

Senator Judith Zaffirini



Reports to the Families of District 21

Dear Friends:

Our Senate District 21 is a microcosm of Texas, characterized by hardworking families, active communities and the resilient spirit that typifies our great state. We are diverse communities, each with unique characteristics and contributions, yet sharing a vision of a thriving, prosperous Texas.

Home to more than 907,000 persons, our wonderful district comprises 16 counties, namely, Caldwell, Dimmit, Duval, Jim Hogg, Karnes, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, Starr, Webb, Wilson and Zapata; and parts of Bexar, Guadalupe, Hays and Travis.

Our collective goals guide us as we agree on the importance of safeguarding the health and safety of our families, ensuring top-quality education for our young minds and fostering an environment in which businesses and opportunities can flourish.

Thanks to Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick's appointments, I am positioned to make a positive impact in these arenas. I am grateful to serve not only as Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development, but also as a member of the Senate Committees on Finance, Business and Commerce, State Affairs and Redistricting; and of the Texas Judicial Council and Texas Access to Justice Commission.

As your voice in the Texas Senate, your aspirations and concerns are my guide. Every vote I cast, every bill I support and every initiative I undertake is with you and your family in mind. You inspire me to bridge divides,

to seek common ground and to ensure our legislation reflects our shared ideals and dreams.

My staff and I also are dedicated to providing the best constituent services possible. We stand ready to assist you with any state government-related matters. Whether it regards navigating bureaucracy, resolving an issue with a state agency or simply getting answers to your questions about legislation, we're here to help. We may not always succeed, but we always try.

This *Report to the Families of SD 21* is not merely an update, but, rather, an open invitation. I encourage you

to participate in our democratic process and to reach out to us with your thoughts, concerns and ideas.

As your senator, it is my duty and privilege to serve you. Toward that end my staff and I embrace the mantra I learned from the Ursuline nuns, "Serviam!" (I shall serve.)

While we collaborate to shape the future of our district and state, my prayer is for the Lord to bless each of us with continued strength, unity and compassion. I hope that together we can cultivate a future marked by prosperity, happiness and a continued commitment to our shared values.

May God bless Texas!

Judith Zaffirini

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State Senator, District 21

www.zaffirini.senate.texas.gov



JOINING SENATOR JUDITH ZAFFIRINI FOR SWEARING-IN CEREMONIES at the Texas Senate on Jan. 9, 2023, are her husband and son, Carlos Sr. and Jr.; daughter-in-law, Audrey; and grandsons, Asher (6) and George (4).

Senator Zaffirini Focuses on Enhancing Healthcare



McMULLEN COUNTY OFFICIALS MEET REGULARLY with Senator Judith Zaffirini during the interim. Joining her at a working luncheon are (L-R) Sheriff Emmett Shelton, Judge Deborah Garza, Commissioners Murray Swaim and Scotty McLaugherty, Emergency Management Coordinator Michael Padilla, County Judge James Teal, Commissioner Max Quintanilla, County Attorney Kimberly Dusek, Tax Assessor Bessie Guerrero, County Treasurer Jill Atkinson, Project Manager Dale Patterson and Chief Appraiser Blaine Patterson.

Senator Judith Zaffirini consistently has championed health and human services, especially for the very young, the very old, the very poor, persons with disabilities and veterans. During the last legislative session she passed 14 bills that meet some of their needs.

Senate Bill (SB) 2476 by Senator Zaffirini and Rep. Tom Oliverson (R-Cypress), for example, protects patients from balance billing for

out-of-network services by ground emergency medical services. She wrote it in response to constituent Keith Muschalek's distressing experience of being charged \$4,500 for his son's 30-mile ride to San Antonio. The Wilson County resident's suggestion is a national model that others will emulate.

Advocating for senior citizens, Senator Zaffirini sponsored bills such as House Bill (HB) 54 by Rep. Senfronia Thompson (D-Houston), raising the personal needs allowance of Medicaid-reliant nursing home residents for the first time since 2005 from

\$60 to \$75; and HB 728 by Rep. Toni Rose (D-Dallas), establishing a statewide interagency aging services coordinating council. These initiatives improve financial security and interagency collaboration for the elderly.

