



# SARAH ECKHARDT

STATE SENATOR • DISTRICT 14

February 20, 2026

The Honorable Dan Patrick  
Lieutenant Governor of Texas  
State Capitol, 2E.13  
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Governor Patrick,

I greatly appreciate your soliciting input from Senators on issues to study during the interim by the 89th Legislature as we identify what challenges and opportunities face the people of Texas and guide our priorities during the 90th Regular Session. I believe that the following issues represent opportunities to develop bipartisan legislative solutions that will put opportunity within reach of every Texan. I look forward to working with you and your office as well as my Senate colleagues to bring bipartisan solutions forward.

## **Administration**

### **Examine the Senate's response to workplace harassment claims**

In recent years several states have moved toward providing enhanced protections to employees subjected to workplace harassment, including requiring mandatory harassment training, softening of the test for harassment under federal standards, and banning nondisclosure agreements that could silence harassment victims. In 2021 the Texas Legislature followed suit, with Governor Abbott signing SB 45 into law on May 30, 2021 and HB 21 into law on June 9, 2021. However, the Senate has not reviewed its own policies and procedures to ensure that Senate employees are sufficiently protected. The Committee should:

- Review the current Senate policies and procedures for employee complaints of workplace harassment;
- Evaluate the frequency of such complaints and the manner of resolution;
- Study the types of harassment that are reported to determine how the Senate can best deter such harassment; and
- Evaluate policies and procedures used in similar workplaces (e.g. other legislative bodies and comparable arenas of high public interest) when those employees file workplace harassment complaints to identify best practices that protect the rights of the accuser and the accused.

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## **Public Participation in Senate Committees**

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 36 states offer opportunities for public participation in legislative committees remotely. These include online remote witness registration, online bill comments and written testimony, and virtual audio and visual testimony. Additionally, since the 87th Regular Legislative Session, the Texas House of Representatives has allowed online public comment on all legislation before a committee or subcommittee, which is then published alongside the Committee Report. While some committees in the Texas Senate have intermittently used remote methods of public participation, there is no established policy allowing Texans to make their voices heard without being physically present in the Texas Capitol. There are lessons to be learned from many of our local government partners in the state that are required by laws we have passed to deliberate in a transparent manner. In a state as geographically large as Texas, we should explore all available options to promote greater participation and public input irrespective of where in the state they reside. As such, the committee should:

- Evaluate public participation policies for committees of the Texas Senate;
- Study best practices by other legislative bodies for allowing members of the public to access committee information and comment on pending legislation;
- Consider methods for Texans to engage with committees without being physically present at the Texas Capitol;
- Look for opportunities to create greater proactive transparency of the information submitted to members of the Legislature and inform our lawmaking; and
- Make recommendations for changes to the Texas Senate Rules to ensure the committee process remains efficient, transparent, and accessible to the public.

## **Business and Commerce**

### **Energy Efficiency**

Energy efficiency is the cheapest and most cost-effective way to reduce demand and keep energy bills low. Although Texas was the first state to enact energy efficiency goals, Texas now lags near the bottom. The Senate should study the current residential energy efficiency program structure and make recommendations for improvement on return on investment, specifically reporting on:

- Data collected to determine the population utilizing programs, which have the highest success rates, and where program benefits are utilized;
- Increasing success with programs specifically targeting multi-family housing structures;
- Potential for expanding the number of companies providing energy efficiency programs to customers; and
- Creating new programs funded with interconnection fees for larger load users.

### **Home Insurance**

Texas ranks in the top 5 for the highest annual property insurance premiums on homes with a mortgage nationwide. In 2023 and 2024, homeowners insurance rates climbed 21.1% and 18.7%, respectively. As Texas leads the nation in most frequent and most

severe weather events, the Legislature should look for ways to maintain a stable and affordable insurance market. The Committee should:

- Evaluate the rising cost of property and casualty insurance on Texas property owners, real estate lenders, and commercial and industrial development;
- Consider the relationship between ISO ratings, land use regulations, and regional insurance costs;
- Identify policy solutions to curb year-over-year rate changes, including SB 1643 89(R), which would have required the Texas Department of Insurance to review any rate changes over 10%; and
- Identify opportunities to increase consumer transparency, including monitoring implementation of HB 2067 89(R), which requires insurers to provide policyholders and applicants for insurance with a timely written statement explaining the reason for the declination of a policy application or the cancellation of or refusal to renew an existing policy.

### **Workers Compensation & Workplace Safety**

Texas remains the only state in the country that does not require private employers to carry workers' compensation insurance, and according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Texas leads the nation in workplace related fatalities. To ensure Texans can work without fear of death or bodily injury, the Committee should:

- Evaluate the economic impacts of Texas' status as the sole remaining non-subscriber state;
- Study the causes of the state's high rate of workplace injuries and fatalities, with specific attention to high-risk industries such as construction and resource extraction; and
- Make recommendations to incentivize or require private employers to carry workers' compensation insurance and policies to reduce workplace injuries and fatalities;

### **Criminal Justice**

#### **Increasing Building Space for Courts Across the State**

According to the Office of Court Administration (OCA), Texas's 15th Court of Appeals and the Texas Business Court, despite opening in September 2024, still lack permanent dedicated court spaces. The issue of space is not isolated to these two specific courts, however, it is exceptionally detrimental to those courts' abilities to conduct in-person hearings and jury trials when needed. Across the state as populations continue to grow, courts are running out of space to meet their needs. To ensure the Texas court system is as efficient and effective as possible, proactive planning for future capacity constraints and needs across the state are warranted. The Committee should evaluate the following:

- General building shortages and growth needs for courts across the state at every level of jurisdiction.
- Available building spaces specifically dedicated to the Business Court and 15th Court of Appeals for both the short-term and long-term.

- Evaluate the sources of funding available to OCA for purchase, rental, or construction of these courts to determine if they are adequate to complete implementation and continue to fund these new courts and expanding other courts across the state in the years to come.

