

Carol Alvarado

The 87th Legislative Session – Capitol Update 2021



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Thank you for the continued honor and opportunity to serve as your State Senator for District 6. The 87th Legislature adjourned on May 31, 2021 and I am pleased to provide this report on our work. This newsletter provides an overview of the 87th Regular Session, my key committee assignments, and legislative achievements and other important updates.

The Texas Legislature meets every two years for 140 days from January to May. During the regular session, legislators from across the state craft the state's two-year budget and review thousands of bills. When the legislature met in January 2021, the state faced major challenges with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and a projected billion dollar shortfall. In February Winter Storm Uri struck, leaving hundreds of Texans dead, causing billions of dollars in damage and highlighting the need for major efforts to reform state public utility regulation and energy grid resiliency.

Nonetheless, the 87th Legislative Session passed a balanced budget that will fuel economic recovery, improve Texans' health and continue to fund historic investments in public education. The legislature passed a slate of bills and millions of dollars in funding to reform the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), mandate weatherization for power companies and improve the resiliency of the electrical grid. In addition, major bills were passed to fight the scourge of human trafficking and set the state on the path to administer historic funding to combat the ongoing opioid epidemic.

Despite these victories, legislation to expand Medicaid and register to vote online died during the legislative process. During the interim, I will continue to fight for these and other common-sense priorities that improve life for all Texans.

It has been a distinct privilege to serve Senate District 6. In addition to legislative matters, resolving constituent issues remains a top priority for our office. Both the capitol and district offices are prepared to serve every resident in the district and stand ready to assist in any way possible. Please feel free to contact either office for help cutting through government red tape or marking an important life accomplishment with an official state resolution and flag flown over the Texas Capitol. This newsletter includes contact information for both offices should you need assistance or more information.

Please know that I will continue to work hard every day to improve prosperity and increase opportunities for everyone in our district. I look forward to continuing to work together over the legislative interim.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol Alvarado".

*Senator Carol Alvarado
State Senate District 6*



Highlights of the 87th Legislature

COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

One of the top priorities for the 87th Legislature was improving the state's public health response to COVID-19 and future pandemics. **SB 239** requires the Department of State Health Services to develop a disease prevention information system to share information on vaccinations during state and local disasters. **SB 437** directs the Texas Division of Emergency Management to create an advisory committee to recommend guidelines for a state reserve of personal protective equipment. **SB 969** standardizes state data collection, reporting and information sharing for hospitals and public health authorities during disease outbreaks. **SB 1780** establishes the Texas Epidemic Public Health Institute at the University of Texas Health Sciences Center in Houston to support the state's pandemic preparedness and response capabilities and better protect public health.

EDUCATION

SB 165 allows students to exceed the limits on dropping college courses without a penalty during a declared state disaster. **SB 1860** directs the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to create an electronic application for Texas students to apply for state financial aid. **SB 1888** creates a pathway for high achieving high school students who demonstrate college readiness to graduate early and enroll in Texas colleges.

HB 3489 requires the Texas Education Agency to develop and distribute guidelines and best practices to integrate digital devices into instruction in public schools. **HB 159** requires all Texas educators to receive training regarding special needs, such as dyslexia, mental health and special education. **HB 2256** directs the State Board for Educator Certification to create a certification for bilingual special education instructors. **SB 560** directs the Texas Education Agency, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Texas Workforce Commission to develop a strategic plan to improve and expand bilingual education in public schools. **SB 1615** expands the Adult High School Charter School Program to increase access to training for high school diplomas and industry certifications for adults who left high school before graduating.

ELECTRICAL GRID RELIABILITY AND REFORM

SB 2 reforms the ERCOT board by requiring board members to be Texas residents and expanding the board's professional experience criteria. **SB 3** requires energy companies to weatherize electric infrastructure. It also improves the statewide power emergency alert system. The bill creates the Texas Energy Reliability Council to improve the reliability of Texas' energy and electrical infrastructure. It also increases penalties for companies that fail to prepare for weather emergencies. **SB 2154** makes multiple reforms



Senator Alvarado being sworn in on the opening day of the 87th Regular Session.

to the board of the Public Utility Commission. **HB 16** prohibits electric companies from selling energy plans to residential and small business customers where wholesale electricity costs are passed through to customers. **HB 2586** requires the Public Utility Commission to conduct an annual external audit of ERCOT financial statements.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The 87th Legislature passed major reforms and funding to prevent the continued threat of human trafficking in Texas. **HB 1540** implements multiple unanimous recommendations from the Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Taskforce to protect our most vulnerable citizens from being trafficked. I successfully offered an amendment that will increase the penalty for solicitation and purchase of prostitution to a felony, making Texas the first state in the country to do so and deterring those who prey on human trafficking victims. **HB 390** requires hotels and motel employees to receive annual training to identify and prevent human trafficking. **SB 315** prohibits Texans younger than 21 from working or entering sexually oriented businesses and allows the Attorney General and Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission to suspend violating business' licenses.

