



SENATOR JANE NELSON

P.O. Box 12068
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78711
(512) 463-0112 * FAX (512) 463-0923
www.nelson.senate.state.tx.us

****News Release****

For immediate release
May 30, 2005

Contact: Dave Nelson
(512) 463-0112

LEGISLATURE ADJOURNS AFTER PASSING KEY REFORMS

AUSTIN -- The Texas Legislature adjourns today after passing several key reforms in its 79th Regular Session, which began January 11, 2005. According to the Texas Constitution, the Legislature meets for 140 days in every odd-numbered year to craft the state budget and consider changes to existing law.

Following are some of the key bills sponsored by Texas State Senator Nelson, R-Lewisville, and a report on how they fared:

Issue: Protective Services Reform (SB 6)

Status: Sent to Governor

Purpose: Responds to a series of tragedies involving CPS and APS and the ensuing critical report by the Office of Inspector General. The goal of SB 6 is to reduce caseloads, retrain our caseworkers, improve coordination to law enforcement and mobilize communities to prevent child abuse and senior neglect.

Statement:

""This legislation will ensure that the agencies responsible for making life-and-death decisions are properly equipped and trained to make the right decisions. This has been an issue so close to our hearts because it involves our children and our most vulnerable citizens. We need our protective service agencies to do what their name suggests -- protect."

Issue: Student Health Initiative (SB 42)

Status: Sent to Governor

Purpose: Responds to the growing problem of child obesity by expanding the physical activity requirement to middle schools and junior high schools and expanding focus on health curriculum in public schools.

Statement: "We need to ensure that our children receive basic nutrition and exercise during the school day to prevent these life-threatening illnesses associated with obesity and inactivity, and this legislation will help ensure that our students are put on the path to good health," Senator Nelson said.

Issue: Meth Watch (SB 66)

Status: Sent to Governor.

Purpose: Creates a Meth Watch initiative to reduce the production and abuse of methamphetamine in Texas. It also includes drug education provisions and a drug-endangered child initiative to reduce drug exposure to children.

Statement: "I am so pleased that this legislation has been sent to the governor's desk. Meth is one of the most destructive narcotics, and unfortunately it is one of the easiest to manufacture. These initiatives represent a comprehensive approach to reducing meth abuse in Texas."

Issue: Medicaid Fraud (SB 47)

Status: Passed Senate; Amended to SB 563 and sent to Governor

Purpose: Reducing Medicaid fraud by expanding the Medicaid Fraud Pilot (SB 47).

Statement: "Medicaid fraud not only robs taxpayers, it ultimately robs needy families of services. These provisions are vital to protecting the integrity of Medicaid, and I am pleased that they have been approved by both chambers of the Legislature."

Issue: Military Families & Domestic Violence Victim Protection (SB 1186)

Status: Sent to Governor

Purpose: Protects military families from penalties associated with breaking their lease agreements when called up to active duty. The protection will also apply to victims of domestic violence who need to move after a court finding of abuse.

Statement: "This was a very important piece of legislation in a time of war. Our military makes so many sacrifices for us, and I am pleased that we can make things just a little bit easier on their families. When they are called up for active duty, we should help them take care of their affairs at home. I am also pleased that we were able to amend this legislation to afford the same protection for domestic violence victims who may need to move in order to escape from their abuser and break the cycle of violence."

Issue: Advance Notice of Bail (SB 56)

Status: Sent to Governor

Purpose: Requires that notice be given to prosecutors when a bail reduction is being considered involving a violent offender. Senator Nelson filed similar legislation in 2001 in response to the bail reduction of University Park resident Timothy Richardson, who was later convicted of capital murder of his wife, Mary Richardson.

Statement: "SB 56 is my renewed attempt to make potentially life-saving information about bail reductions available to victims of violent crime and their families. I worked closely with a family that had been through a horrific tragedy, and I am so pleased we have finally passed this legislation."