### **Community Diversion and Re-Entry Support**

Aside from the benefits to the subject of the criminal record and the economy, there are many benefits for employers who include individuals with criminal backgrounds as part of their workforce. The Texas Public Policy Foundation reports that the population of individuals unemployed due to a criminal background accounted for an estimated \$78-87 billion decrease in the 2014 U.S. Gross Domestic Product. On a more localized scale, studies have also shown that children with incarcerated parents have an increased risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system themselves, further exacerbating the larger economic impacts. When employers participate in second chance hiring, they do more than provide a job; they mitigate the consequences associated with the cycle of poverty and crime that can affect society as a whole and last generations. The Committee should:

- Study the barriers to employment individuals with criminal backgrounds face, including the concerns of business owners when they are considering hiring such an individual;
- Evaluate methods to educate businesses on interpreting background check results and when specific circumstances warrant looking past criminal records when considering a job applicant; and
- Evaluate the risk of liability for negligent hiring under Texas statute and study methods to mitigate that liability, where appropriate, to encourage second chance hiring.

### **Bolstering the Economy by Increasing Pathways to Criminal Record Clearing**

Texas suffers *billions* of dollars in earning losses each year due to the underemployment of people with criminal records. The system that allows folks with a criminal record to have their record cleared is petition-based, which adds hurdles to the process. As a result, only 6.5% of individuals obtain the criminal record clearing within 5 years of becoming eligible. There is no right to counsel for criminal record clearing and obtaining relief is costly and difficult to navigate. During the 87th interim, the House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee recommended that Texas adopt Clean Slate legislation but none of the 24 criminal record clearing bills filed last session made it successfully through the Senate. The Committee should evaluate the following:

- Study current expunction and record clearing processes under state statute to determine if there are unnecessary barriers to record sealing;
- Evaluate methods to streamline the current record clearing and expunction processes under state statute; and
- Evaluate the feasibility of automated record clearance for those who are already eligible to have their record sealed.

### **Cost to Counties for State Inmates**

Following a conviction of a felony or a state jail felony, the state of Texas is required to facilitate the transfer of such prisoners from county jails to state prisons so those inmates may serve out their sentence. However, this transfer into state facilities is often not happening within the statutorily required time frame. This delay places the financial burden on the county taxpayer and can lead to overcrowded jails, slowing the wheels of justice in our state. Although measures were taken in the 88th Legislative Session to alleviate this burden on the counties, such measures only applied to the transfer of certain state inmates. The counties were left with multiple jail populations with no statutorily enforced timeline for when they must be transferred from county jails to state facilities. Addressing these unreimbursed holds creates an opportunity to provide property tax relief to the taxpayers of this state. The Committee should evaluate the following:

- Study the cost local governments have incurred while waiting for state agencies to timely take custody of paper-ready inmates, blue warrant parolees, criminal defendants who are incompetent to stand trial, and youth held in county jails and facilities; and
- Evaluate state criminal justice facility capacity statewide, including the availability of forensic beds, to better understand the reasons for delay in state agencies taking timely custody of such inmates.

### **Economic Development**

#### **High Quality Childcare**

The Texas economy is losing an estimated \$9 billion each year because of insufficient childcare capacity. According to a 2024 study from the University of Texas at Austin, there are 27% fewer childcare programs operating in the state than in 2020, with more expected to close now that pandemic relief funds have lapsed. Many programs often have waitlists due to staff shortages. The Committee should study this shortage and issue recommendations on how to:

- Decrease the number of eligible families on the child care subsidy waitlist;
- Increase the number of high-quality child care programs across the state, specifically in rural communities and those that serve infants and toddlers;
- Reduce child care tuition costs for working families;
- Lessons learned and best practices in other states and by programs being initiated by local government partners; and
- Recruit and retain more effective child care educators.

#### **Workforce Education & Tri-Agency Coordination**

In the 88th & 89th Legislative Sessions, the Legislature enacted several grant programs and workforce development initiatives to strengthen workforce education, including efforts led and supported by the Tri-Agency of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and Texas Education Agency (TEA). To ensure this collaborative initiative continues to strengthen our workforce education and development programs, the Committee should:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of these targeted investments in aligning education and training programs with high-demand jobs and regional labor market needs;
- Explore the impact that the federal Workforce Pell will have on eligible short-term credentials in Texas; and
- Recommend additional steps to maximize the impact of these efforts on Texas's economic competitiveness.

## **Education (K-12)**

### **Pre-Kindergarten Access**

In the 89th Legislature, provisions of HB 2 expanded public pre-K eligibility to include children of full-time classroom teachers. However, many barriers to affordable and accessible pre-K enrollment persist, with TEA estimating over 270,000 three- and four-year-olds who are not enrolled in public pre-K across the state. The Committee should:

- Review the impact of pre-K funding in HB 2;
- Examine barriers to creating additional pre-K capacity in school districts; and
- Review barriers for school staff who are parents to participate in the workforce and strategies to facilitate the ease of returning to the classroom, such as extending the public pre-K benefit offered to full-time classroom teachers in HB 2 to include other district staff, such as English as a Second Language teachers, Special Education teachers, coaches, and librarians.

### **Artificial Intelligence Guidance for Schools**

According to the RAND Corporation's 2025 American Mathematics Educator Survey, more than half of Texas students and teachers have used artificial intelligence (AI) tools for instruction during the 2024-2025 school year. The proliferation of AI usage by students in schools has created significant challenges for students and educators. Students in Texas are interacting with AI-tools such as ChatGPT without necessary context of how the tool functions, how the tool may generate inaccurate information, and how to keep both themselves and their personal data safe. Teachers and school staff have not been given statewide training to discern when a student's work includes content generated by an AI, and have also not been given resources on how to discuss best-practices with students. Currently, 33 states (and Puerto Rico) offer official guidance or a policy on the use of AI in K-12 schools. The Committee should:

- Evaluate current state of AI usage by K-12 students in schools, and explore issues experienced by students with AI literacy, safety, and classroom learning; and
- Consider subjects to be included in AI guidance, including potential TEKS for students, as well as resources for teachers and parents or guardians, such as defining AI types, identifying AI content, protecting personal safety and information security, and maintaining academic transparency.

### **Review of Implementation of School Personal Device Ban**

Many students, educators, and administrators have reported the benefits of Texas's personal device ban in schools since the beginning of the 2025-2026 school year. In

fact, students from Round Rock ISD have reported feeling more engaged both inside and outside the classroom. As districts implement HB 1481 89(R), certain subjects and extracurriculars have reported challenges to completing research or projects during class time. Educators are grappling with the challenge of teaching kids to be tech literate but not tech dependent. The Committee should:

- Monitor the implementation of HB 1481; and
- Evaluate device bans in other states and consider whether or not exceptions may be required for certain courses, extracurriculars, and school safety procedures.