PUBLIC EMPLOYEES AND RETIRED TEACHERS

Major legislation passed by the 87th Legislature also increased transparency and solvency of the state's Employee Retirement System (ERS) and Teachers Retirement System of Texas (TRS). **HB 917** allows up to three retired state employees to serve on the ERS Board of Trustees, increasing their input on important decisions impacting former state employees. **HB 3898** aligns actuarial soundness requirements for the state's public retirement systems with industry standards to help pay off unfunded liabilities more quickly. **SB 321** changes contribution structures and retirement benefits for retired state employees and law enforcement officers. It also requires the state to pay down its unfunded liability no later than 2054. **SB 483** improves retirement system transparency and requires ERS and TRS to report to the legislature on assumed and actual rates of return for their investments. **SB**

Highlights of the 87th Legislature

1071 maximizes disability retirement benefits for law enforcement officers catastrophically injured in the line of duty from 100 percent to the maximum allowed by state law.

TAXES

HB 988 increases property tax transparency and makes property tax appeal procedures easier for taxpayers. It allows property owners to request binding arbitration for procedural violations by appraisal review boards and tax authorities. It also enables taxpayers to request single-member hearings. The bill creates a complaint process for procedural violations by appraisal review boards. The bill also requires the Comptroller of Public Accounts to review and approve changes to appraisal review board rules. **SB 742** ensures that small businesses who experience non-physical, economic damage in a declared disaster are eligible to pay their property taxes in installment plans, as envisioned in current law.

HB 1195, which I co-sponsored, exempts federal loans and grants made to Texas small businesses under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and subsequent federal rescue packages from state franchise tax.

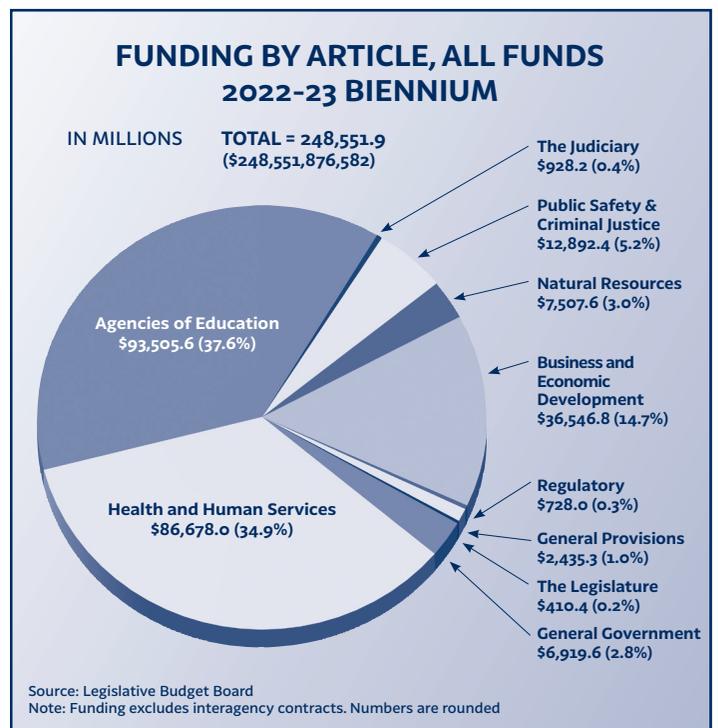
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

HB 5 establishes the Broadband Development Office within the Office of the Comptroller of Public Accounts to create state maps of areas with inadequate broadband coverage and award grants to expand broadband access in these areas. **HB 2219** reauthorizes Texas Mobility Fund bonds to allow the state to expedite transportation funding for highway and other transportation projects. **HB 3286**, which I sponsored, allows apartment complex owners and managers in Harris County to request the county prohibit overnight parking of commercial vehicles in public rights-of-way next to these complexes.