Texas ranks among the worst states for preventable child drownings, with an average of 83 children drowning annually since 2010. In 2019 six-year-old Cati DelaPeña, who was not provided a life jacket at a summer camp despite her parents explaining she could not swim, drowned. HB 59, Cati's Act, by Rep. Vicki Goodwin (D-Austin) and Senator Zaffirini now mandates life jackets for non-swimming children.

Other crucial bills passed by Senator Zaffirini include SB 52 with Rep. Reggie Smith (R-Sherman), directing state hospitals to establish essential caregiver visitation policies; and HB 109 by Rep. Julie Johnson (D-Dallas), preventing health benefit plans from denying claims for hearing aids based on price if the enrollee pays the excess.



CONSTITUENTS ARE THE CORE of Senator Judith Zaffirini's commitment to health and human services, as evidenced by her visits to long-term care residents such as (1) Cathy Ross at Las Palmas Skilled Nursing & Rehabilitation in La Salle County; and by championing constituent-inspired legislation such as SB 2476, spurred by (2) Robin and Keith Muschalek of Wilson County.



EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS IN SENATE DISTRICT 21 INTERACT REGULARLY WITH SENATOR JUDITH ZAFFIRINI, strengthening connections between her and the education community. (1) Texas State University President Kelly Damphousse receives a Senate gavel and sound block after commencement exercises, and (2) Del Valle ISD students brief her about their Coding at the Capitol experiences.

Excellence in Higher, Public Education Is Worthy Goal

Senator Judith Zaffirini continues to prioritize the enhancement of Texas' education system through her legislative activities. Each bill she supports aims to improve various aspects of the educational experience, embodying three central values: excellence, affordability and accessibility.

To foster high-quality educational experiences, she and Rep. Mary González (D-Clint) passed Senate Bill (SB) 37, extending hazing reporting immunity to entities supporting student organizations and to those who notify law enforcement and cooperate with their investigations. These changes incentivize reporting of hazing misconduct, thereby creating safer learning environments.

Further championing academic improvement, Senator Zaffirini sponsored House Bill (HB) 584 by Rep. Giovanni Capriglione (R-South Lake), establishing an IT credential program to equip students for the digital job market.

The senator also is concerned about the financial challenges of acquiring quality education. To

this end she passed HB 1211 with Rep. Ryan Guillen (R-Rio Grande City). This initiative expands loan repayment assistance to licensed school psychologists, easing their monetary burden.

Recognizing the diversity of Texas students, Senator Zaffirini promotes initiatives that make education more inclusive and adaptable. Her SB 55, passed with Rep. González, for example, requires a study of graduation rates and financial aid available for students diagnosed with autism; while her SB 68, passed with Rep. Andrew Murr (R-Junction), allows high school students to gain real-world career experiences.

What's more, by sponsoring HB 1225 by Rep. Will Metcalf

(R-Conroe) to allow school districts to administer assessment instruments in paper format to any student if requested, she reaffirms her dedication to providing a flexible educational testing process.



SUNFIELD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS in Hays County answer questions while learning about the Texas Flag with Senator Judith Zaffirini, a former educator, and Principal David MacRoberts.



INCREDIBLY TALENTED MUSICIANS inspire Capitol visitors to embrace and appreciate vibrant culture. Mariachi Cascabel from Rio Grande City High School and Mariachi Grulla de Plata from Grulla High School in Starr County showcase their talent and passion for mariachi at the Texas Capitol rotunda, representing the rich heritage of their communities.

Senator Zaffirini Helps Secure Funding to Address Critical Policy Priorities

As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Judith Zaffirini helped secure \$18 billion for property tax relief by co-sponsoring legislation increasing the homestead exemption from \$40,000 to \$100,000; establishing a three-year, 20 percent appraisal cap for non-homestead and commercial properties worth \$5 million or less and exempting more small businesses from the franchise tax. The senator also helped obtain \$8.83 billion for initiatives relating to education, healthcare and more.