### **Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect**

The Texas Legislature has made significant strides in protecting children from abuse and neglect. However, there is a significant lack of child protection concerning at-risk children who are homeschooled. Only three states offer protections for this population, such as prohibiting homeschooling if a registered sex offender lives in a household (Arkansas), prohibiting homeschooling if the parents have been convicted of certain violent crimes against children (Utah), or prohibiting homeschooling if an adult in the household has been convicted of a range of offenses such as homicide or kidnapping (Pennsylvania). Further, no state has instituted formal monitoring to prevent a child from entering homeschooling during an open child abuse or neglect investigation as a measure to cease an examination. The Committee should:

- Review best practices by other states to proactively protect these vulnerable children; and
- Explore common sense safeguards to prevent children from being withdrawn from the public school system for the purpose of abuse or to hide abuse.

### **Finance**

#### **Benefits for State Retirees**

During the 88th session, the Legislature did excellent work in a bipartisan fashion to address retiree benefits for those in the Teacher Retirement System (TRS). The Committee should study doing the same for those in the Employee Retirement Systems (ERS), beginning with:

- Reviewing the actuarial status, funding level and liabilities, and impact of increased funding in the 87th, 88th, and 89th Legislatures;
- Evaluating costs of benefit enhancements such as automatic ongoing COLAs and supplemental payments (13th Check) to ERS retirees;
- Determining methods of prefunding benefit enhancements that can be distributed immediately to ERS retirees; and
- Analyzing the impact inflation and the cost of living have had on ERS Retirees, taking into account regional variations.

#### **Indigent Defense Funding**

The *Fair Defense Act of 2001* (“FDA”) created a fund to be used by the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) to develop standards by which attorneys may qualify for appointment to represent indigent defendants and a plan establishing statewide requirements for counties relating to reporting indigent defense information. As a result,

indigent defendants in many Texas counties are getting better-qualified defense attorneys timely appointed, thereby improving overall effectiveness and efficiency of the courts.

As Texas's population continues to grow, so does the strain on the criminal court system to support growing caseloads – especially where those constitutionally entitled to defense cannot access it for a variety of reasons. The growth of areas known colloquially as “legal deserts” (predominantly in rural areas and low-income communities) leaves people without access to Constitutionally protected representation. To ensure Texas's compliance with the state and federal constitutions, as well as improved efficiency of the court system, it is crucial to examine the dedicated funds and evaluate where the state can improve. The Committee should:

- Evaluate the history of deposits into, and appropriations from, the General Revenue-Dedicated Account 5073 (Fair Defense Account) and whether revenue sources for this account are sufficient to meet the indigent defense needs in the county and state courts as our population grows;
- Calculate the cost per capita of providing defense where constitutionally mandated to indigent defendants and determine where an increase in funds is needed to continue to meet the state's constitutional burdens;
- Evaluate “legal deserts,” what best practices we can replicate from other states, and how the state can better distribute resources to meet its burden across the entire state; and
- Evaluate available Federal Title IV-E funds to see if more could be obtained to support TIDC.

### **Reducing Statewide Crime Lab Staff Shortages**

Crime labs across Texas continue to face staffing issues. These analytical experts face 2-4 years of on-the-job training at the labs after receiving a degree, which must occur before a forensic pathologist can produce casework and testify independently. Many labs estimate the cost of training a forensic analyst to the point of doing case work to be between \$300k and \$500k each. This challenge is compounded by public forensic labs regularly losing trained staff to private sector industries that offer better pay, less stress, and better working conditions. Excellence in forensics is crucial to ensuring criminals are caught in a timely manner and the innocent go free, reducing the financial load on the penal system. The Committee should:

- Study workforce shortages and attrition rates related to forensic science both in state and locally run labs;
- Consider loan forgiveness and/or scholarships and grants to students pursuing a career in forensic science in exchange for their commitment to serve in Texas public forensic laboratories for a period beyond the completion of training;
- Consider state funding for the training of forensic lab staff in Texas to offset the initial and ongoing costs to county and regional laboratories; and
- Examine funding both discipline-specific practical training such as forensic professional certification programs as well as options for continuing forensic education through the Texas Forensic Science Commission, Texas Universities, and/or other qualified resources.

### **Juvenile and Family Legal Representation**

Every year, the Texas Child Protective Services (CPS) system affects tens of thousands of families, and the consequences in these cases can be severe, including permanent family separation. All children and many parents involved in CPS cases receive court-appointed counsel. When a court appoints an attorney for a child or parent in a lawsuit filed against the parent by the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), the legal representation is publicly funded, but unlike in criminal cases, the state provides no funding for these attorneys. Funding, administration, and oversight falls almost entirely upon county governments. These cases typically last on average between 12 to 18 months and the attorneys can remain on an appointment for years, long after the parent's rights have been terminated, when their client is a child. The Committee should:

- Monitor the effects of SB 2120 from the 88th Regular Session relating to the establishment of a family protection representation program within the Texas Indigent Defense Commission;
- Assess the availability of qualified attorneys across the state to provide court-appointed legal representation for youth involved in the juvenile justice system and children and indigent parents named in lawsuits filed by DFPS;
- Study the role county governments play in the CPS system in Texas, including court operations and diversion programs, support services, and the cost to counties for providing legal representation for parents and children involved with the CPS system;
- Evaluate best practices and ways for the state to better support counties in the facilitation of the CPS system in Texas;
- Examine funding needs to support high-quality legal representation of children and indigent parents in cases brought by DFPS; and
- Evaluate the extent to which the state is fully utilizing our allocation of Federal Title IV-E funds to support legal representation of children and parents in cases brought by DFPS, and consider ways to maximize the drawdown of these funds.

