. HB 2287 establishes the Collaborative Task Force on Public School Mental Health Services to evaluate school mental health services, educator mental health trainings, and the impact of mental health services on student violence and suicide rates.

I was also a joint author on **HB 3121**, authored by **Rep. John Turner** (D-Dallas) and sponsored by **Sen. Nathan Johnson** (D-Dallas), which creates a voluntary quality standards certification for youth residential treatment centers that offer behavioral and mental health services.

SUPPORTING HIGHER EDUCATION

I authored **HB 1325**, which was sponsored by **Sen. Miles** in the Senate. The bill adds the Sam Houston State University College of Osteopathic Medicine and the University of Houston College of Medicine to the existing Joint Admission Medical Program (JAMP), which was created to help provide a path for economically disadvantaged undergraduate students to graduate college and gain admission to medical school. I am glad that this bill passed because it builds on the work we did last session in passing HB 826 (86R) that created the University of Houston College of Medicine.

I was also a joint sponsor on **SB 1295**, authored by **Sen. Brandon Creighton** (R-Conroe) and sponsored by **Rep. Geanie Morrison** (R-Victoria), which provides financial support

and incentives to certain smaller universities to help at-risk students complete their courses of study and graduate.

COUNTY AFFAIRS

This session marks my seventh term as Chairman of the House Committee on County Affairs, with jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to counties, regional councils of government, multicounty boards and commissions, relationships and contracts between counties, and the Texas Commission on Jail Standards.

The committee has nine members, including myself: **Chair Garnet F. Coleman** (D-Houston), **Vice Chair Lynn Stucky** (R-Denton), **Rep. Charles “Doc” Anderson** (R-Waco), **Rep. Oscar Longoria** (D-Mission), **Rep. Phil Stephenson** (R-Wharton), **Rep. John Turner** (D-Grand Prairie), **Representative Ray Lopez** (D-San Antonio), **Rep. Jeff Cason** (R-Bedford), and **Rep. David Spiller** (R-Jacksboro).

This session the committee met a total of 19 times to gather information on issues affecting Texas counties, and to hold public hearings and vote on legislation. Of the 139 House and Senate bills referred to the committee for consideration, the committee voted to approve 93, and 37 were passed into law to be effective immediately or beginning on September 1, 2021.

Three of my own bills were passed by the legislature through the Committee on County Affairs. The first is the previously mentioned **HB 1338**, which was sponsored in the Senate by **Sen. Miles**, extending the Harris County LPPF. This bill is the latest step in a long-term effort by the Committee on County Affairs to ensure that all Texans, from rural areas to inner cities, have access to the health care they need. Texas has a total of 27 LPPFs that, since fiscal year 2012, have pulled down over \$6.2 billion in federal funds to help cover hospital expenses in communities across the state. I am proud that every LPPF bill passed in Texas has gone through the House Committee on County Affairs during my chairmanship.

I was also proud to sponsor **SB 504** by **Sen. Miles**, giving Harris County fire marshals the same authority as state fire marshals to enter group homes to determine the existence of dangerous conditions and provide immediate relief to vulnerable people in grave danger.

Regretfully, my **HB 1240**, sponsored in the senate by **Sen. Miles** was vetoed by the Governor. This bill would have allowed Harris and Fort Bend County to allow their fire marshals to write class C misdemeanor tickets in order to better enforce the fire code,

instead of simply giving warnings or get the police involved. This bill would have made our county safer.

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE

LGBTQ+ Rights

This session, I filed **HB 2069**, an omnibus bill that includes several policies to protect LGBTQ individuals from discrimination. The bill continues my efforts to champion LGBTQ rights and fight against legislation aimed at marginalizing and discriminating against the LGBTQ community.

The omnibus bill pulls together several previous pieces of legislation that I have filed into a collection of long overdue policy changes (the bills and dates identify the first time I filed the bill) :

- Repealing provisions defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman (2009, 81R HJR 131)
- Establishing uniform, streamlined court procedures for change of name and gender marker on state-issued IDs (2007, 80R HB 1761)
- Including protection for transgender individuals in our Hate Crimes Law (2007, 80R HB 1289)
- Repealing the criminal offense of homosexual conduct (2005, 79R HB 3215)
- Passing a comprehensive LGBTQ non-discrimination act prohibiting discrimination and harassment in employment, public accommodation, housing, schools, and other areas (2005, 79R HB 376 and HB 2522)
- Including LGBTQ individuals in Texas' Romeo and Juliet law (2013, 83R HB 3322)

Despite my bill not passing, it is important to continue to bring attention to these issues because Supreme Court Judges read newspapers, too.

Renters' Rights

Last session, in response to Hurricane Harvey, I filed HB 993 (86R) with joint author **Rep. Armando Walle** (D-Houston), that would have required property owners to give notice to prospective residential tenants regarding flooding risk. Regrettably, that bill did not pass. However, this session I again joint authored a similar bill with **Rep. Walle, HB 531** (sponsored by **Sen. Joan Huffman** (R-Houston)), that did pass and will become law starting January 1st, 2022.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Following the murder of George Floyd, **Sen. John Whitmire** (D-Houston) and I announced that we would be filing the Justice Reform Act (**HB 4145/SB 1775**) to build upon our efforts in the previous sessions to pass the Sandra Bland Act and HB 4468 (86R). The Justice Reform Act included policies to improve data collection, improve safety in county jails, improve peace officer training, bail reform, increase peace officer accountability, require written consent for consent searches, prohibit pretext stops, and prohibit arrests for fine-only offenses.

I also joint authored **HB 88/SB 1224**: The George Floyd Act by **Rep. S. Thompson** and **Sen. Royce West** (D-Dallas). The George Floyd Act included policies that addressed qualified immunity for peace officers, required corroboration for the testimony of undercover peace officers, created a duty for peace officers to intervene and make a report when they saw a fellow peace officer using excessive force, put limits on chokeholds, prohibit arrests for fine-only offenses, and required law enforcement departments to adopt progressive disciplinary matrix for peace officers.

Despite neither the Justice Reform Act nor the George Floyd Act passing out of the Texas House, my colleagues in the House and I worked hard to get several important criminal justice reform policies passed, including **HB 830**, which would have prohibited arrests for fine-only traffic tickets. The House also passed **SB 68** by **Sen. Miles** which I joint sponsored in the House with **Rep. Ron Reynolds** (D-Missouri City) which would have created a duty for peace officers to intervene and make a report when they saw a fellow peace officer using excessive force. Regrettably, both of these important pieces of legislation died in the Senate after the House passed them.

UPCOMING SPECIAL SESSION

Regretfully, this session Republican leadership focused on non-issues like "voting integrity" based on the Big Lie. The truth is their omnibus voting bill **SB 7** would have made it more difficult for all citizens to vote, particularly people of color and the elderly. When Republicans made a bad bill worse at the last minute, House Democrats were right to break quorum to stop SB 7 from passing during the regular session.

Governor Abbott has called the Legislature back for a special session starting July 8th. Regrettably, to once again likely focus on bad public policy, including voter oppression,



Rep. Garnet Coleman speaking against SB 7 at a press conference held at the AFL-CIO in Austin.

banning transgender athletes in school sports, making bail more punitive, and limiting local input in the legislative process.

Additionally, there will almost certainly be a second special session in the fall to focus on redistricting and appropriating \$16 billion in federal funds. In these upcoming special sessions, I will continue to work with my colleagues in order to prevent bad public policy from becoming law, and making sure the available federal funds get to the people and communities that need them the most.