Improving Education, Healthcare

Collectively, the senator's education and healthcare funding priorities focused on investing in our teachers, our students and our future.

More specifically, for example, she helped secure impactful funding for infrastructure improvements, benefits for retired teachers, cutting-edge research, faculty recruitment, financial aid and student success programs, including the following:

- \$5 billion, cost-of-living-adjustment and supplemental check for retired teachers
- \$650 million, community college funding formula increase
- \$141 million, B-on-Time Student Loan account transferred to student success and financial aid to improve outcomes for at-risk students
- \$71.8 million increase, early childhood intervention
- \$18.5 million, molten salt nuclear reactor project research at The University of Texas (UT) at Austin
- \$6.6 million, free breakfast for reduced-price eligible students
- \$4 million, UT Education and Research Center at Laredo healthcare programs
- \$4 million, Texas A&M International for Clinical Lab Sciences and Occupational Therapy programs
- \$2 million, UT San Antonio Life Science Center

Senator Zaffirini supported House Bill 1595 by Rep. Greg Bonnen (R-Friendswood) and Senator Joan Huffman (R-Houston), resulting in approximately \$36 million in additional funding for Texas State University.

Her budget riders resulted in funding for healthcare, including \$10 million, Guadalupe Regional Medical Center, to enhance healthcare facilities and services; \$5 million, Forensic Psychiatry Fellowship program, to increase the number of qualified forensic psychiatrists in the workforce; and \$2.5 million, air quality planning grants to reduce fine particulate matter that can cause health issues.

What's more, she advocated for \$2 billion, community attendants' pay raises; and \$18.3 million, Local Mental Health Authorities' salary increases.

Prioritizing District 21 Concerns

Understanding the challenges faced by landowners affected by criminal activities at the border, she and Senator César Blanco (D-El Paso) and other border senators co-authored a budget rider that allocated \$25 million for landowner compensation.

"We often hear from constituents whose livelihoods are threatened when their fences are damaged and livestock escape," she said. "Landowners face great financial

burden from these repeat criminal incidents, and I am thankful legislators agreed that leaving them without recourse is not the Texas way." She also helped obtain \$5 million for the Wilson County Emergency Operations Center.

Senator Zaffirini took a decisive step to tackle a critical health concern in Laredo by securing \$415,000 in the budget for three ethylene oxide air monitors. This action was prompted by a 2022 Texas Department of State Health Services report that revealed higher cancer rates in areas surrounding the Laredo Midwest Sterilization Corporation facility, known for emitting ethylene oxide—a carcinogen—during its sterilization processes.

Enhancing Criminal Justice

Senate Bill (SB) 49 by Zaffirini and Rep. Mary González (D-Clint) was funded with \$3.1 million to expand access to relocation benefits for crime victims, helping them and their families rebuild their lives.

Addressing the pressing issue of sexual assault, Senator Zaffirini authored SBs 1401, sponsored by Rep. Ann Johnson (D-Houston), and 1402, sponsored by Rep. Donna Howard (D-Austin), which authorize \$2.7 million in victims' compensation funds for medical care provided during forensic examinations after sexual assaults

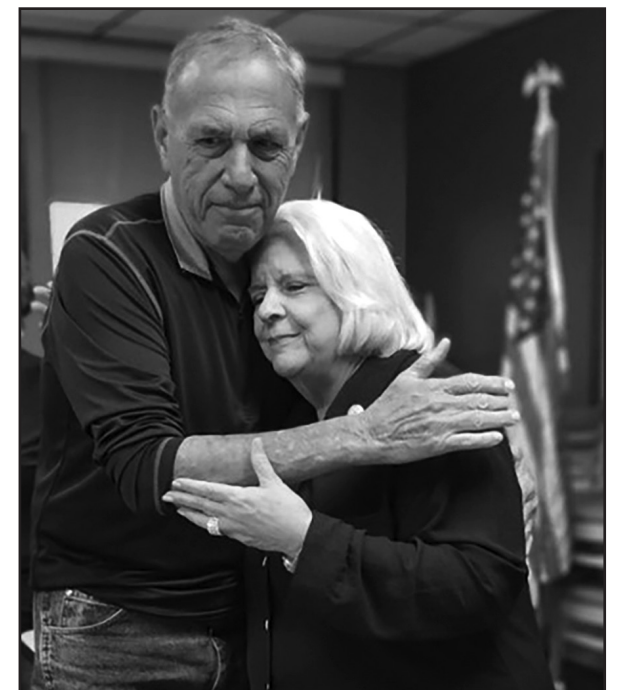
and require law enforcement training about sexual abuse.