### **Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Vouchers**

The Texas Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Program is a statewide partnership between the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) that expands access to the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) housing vouchers for youth in the FYI program across Texas. Eligible young people in foster care can receive rental assistance and access voluntary supportive services to achieve stable housing and independence. While Texas has been incredibly successful in FYI implementation, growing the program from roughly 40 vouchers to nearly 650 within a five-year window, new dedicated service funding would allow the state to further leverage this powerful federal resource. The Committee should:

- Evaluate models from other states, including states that have appropriated funds to augment required FYI services, to determine best practices and potential applicability in Texas;
- Study the utilization and effectiveness of the partnership between DFPS, TDHCA, and HUD, including comparison with FYI implementation through partnership with local public housing authorities, and evaluate potential hybrid approaches. The assessment should examine impacts on voucher access, timeliness of lease-up geographic equity, administrative burden, and outcomes for youth;
- Study and evaluate the feasibility and impact of a phased state investment in FYI supportive services. In particular, evaluate rolling out an initial phase serving approximately 750 youth and a subsequent phase scaling to serve an additional 750 youth, sufficient to address the estimated statewide unmet need;
- Study and evaluate potential performance metrics and outcomes, including housing availability, successful voucher utilization, educational participation, workforce engagement, and financial literacy, to inform legislative decision-making.

## **Health and Human Services**

### **Access to Healthcare Coverage**

Texas has both the highest rate and the highest number of uninsured people in the nation, with nearly 20% of Texans being uninsured (not even counting those who are underinsured), leading to poor health outcomes and expensive care. Texas also has the highest rate of uninsured children. This high uninsured rate has negatively affected the Texas economy, as worse health limits earning potential, increases absenteeism, and sidelines successful workers. In 2016, the Texas Alliance for Health Care estimated the cost of lower lifetime earnings and worse health for uninsured Texans was a whopping \$57 billion. This figure is likely higher now as a greater number of Texans are unable to afford health insurance, as the expiration of critical federal tax credit subsidies in 2025 left an estimated 1 million Texans without aid that helped make health insurance premiums financially feasible. The Committee should:

- Evaluate health coverage solutions for uninsured and underinsured Texans to promote greater prosperity among families and improve health outcomes for children with access to primary, mental, and specialty care for all Texans;
- Study ways to improve ease of access to health coverage for uninsured children who are eligible for Medicaid or CHIP but not enrolled, including children in rural areas and children in families who have encountered delays and other barriers in the state's Medicaid enrollment system; and
- Explore allowing the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to adopt "*Express Lane Eligibility*," which could enable the use of already-verified information from other state programs to streamline enrollment and help connect eligible kids to Medicaid and CHIP health insurance with affirmative parental consent.

## **Maternal health**

Texas faces a maternal mortality rate higher than the national average. This is due to several factors, including a large rural population, maternity care deserts, mental and behavioral health issues, and the 5th highest percentage of women not receiving adequate prenatal care in the country. In addition, racial disparities in access to care mean that maternal mortality risk is significantly higher for black Texans. The Committee should:

- Evaluate findings and recommendations made to the Texas Legislature by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in their September 2025 report on Racial Outcomes in Maternal Mortality. In particular, the Senate should explore how to implement that Commission's recommendations related to:
  - Investing in more timely disaggregated data collection related to maternal mortality and morbidity in Texas;
  - Ensuring services are available in multiple languages; and
  - Increasing investment in midwives, doulas, and community healthcare workers.

## **Nutritious Food Access**

Texas has the highest number of residents experiencing food insecurity (5.3 million). According to Feeding Texas, the rate of food insecurity in Texas has risen from 16.4% to 17.6% (1 in 6 Texans) since last year's report. The Committee should:

- Evaluate the state of affordable food access for Texans, including the impact of Texas opting out of Summer EBT funds and new requirements added to SNAP in HR 1, passed by Congress in 2025;
- The capacity of the food distribution infrastructure that exists to help Texans in need and identify what and where additional support is necessary; and
- Investigate strategies for addressing healthy, accessible, and affordable food security in rural and urban Texas.

## **Rural Hospital Closures**

Texas leads the nation in rural hospital closures, with the Texas Organization of Rural & Community Hospitals identifying 24 communities losing their hospital since 2010. A report from *Kaufman Hall* found that over a quarter of Texas rural hospitals were at risk of closure, compared to 16% in 2020. Although Texas will receive the largest portion of the federal Rural Health Transformation Program funding of any state, the funding comes out to only \$60 per resident in a rural county — the lowest rate in the nation per capita for rural population. The Committee should:

- Identify the drivers causing rural hospital closures;
- Evaluate engagement with the Health & Human Services Commission's (HHSC) Rural Hospital Finance program created by HB 18 89(R); and
- Consider if any services and strategies (such as managing telehealth and uncompensated care costs) could be shared in a rural network or consortium model to support patients while maintaining independence.

### **Rural Labor & Delivery Access**

Beyond the issue of the ongoing financial viability of rural hospitals in Texas generally, a number of hospitals that remain open are able to do so by cutting high-cost services with low reimbursement rates. Nearly 60% of rural Texas hospitals do not deliver babies, with Texas having lost a dozen rural obstetrics units between 2010 and 2022, according to the University of Minnesota Rural Health Research Center. Even after Medicaid reimbursements increased for deliveries, Texas still ranks as the 8th worst state in the nation for obstetrics reimbursement rates. The Committee should:

- Identify areas of the state where the disparity in access poses an imminent threat to the health and wellbeing of pregnant Texans; and
- Consider strategies to combat the growing labor and delivery shortage in rural Texas, including exploring the feasibility of a pilot program to establish standby prenatal services, boosting the rural maternal health workforce pipeline, and engaging healthcare workers to provide basic preventative care and maternal health services.

### **Harm Reduction Strategies**

Drug-related deaths have increased in Texas since 2019, peaking in 2023 with an estimated 5,566 deaths. That year, Travis County recorded 440 accidental drug-related deaths, or 33 deaths per 100,000 residents. Tarrant County has experienced over 2,000 fatal overdoses in the past five years, or more than one a day. Texas drug deaths fell 12 percent in 2024; however, drug overdose deaths in Texas remain above prepandemic levels. The Committee should:

- Examine the effectiveness of life-saving drug testing technologies (e.g., test strips) and overdose interventions (e.g., Narcan) to prevent drug overdose and death;
- Evaluate policy barriers that limit or prohibit local governments or organizations from distributing harm reduction supplies, and implementing harm reduction strategies that have proven effective at reducing drug overdoses and deaths; and
- Make recommendations for evidence-based strategies for mitigating deadly drug use in Texas.