BUDGET

SB 1, the state's two-year budget for 2022-2023, provides funding for all areas of state government. The budget invests total of \$248 billion in All Funds, including \$116 billion in General Revenue over the 2022-23 biennium. **SB 1** maintains the state's commitment to public education, prioritizes health care for Texans and fuels Texas' economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The budget provides more than \$46 billion for Texas public schools. **SB 1** fully funds investments in public education made during the 86th Legislature, including \$3.1 billion to support public school enrollment growth and \$1 billion to reduce property taxes during the 2022-23 biennium. The budget invests \$897 million to maintain current health insurance premiums



Please note: Special sessions may affect listed budget numbers. These numbers are based on if the veto of the Legislature's funding is restored.

and benefits for retired teachers through TRS-Care. It also increases the state contribution for TRS from 7.5 percent to 8 percent by 2023.

The budget provides \$4.2 million to increase the Public Utility Commission's regulatory oversight of the ERCOT. It also invests more than \$36 million across four state agencies to implement legislation passed to enhance regulatory oversight and improve reliability of the state's electrical grid.

SB 1 also invests more than \$34 billion in health and human services. This is an increase of \$661 million, or 2 percent, over funding in the 2020-21 budget. This includes over \$352 million for women's health programs, a historic high and an increase of \$10.2 million over the previous budget. **SB 1** provides more than \$76 million to decrease waitlists for medical services for individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities. The bill also invests \$8.1 billion for mental health priorities across 25 state agencies.

The bill provides over \$34 million in funding to increase Rape Crisis Centers capacity to provide mental health counseling to sexual assault survivors. It also includes \$128.5 million for the Department of Public Safety to prioritize sexual assault testing kits and ensure timely testing.



Senator Alvarado laying out a bill in committee.

Highlights of the 87th Legislature

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Below are the eight proposed constitutional amendments. This year the election date is on November 2, 2021.

Proposition 1 (HJR 143)

“The constitutional amendment authorizing the professional sports team charitable foundations of organizations sanctioned by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association or the Women’s Professional Rodeo Association to conduct charitable raffles at rodeo venues.”

Proposition 2 (HJR 99)

“The constitutional amendment authorizing a county to finance the development or redevelopment of transportation or infrastructure in unproductive, underdeveloped, or blighted areas in the county.”

Proposition 3 (SJR 27)

“The constitutional amendment to prohibit this state or a political subdivision of this state from prohibiting or limiting religious services of religious organizations.”

Proposition 4 (SJR 47)

“The constitutional amendment changing the eligibility requirements for a justice of the supreme court, a judge of the court of criminal appeals, a justice of a court of appeals, and a district judge.”

Proposition 5 (HJR 165)

“The constitutional amendment providing additional powers to the State Commission on Judicial Conduct with respect to candidates for judicial office.”

Proposition 6 (SJR 19)

“The constitutional amendment establishing a right for residents of certain facilities to designate an essential caregiver for in-person visitation.”

Proposition 7 (HJR 125)

“The constitutional amendment to allow the surviving spouse of a person who is disabled to receive a limitation on the school district ad valorem taxes on the spouse’s residence homestead if the spouse is 55 years of age or older at the time of the person’s death.”

Proposition 8 (SJR 35)

“The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to provide for an exemption from ad valorem taxation of all or part of the market value of the residence homestead of the surviving spouse of a member of the armed services of the United States who is killed or fatally injured in the line of duty.”

BILLS PASSED BY THE NUMBERS

87th Legislature Statistics

The following bill statistics were calculated on June 21 at 8 a.m.

House Bills (HBs) & Senate Bills (SBs)	
Filed	6,927
Sent to the Governor	1,073
Signed by the Governor	947
Filed without the Governor’s signature	105
Signed by the Governor/line-item veto	1
Vetoed by the Governor	20

House Joint Resolutions (HJRs) & Senate Joint Resolutions (SJR)	
Filed	221
Filed with the Secretary of State	8

House Concurrent Resolutions (HCRs) & Senate Concurrent Resolutions (SCRs)	
Filed	179
Filed with the Secretary of State	14
Sent to the Governor	86
Signed by the Governor	86
Filed without the Governor’s Signature	0
Vetoed by the Governor	0

Committee Assignments and Legislative Achievements

MY COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

There are multiple criteria considered by the lieutenant governor when making committee assignments, such as seniority, background, knowledge and the concerns of each senator's unique district. This session, I was re-appointed as Vice Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Ports. In addition, I was re-appointed to the Senate Committees on Transportation and Nominations, which approves appointments made by the Governor to important state offices.

I also received new appointments to the Senate Committee on Administration, which schedules

local and uncontested bills for floor debate. I was also appointed to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development, which considers a broad variety of legislation including, oil and gas regulation, environmental quality, affordable housing, workforce development and tax incentives to support our local communities and economies.

In addition, I was appointed to the Senate Special Committee on Redistricting, which is responsible for drawing the state's maps for legislative, congressional and the State Board of Education districts based on updated population counts from the once-in-a-decade U.S. Census.