Issue: Nursing Shortage (SB 132)

Status: Sent to Governor.

Purpose: To address the shortage of qualified nurses in Texas.
Statement: "This is vital legislation that will help pool the resources of our nursing institutions so that we can graduate more nurses to fill this important need in our medical community."

Issue: Flag Flying (SB 54)
Status: Passed Senate, Died in House.
Purpose: This bill allows homeowners, regardless of their participation in a restrictive homeowners' association, to respectfully display the American flag.
Statement: "Our flag represents the sacrifices of our military, and people should be allowed to honor those sacrifices by flying the Stars & Stripes, especially during a time of war."

Issue: Niche Hospitals (SB 872)
Status: Sent to Governor
Purpose: This bill directs the Department of State Health Services to study niche providers with particular emphasis on their financial impact on general hospitals. Additionally, this legislation initiates a study into the issue of infections acquired at hospitals.
Statement: "There are many opinions on niche hospitals but little information on their impact on the community. This bill protects consumers through its disclosure requirement, while directing DSHS to study these facilities. With that information, the next Legislature will be able to make an informed decision on the future of niche hospitals."

Issue: Newborn Screening (HB 790)
Status: Sent to Governor
Purpose: To increase the number of diseases for which newborns are screened.
Statement: "Advances in science have made it much more likely that babies who are born with serious medical disorders can be successfully treated and live normal, healthy lives. However, it is vital to catch these diseases early, which is why this legislation to increase the number of screenings is so vital."

Issue: Practice of Dentistry (SB 610)
Status: Sent to Governor
Purpose: To improve patient protections and to allow retired dentists to apply for a charitable care license.
Statement: "One of the major components of this legislation is to allow our retired dentists to provide charitable services. Currently they can provide services in other countries but not here in their home state. This is a long overdue piece of legislation that will allow our dentists to provide charitable care."

Issue: Flu Vaccines (SB 1331)
Status: Sent to Governor
Purpose: To increase the availability of flu vaccinations for the elderly.

Statement: "Influenza can be particularly detrimental, even deadly, among our senior population. This legislation will ensure that our elderly citizens have access to these life-saving vaccines."

Issue: State Board of Medical Examiners (SB 419)

Status: Sent to Governor.

Purpose: To continue the functions of the State Board of Medical Examiners according to recommendations of the Sunset Advisory Commission. Parental consent and late term abortion ban was added by the House.

Statement: "I have sponsored the parental consent bill in the past and am pleased that we have finally passed this legislation ensuring that parents have a say in their daughters' decisions about abortion. No other major medical procedure is allowed for minors without a parent's consent, and this particular issue is one in which parents are needed the most. I also agree strongly that late-term abortions should not occur unless the life of the mother is in danger."

Issue: PUC Sunset (SB 408)

Status: Sent to Governor

Purpose: To continue the functions of the Public Utility Commission according to the functions of the Sunset Advisory Commission.

Statement: "This legislation will extend the Public Utilities Commission and ensure it has the tools it needs to protect utility consumers and promote a strong, fair telecommunications market."

Issue: Medicaid Reform (SB 1188)

Status: Sent to Governor

Purpose: To implement recommendations of the Governor's Medicaid Reform Workgroup. If measures are not taken to contain costs, the present \$17 billion annual Texas Medicaid budget will exceed \$136 billion annually — more than one-quarter of a trillion dollars (\$272 billion) a biennium in less than 20 years. SB 1188 is the resulting legislation from the Governor's Medicaid Reform Workgroup, which identified reforms which presume \$262 in potential net savings to the state.

Statement: "These reforms will help promote access to medical care among our Medicaid patients and also help contain our costs."

SENATOR JANE NELSON, R-LEWISVILLE, represents District 12, which includes parts of Tarrant and Denton counties. For a complete update on all the activities of the Legislature, visit www.capitol.state.tx.us.

-###-