### **Effects of Extreme Heat**

Heat is becoming more extreme and more frequent in Texas, leading to a myriad of public health challenges, particularly among vulnerable populations. In 2023, Texas's hottest year to date, over 300 Texans were reported to have died from heat-related health issues. This was more than any other year on record, with more than twice as many people dying as in 2011, the previous hottest summer on record. Thousands more experience heat illness, intensifying health issues that can lead to medical emergencies. The Committee should:

- Examine the effects of heat on vulnerable populations, including but not limited to pregnant people, young children, the elderly, and people with pre-existing medical conditions;
- Study best practices for protecting these vulnerable populations as well as those Texans with limited access to air conditioning, including Texans experiencing homelessness; and

- Assess the adequacy of public health data collection requirements and infrastructure for predicting, tracking, and mapping heat effects within communities.

### **Gun Violence**

In 2020, gunshot wounds became the leading cause of death for Texas youth, surpassing car accidents. Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) data shows gunshots killed nearly 300 Texans under 18 in 2022, compared to just over 100 in 2012 — a nearly 200 percent increase over the past 10 years. The number of Texas children killed by gunshot wounds has nearly tripled in the last decade. Additionally, deaths from domestic violence involving guns are also on the rise. In the last decade, the number of homicides involving a gun has doubled. The Committee should:

- Examine the impact on public health of gun violence, with particular emphasis on children and victims of domestic violence; and
- Study best practices for gun violence prevention and mitigation, including safe storage.

### **Mental Health Jail Diversion Efforts & Forensic Waitlists**

Individuals awaiting competency restoration are held in county jails until a bed in the state hospital system or a contracted private provider is available. At the end of August of 2025, just under 1,800 individuals were waiting in Texas county jails for a state mental health bed. These individuals often remain in jail for extended periods, sometimes waiting a minimum of six months and up to 14 months for a bed to become available in state hospitals.

Mental health diversion programs offer a "public safety exit ramp," redirecting individuals toward community-based treatment that addresses the root causes of their behavior, reducing jail overcrowding, and decreasing the strain on law enforcement resources. By providing an alternative to incarceration, we can eliminate the complicating factor of creating an often unnecessary criminal justice system interaction that can become a barrier to effective treatment. In addition, fewer individuals will join the state waitlist, which could allow the state to use our existing and already funded additional capacity more efficiently. The Committee should:

- Evaluate the availability of forensic beds statewide, including beds available in private facilities, accounting for investments that have already been made;
- Assess the progress by state agencies to implement the already funded capacity expansion of forensic and mental health beds to ensure we are meeting scheduled milestones;
- Study the cost local governments have incurred while holding individuals awaiting transfer to a state facility for competency restoration as well as initiatives to restore competency in jail-based and other local settings; and
- Explore ways to divert individuals with mental health and substance use disorders from entering jail by surveying best practices for community-based diversion centers and coordinating a local continuum of care to provide both pre-arrest and post-arrest services.

## **Measles Outbreaks**

In 2025, West Texas experienced a measles outbreak that infected at least 762 Texans, with 99 hospitalized and two fatalities of school-aged children. This outbreak was the nation's largest in more than 35 years. Just two months into 2026, reports have confirmed that Texas has seen measles outbreaks in the Dilley Immigration Processing Center as well as at least 5 confirmed cases in Rockwall County. The Committee should:

- Study successful strategies employed during measles outbreaks to prevent the spread of infections, such as DSHS recommended early doses of the measles vaccine;
- Consider if communication between medical providers and DSHS could be improved to ensure accurate tracking of reported measles cases and collaborate with public health authorities; and
- Explore legislative strategies to avoid future measles outbreaks, such as creating in-school guidance for students and staff for identifying symptoms or managing potential exposure and encouraging public awareness of the proven safety of the vaccine.

## **Higher Education**

### **Monitor Community College Finance**

SB 1786 89(R) adjusted the state's outcomes-based funding formula for community colleges originally established by HB 8 88(R). The committee should consider how colleges are responding to the formula's funding incentives to improve outcomes for 744,000 students, and specifically:

- Monitor rulemaking from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board;
- Review Regional Labor Demand Assessments produced by the Texas Workforce Commission;
- Study the impact of already enacted or anticipated changes to the credential of value methodology, including Associate's and certificate programs no longer rewarded by the state funding formula;
- Study the impact of the Financial Aid for Swift Transfer (FAST) program on dual credit outcomes, with a specific focus on students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and make recommendations to expand the program to more students; and
- Review the findings from relevant legislatively mandated studies, including the study on dual enrollment course sequences and workforce capacity mandated by HB 1868 89(R) and the study examining the fiscal impact of rewarding transfer outcomes for students who were previously enrolled in a public four-year institution, as mandated by SB 1400 89(R).

### **Monitor Higher Education and Workforce Programming within Texas Prisons**

A postsecondary credential is an essential asset for any citizen to improve their prospects of competing in today's workforce, gaining self-sustaining employment, and for those Texans exiting the criminal justice system, reducing recidivism. Yet, of the 56,669 Texans released from prison in 2020, the average person was 37 years old and

had only the equivalent of an eighth-grade education. Last session, SB 2405, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Sunset Bill, sought to address these issues by transferring the administration of post-secondary education from TDCJ to the Windham School District. To ensure incarcerated students have access to quality post-secondary education programs, the Committee should:

- Review the progress of transferred post-secondary education from TDCJ to the Windham School District;
- Consider how agencies, including the THECB and TDCJ, are providing clear criteria and guidance to colleges that align with the state's goals for public safety and workforce development;
- Evaluate Lee College's work with TDCJ's Huntsville Unit to consider how that method could be applied broadly across the state; and
- Assess the availability funding to allow Lee College's effort to be expanded statewide.

## **Homeland Security & Veterans Affairs**

### **Emergency Responder Communication Interoperability**

Recent legislative investigations into the July 2025 Hill Country floods, Panhandle fire, and the Uvalde/Robb Elementary shooting have all highlighted how gaps in the interoperability of emergency responder communication systems can catastrophically delay emergency response efforts. It is important that the state lead on this issue to ensure that localized turf disputes don't come at the expense of vulnerable Texans. The Committee should:

- Review the Texas Statewide Communication & Interoperability Plan and identify opportunities to accelerate the state's progress towards enhancing emergency communications interoperability;
- Review the Statewide Emergency Radio Infrastructure grant program and make recommendations to ensure the program can meet the growing needs of emergency communications interoperability;
- Study the unique challenges and barriers that prevent effective communication between first responders and other emergency response personnel during an emergency, including but not limited to: geography, topography, and the built environment);
- Identify limitations of federal funding and communicate needed changes to our Congressional delegation and federal agencies to ensure that we can maximize support to serve Texans; and
- Make recommendations on any legislation or funding needed to improve emergency communications across the state.