Senator Alvarado questioning a gubernatorial nominee before the Senate Committee on Nominations.

MY LEGISLATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS

SB 678 establishes the Small Business Disaster Recovery Loan Program to provide short-term, emergency bridge loans to small businesses that are damaged by a disaster. This bill will speed up needed funding for Texas small businesses, allowing them to keep their doors open and employees on payroll after future natural disasters or pandemics.

SB 900 directs the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to create safety standards for aboveground and underground storage vessels. These regulations will protect from leaks and catastrophic damage after natural disasters or industrial accidents. It will also prevent the numerous fires, leaks and explosions seen across Texas over the past few years.

SB 1063 allows school districts to offer optional courses in personal financial literacy and enable students to obtain course credits required for graduation. This bill will equip Texas students with the long-term skills they need to make informed financial decisions as students and later adults.

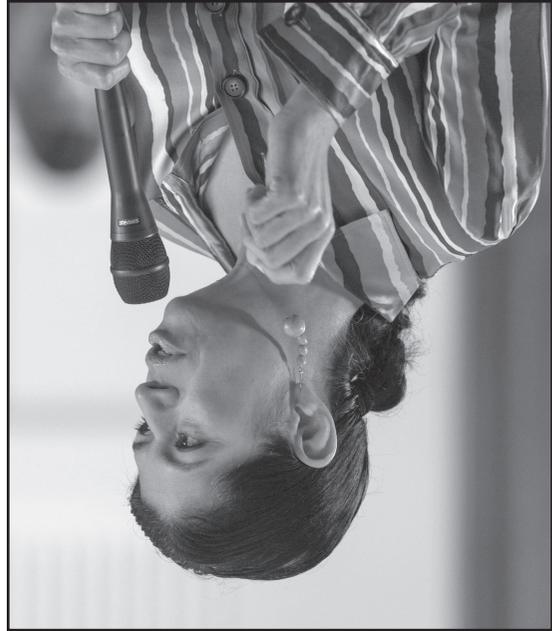
SB 1065 eliminates out-of-pocket costs for medical screenings to diagnose breast cancer. It also expands the types of procedures available to include more accurate procedures, such as ultrasound and MRI. This bill removes the cost barrier to screenings and allows women with a family history of breast cancer or other medical conditions to receive the most accurate screening possible.

SB 1774, the Texas Ports Prosperity Act, allows Texas ports to sell land they own and use the proceeds to pay for projects to deepen and widen their ship channels. This will allow Texas ports, like the Houston Ship Channel, to quickly finance improvement projects that increase jobs and expand economic output without waiting for federal funding from the U.S. Congress.

HB 3257 establishes the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission and directs it to conduct a study every two years on antisemitism in Texas. It requires the commission to raise awareness of antisemitism in Texas, provide assistance to schools and colleges on courses to combat antisemitism and recommend whether International Holocaust Remembrance Day should become an official state holiday.

HB 4110 raises criminal penalties for the sale of stolen catalytic converters. It also increases record-keeping requirements and regulations for metal recyclers to prevent thieves from selling and recycling stolen devices. This bill will reduce catalytic converter theft, which has skyrocketed across Houston and Texas in recent years.

HCR 51 urges the U.S. Congress to pass the I am Vanessa Guillen Act, which includes reforms to sexual harassment investigations in the U.S. Armed Services. These federal reforms include enhancing reporting options and requirements for sexual harassment reporting and removing commanding officers and those with conflicts of interest from the line of reporting to ensure the tragic death of Vanessa Guillen never happens again.



Senator Carol Alvarado is proud to serve Texas Senate District 6 in Harris County and was first elected in a 2018 Special Election. In 2008, she was elected to the Texas House of Representatives and served 5 terms representing District 145. She served as Chair of the Urban Affairs Committee and Co-Chair of the Select Committee on Transparency in State Agency Operations. Carol's primary legislative focus has been on economic development, public health and public education. She has championed legislation aimed at strengthening our state's workforce, regulating the use of e-cigarettes for children and criminal justice reform. Carol is an advocate for women's health and reproductive rights and has passed legislation to assist victims of sexual abuse. As a member of the Houston City Council from 2002-2008, Carol led the effort to make restaurants smoke free, stopped the shipping of more hazardous chemicals through our neighborhoods, and had air quality monitors installed in neighborhoods near chemical plants. Carol is a native Houstonian and longtime resident of Houston's East End. She holds a Master of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of Houston and is a member of St. Alphonsus Catholic Church.

ABOUT CAROL ALVARADO



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