### **Weakening the Ability of Cartels to Cause Violence on Both Sides of the Border**

Mexican drug cartels are increasingly reliant on firearms smuggled from the U.S., with 68% of guns recovered at crime scenes in Mexico traced back to the U.S.—including over 14,000 from Texas between 2017 and 2021, accounting for 42% of firearms trafficked into Mexico. To ensure cartels do not use Texas as a safe harbor to traffic firearms, the Committee should:

- Review current state and federal efforts to prevent the trafficking of firearms in Texas, and efforts to arrest and prosecute those aiding cartels in trafficking firearms;
- Examine current Texas laws around firearm trafficking and how they apply to cartel operations, specifically with regard to straw purchasers who knowingly purchase small quantities of firearms for cartels; and
- Make recommendations on any legislation or funding to discourage gun trafficking and prosecute those who knowingly participate in gun trafficking.

### **Veteran Food Access**

U.S. Census Bureau data between 2021 and 2023 estimates that 99,000 Texas veterans received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits — tied for the second-highest population receiving food assistance in any state. Recent federal changes to SNAP now require able-bodied veterans to document at least 80 hours a month of work, volunteering, or job training to access SNAP benefits, whereas veterans had previously been exempt from this requirement. While data on how many Texans this will impact has not been collected, unprecedented demand has exceeded resources at services such as Meals for Vets, which has ceased accepting applications. To ensure veterans and their families do not go hungry in Texas, the Committee should:

- Examine challenges veterans may experience to food access, including the impact from new requirements added to SNAP in HR 1 (known as the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act, or OBBBA*), passed by Congress in 2025; and
- Determine strategies for mitigating food access shortages for veterans and their families.

### **Veteran State Phone Usage Program**

Lifeline, a federal phone services program for income-eligible individuals, is currently capped at 135% of the federal poverty line (or \$1,761 monthly for an individual). Despite this program, gaps in access persist, with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration estimating 15% of veteran households do not have an internet connection. Veterans, particularly those experiencing homelessness, living in transitional housing or rural areas, or making above the Lifeline income cap, face barriers to accessing services designated for former service members due to a lack of phone and reliable internet access. This includes applying for and receiving healthcare, food, housing, and employment assistance.

The Committee should:

- Consider barriers to veterans contacting food, healthcare, and housing assistance; and
- Explore the financial feasibility and utility of creating a *Veteran State Phone Usage Program* to provide free internet-enabled devices for veterans, robust broadband internet service, access to digital literacy training, and technical support.

## **Female Veterans**

The Women Veterans Assistance Program, a branch of the Texas Veterans Commission, serves clients by connecting them to essential services and advocating on their behalf. The committee should:

- Assess the effectiveness of current services under the Program, especially for female veterans with children; and
- Explore the costs and benefits of expanding the Women Veterans Assistance Program to include more robust and frequent assistance.

## **Local Government**

### **Residential Homestead Flexibility for Local Governments**

Under current state law, cities, counties, and other local taxing units can reduce the assessed value of a residential homestead only by a percentage of the value, capped at 20%. In our ongoing efforts to reduce the property tax burden, particularly for vulnerable Texans, the Committee should consider the benefits of giving local governments greater flexibility in fashioning the residential homestead exemption to meet the needs of local taxpayers. In looking into providing our local governments with more flexibility, the Committee should consider allowing property tax exemptions made by a taxing unit to be expressed as;

- A percentage of the appraised value of the homestead;
- A portion of the value, in dollars; or
- A combination of a percentage and a flat dollar value.

## **Affordable Housing**

We know that the important work the Legislature has done to reduce the property tax burden favors, almost exclusively, homestead owners. More work needs to be done to work on housing affordability for the 2 in 5 Texans who rent their home. Data from the National Low Income Housing Coalition indicates a shortage of 665,957 affordable rental units for extremely low-income renters (households living at or below 50% AMFI) in Texas. The Committee should:

- Examine the impact of the over \$1 billion investment in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program in HR 1 (OBBBA), passed by Congress in 2025, and make recommendations to ensure Texas is best positioned to take advantage of this investment;
- Examine the various methods the state and localities use to guide the location of housing tax credit developments. Study the barriers to developing affordable housing in high-opportunity areas;
- Monitor the implementation of HB 21 89(R) and its impact on Housing Finance Corporations to see how it is impacting the development of meaningfully affordable housing supply; and
- Make recommendations to strengthen funding opportunities in Texas through revisions to the Texas Qualified Allocation Plan and the State Housing Tax Credit Program.

## **Homelessness**

Access to the continuum of housing is crucial to maximizing the efficient use of our limited in-patient bed capacity and addressing the months-long forensic waitlist for admission to state hospitals. The Committee should:

- Study the gap between the existing aggregate amount of supportive housing supply for individuals with mental illness compared to the current and projected number of individuals with mental illness in need of some level of supportive housing in Texas;
- Receive presentations from local government partners implementing strategies to serve this vulnerable population and analyze their effectiveness, cost, and funding mechanisms. Assess the scalability of these strategies and the role for the state of Texas; and
- Identify regulatory, financial, and logistical opportunities for collaboration among federal investment, relevant state agencies, local authorities, and non-profit organizations to equitably distribute what supportive housing supply we have.

## **Special Purpose Districts**

There are thousands of special purpose districts across Texas, such as Municipal Utility Districts, Water Control and Improvement Districts, and Municipal Management Districts. While local notices are typically required to be posted prior to the establishment of these districts, there appears to be no formal avenue for local government to review and weigh in on these proposed districts. Once established, these districts will bring in new residents and development that could strain existing infrastructure and natural resources. Without the ability to thoughtfully consider such districts against future planned developments, local governments do not have a full perspective on the infrastructure needs of their communities. The Committee should

- Study the approval process for special purpose districts created by local law and general law; and
- Identify practical ways for local governments impacted by such districts to have an ability to weigh in on the approval of such districts in terms of available and future infrastructure and natural resources.

## **Emergency Services**

Texas has more natural disasters than any other state in the country. Local governments are typically on the frontline of disaster response and recovery and often shoulder the large financial cost associated, including temporary shelter, food assistance, transportation, and other social services. Unfortunately, local governments often do not have available funds to meet these acute needs. The Committee should:

- Study disaster resiliency statewide and the ability of local governments to properly mitigate and respond to natural disasters;
- Make recommendations for best practices in mitigation efforts that local governments can undertake to lessen the impact of future disasters on residents, as well as best practices for disaster response efforts;
- Consider ways to support local governments in conducting damage assessments to qualify for governmental assistance, including assessing ways to provide

consistent state assistance for local match requirements tied to federal assistance grants;

- Assess current requirements for emergency management coordinators and whether modifications should be made to those requirements;
- Evaluate state financial support for localities that utilize their resources to respond to requests for assistance in other jurisdictions, including rescues and response by aircraft;
- Assess the viability of establishing a revolving statewide fund to support impacted residents with ongoing recovery support and services, including assistance for long-term stability and housing needs;
- Assess ways to better coordinate and train volunteers for deployment to disaster sites; and
- Explore ways to enhance the network of charitable organizations and non-profits available to provide long-term support to disaster victims.

### **County Authority Over Fireworks During Adverse Weather Conditions**

Texas counties have been granted limited authority by the state to regulate fireworks. Only the Fourth of July and Christmas/New Year's holiday sale periods are allowed statewide. A commissioners court may only prohibit fireworks during those sale periods if they adopt an ordinance before June 15th or December 15th for the holiday periods. The lack of flexibility in statute puts local communities at risk as weather conditions grow more erratic and can rapidly change right before the fireworks season. The Committee should:

- Study the impact of uniform statewide regulations on the ability of local governments to regulate the sale and purchase of fireworks in their communities in a manner that protects the health and safety of residents;
- Assess historical fire and emergency response data to understand the impact of limited regulatory authority and statutory deadlines for action on fire events across communities;
- Explore whether the Keetch-Bryam Drought Index is still an adequate measure to reasonably assess the risk of firework sales in the unincorporated areas of the county, or if additional criteria should be utilized; and
- Consider whether the definition of restricted fireworks should be expanded to include more categories of fireworks.

### **Discontinuation of Penny Production**

In late 2025, the United States Treasury halted the production of pennies for general circulation. In response to the penny's phase-out, private businesses have altered policies for cash payments. This option, however, is not available to local governments. Local governments must process many different types of financial transactions, including utility bills, property tax payments, and fees and fines related to judicial cases. State law sets many fines and fees that local governments process at specific amounts that local governments lack the discretion to modify. While many localities offer ways to pay electronically, a sizable number of residents still utilize cash transactions. The Committee should:

- Study the impact on local governments following the federal government's discontinuation of the production of pennies;
- Evaluate various options local governments have to ensure residents receive accurate change, while localities continue to follow required statutory provisions;
- Consider the evaluation of all statutorily required fees that local governments must charge residents; and
- Examine whether the Texas Comptroller currently has the authority to provide administrative guidance to local governments to address these issues.

## **Natural Resources**

### **Protection of Public Beaches**

The Texas Open Beaches Act was published in 1959 to ensure the public has free and unrestricted ingress and egress to public beaches. In 2009, voters codified this right in the State Constitution. HB 5246 89(R) authorizes the Texas Space Commission to temporarily close a highway, beach, or other area to support space-related operations. To ensure continued public access to Texas's 367 miles of coast, the Committee should:

- Monitor the implementation of HB 5246; and
- Review beach access restrictions related to the Texas Space Commission at Boca Chica Beach and other public lands near space exploration companies to ensure Texans' Constitutional right to access their beaches/public lands remains protected and prioritized.

### **Public Participation in Environmental Rulemaking**

As part of SB 1397 88(R), TCEQ was directed to provide outreach and education to the public on participating in the permitting process under the air, waste, and water programs. The Committee should:

- Evaluate current TCEQ policies, including any measures or comparison of the effectiveness of outreach and participation in the TCEQ permit process;
- Examine best practices for public notification and public engagement in similarly situated agencies inside and outside the state; and
- Make recommendations for statutory improvements.

## **Transportation**

### **Statewide Intercity Transportation**

In October 2025, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) released the state's first Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan. The plan highlighted the need for high-speed, high-capacity intercity transportation solutions along congested corridors between the state's largest metropolitan areas. To ensure Texas meets the growing demand for intercity transportation options, the committee should:

- Identify actions necessary to increase mobility and connectivity, and decrease congestion between major metropolitan areas in the state;
- Evaluate emerging technologies for intercity transportation, including advanced air mobility, autonomous vehicles, and passenger rail; and

- Make recommendations to increase intercity mobility options to account for Texas’s anticipated population and economic growth, while protecting individual property rights.

### **Monitor SB 2807 89(R) & Autonomous Vehicle Safety**

SB 2807 89(R) meaningfully expanded the safety requirements for autonomous vehicles (AVs). It tasked the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) with ensuring commercial autonomous vehicles can maintain safe operational conditions, and charged the Department of Public Safety (DPS) with collecting First Responder Interaction Plans. As autonomous vehicles continue to proliferate in Texas, the Committee should:

- Monitor rulemaking from the DMV and DPS;
- Study AV interactions with first responders, including evaluating law enforcement's ability to cite AVs for moving violations, the submission of First Responder Interaction Plans to the DMV, and autonomous vehicle operators' coordination with local law enforcement in disaster planning and declared emergencies;
- Study and evaluate the operations of AVs around areas with significant safety concerns, including around school buses and school zones; and
- Make recommendations to improve public-private coordination on AVs, including forms of data-sharing to ensure local jurisdictions can prepare for and accommodate autonomous vehicle operations.

## **Water, Agricultural & Rural Affairs**

### **Flood Mitigation**

Study the barriers and make recommendations for state assistance needed to lower the burden on small and rural communities to support flood risk reduction and improve flood insurance availability and affordability. The Committee should:

- Review community flood risk reduction approaches, including but not limited to floodplain management practices, land use policies, hazard mitigation investments, voluntary buy-out of flood-prone areas, and other local actions that reduce flood losses;
- Examine how community flood risk reduction efforts affect flood insurance outcomes, including participation and performance in the National Flood Insurance Program’s Community Rating System (CRS), a program that rewards local mitigation actions with reduced flood insurance premiums;
- Assess local capacity and technical assistance needs, including staffing, expertise, data, planning tools, funding, and the barriers and opportunities affecting communities’ ability to implement flood risk reduction measures;
- Review existing State support for community flood risk reduction and technical assistance, and opportunities to strengthen or improve state resources, guidance, and coordination; and
- Study opportunities for — and barriers to — implementation of the legislative recommendations in the 2024 State Flood Plan.

## **Disaster Accounting**

There is currently a lack of uniformity in how local governments report losses and damages incurred by an extreme weather event. This damage data is essential for identifying high-risk areas within the state and, more critically, allocating relief funding, when available, to impacted regions. The Committee should assess strategies for creating State methods and procedures for tracking disaster-related losses that better facilitate identifying “hotspots” and ease statewide prioritization.

## **State Water Infrastructure Financing**

A Texas 2036 report found that the state will need to invest nearly \$154 billion over the next 50 years on water infrastructure, including \$59 billion for water supply projects and \$94 billion for drinking water and wastewater system upgrades. Existing state and federal financial assistance programs are projected to provide nearly \$42 billion in aid over the next 50 years, leaving the state with a \$110 billion funding gap. Proposition 4, approved by voters in November 2025, is a crucial step in closing this gap, but success depends on maximizing state dollars.

- Assess the capacity of existing state and federal water infrastructure financial assistance programs, including the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas (SWIFT). Assess and evaluate methods to leverage the capacity of the dedicated revenue stream established by Proposition 4 (HJR 7(89R)) to provide financial assistance in an amount commensurate with existing capital needs assessments.

## **Barriers to Water Reuse**

Reuse is recommended in the 2022 State Water Plan for dozens of Texas communities as an effective and scalable strategy to maximize our current water supply while reducing the need to identify new sources of potable water. SB 7 89(R) expanded the list of eligible uses in the Texas Water Fund to include reuse, creating increased interest in the development of reuse projects across the state. The multiple benefits of reuse systems are well documented and go beyond water supply, including reduced pollutant discharge into waterways, improved aquifer recharge, and habitat protection. A clear path for safe and effective implementation of reuse statewide would help ensure state resources — including funds in the Texas Water Fund — are leveraged to maximize effectiveness for the benefit of all Texans. The Committee should:

- Examine opportunities to expand the reuse of locally generated waters in Texas as an additional water supply, including identifying funding deficiencies for water reuse projects and regulatory impediments that make expansion of water reuse difficult in Texas;
- Review examples of successfully implemented water, wastewater, and stormwater reuse projects; and
- Make recommendations that would accelerate water reuse across the state, in both rural and urban areas.

## **Groundwater Management**

Groundwater Conservation Districts (GCDs) are responsible for the effective management of groundwater resources across nearly 70% of the state. There are inconsistencies in their technical and administrative capacity, financial resources, and

authority to respond when pumping exceeds sustainable levels (Modeled Available Groundwater, or MAG).

Since 2000, Texas has gained more residents than any other U.S. state. An estimated 1,300 people move to Texas each day. The cyclical drought conditions (one of which much of the state currently finds itself in) that Texas experiences, coupled with widespread development, suggest that it is a good time to take a comprehensive look at the ability of local governments and special purpose districts to ensure adequate water supplies to support ongoing development in their communities. The Committee should:

- Study and make recommendations regarding groundwater management in Texas, including opportunities to standardize, strengthen, and fully resource the operations of GCDs across Texas, and to support the ability of GCDs to proactively manage groundwater consistently to support future sustainability;
- Review the ability of local governments to ensure adequate groundwater availability for their communities, including looking at any development regulations currently existing that allow local governments to consider groundwater sources when approving development applications; and
- Evaluate best practices for local government development regulations that respect private property rights while ensuring future community availability.

### **Environmental Threats to Agriculture and Ranching Industries**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 2024 Texas ranks fourth among states in terms of agricultural and livestock production. Food and fiber account for nearly 10% of the state's GDP, making it a critical segment of Texas' economy and a growth opportunity. However, increasingly extreme weather — both chronic and acute — (such as drought, heat, hurricanes, and ice storms) destabilize and sometimes wipe out agriculture and livestock across the state. In particular, periods of extreme drought come at a high cost to the agriculture and ranching industries. During the 1950s drought of record, for example, the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) estimates that the agriculture sector alone suffered \$36 billion in direct losses. A study from the Baker Institute predicts the next drought of record will cost the agriculture, livestock, and timber industries \$15 billion in the first year. Additionally, pathogens, vector-borne and zoonotic diseases (including Avian Flu and Equine Herpesvirus-1) and invasive and parasitic pests (such as New World Screwworm, pasture mealybug, and rice delphacid) that thrive in these changing conditions exacerbate costs to this already vulnerable sector. Accordingly, the Committee should:

- Examine ways to both quantify the economic effects of this extreme weather and study best practices to mitigate these effects;
- Review the impact of invasive and parasitic pests, vector-borne and zoonotic diseases, and pathogens on Texas agriculture to ensure that we have the resources necessary to promptly remediate and address threats (including reviewing federal-state cooperation); and
- Review the availability of federal or state funds for investment in improved soil conservation programs and practices through the Soil and Water Conservation Board.

### **Pristine Streams**

Only 22 stream segments out of the more than 1,800 stream segments in Texas are classified as *pristine*. Pristine streams are technically defined as a stream segment with naturally occurring phosphorous levels below 10 micrograms, or 0.01 milligrams, per liter in 90% of all water quality tests over the past 10 years. These streams are spring-fed, relying on groundwater flows, and are highly sensitive to nutrient pollution, including wastewater discharge. The State should consider protections for these streams to protect fragile ecosystems and prevent aquifer contamination. The Committee should:

- Study and evaluate options for strengthening protections for pristine streams — particularly in the Hill Country — through improved water quality standards for phosphorus and other contaminants; and
- Assess wastewater discharge permits in rural parts of Central Texas, including within the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, to determine whether the current standards and permitting practices are protective of water quality and public health.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share with you some of the pressing issues that I believe we face as a state. I appreciate your consideration of these suggested interim charges. I look forward to working with you and your staff on these pressing issues affecting our state. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at my office at 512-463-0114.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SEK', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Senator Sarah Eckhardt

CC: Senate Committee Chairs