The Governor's Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force, which recommended these bills, was made permanent by SB 1402.

The senator also advocated for a \$3.7 million increase to basic legal services and legal aid funding and authored riders that secured \$2.2 million for a defendant text reminder program and almost \$700,000 for a guardianship specialty court pilot.



EZRA AND OLIVER GARZA join Senator Judith Zaffirini at a reception honoring Live Oak County local leaders.



DUVAL COUNTY JUDGE ARNOLDO "GUERO" CANTU shares a heartfelt moment with Senator Judith Zaffirini, reflecting years of collaboration and friendship.



EMBRACING THE RICH DIVERSITY THAT DEFINES Senate District 21, Senator Judith Zaffirini engages with constituents of different ages and backgrounds, including (1) Dimmit County residents such as (L-R) Lupe Sanchez, Martha Castilleja and Rosie Lucio; (2) Jim Hogg County Judge Juan Carlos Guerra (center) and community members who reflect on the legacy of the late Sheriff Gilberto Ybañez and the historical presence of the Franciscan Fathers of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Hebronville; and (3) pre-law students from Lockhart High School at the Texas Capitol, accompanied by parent Salomon Key.



CELEBRATING BUSINESSWOMEN'S LEADERSHIP, (1) Cora Hargrave and her granddaughter, Krystabell Hinojosa, join Senator Judith Zaffirini at Zapata County's recognition of women entrepreneurs; and (2) Bexar County Clerk Lucy Adame-Clark (center) and her daughter, Samantha Clark (left), join her to recognize (L-R) Griselda S. and Dulce Romero's essential contributions to the community as dedicated servers.

Bipartisan Efforts Help Businesses, State Agencies

As a member of the Senate Committee on Business and Commerce, Senator Judith Zaffirini played a key role in passing several critical, controversial bills with bipartisan support.

Alongside Senators José Menéndez (D-San Antonio) and Nathan Johnson (D-Dallas), for example, she worked on the electric grid reliability bill, Senate Bill (SB) 7 by Chairs Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown) and Todd Hunter (R-Corpus Christi). The Senate unanimously adopted her amendment that would have included industrial-scale batteries, or energy storage, in a back-up power reserve scheme.

Although SB 7 was not passed, a similar provision was included in House Bill (HB) 1500 by Rep. Justin Holland (R-Rockwall) and Senator Schwertner. This provision requires wind and solar companies to contribute to energy that can be delivered on demand and included energy storage facilities. The result

is that when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine, the lights will still turn on.

Senator Zaffirini also authored important timely bills to ensure fair and affordable online access to goods for Texans. Her SB 58 and SB 1639, sponsored by Rep. Kronda Thimesch (R-Denton), respectively, ban bots that bypass online purchase processes and restrict using bots to bulk-buy event tickets.

Consistent with that committee's oversight of state agencies, the senator spearheaded significant reforms. HB 3033 by Rep. Brooke



KINGSBURY MAYOR SHIRLEY NOLEN JOINS SENATOR JUDITH ZAFFIRINI at a meeting in Guadalupe County to address crucial county issues and foster collaboration.

Landgraf (R-Odessa), which she sponsored, enhanced the Texas Public Information Act, requiring prompt, transparent action by governmental bodies following an attorney general decision about a public information request.

What's more, her SB 1785 and Rep. Ryan Guillen's (R-Rio Grande City) HB 4128 updated background check information access and usage, ensuring robust vetting, particularly for those working with vulnerable populations. Their passing the House bill was crucial to retaining access to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's background check database.

The senator also sponsored and passed an omnibus bill, HB 2719 by Rep. Trent Ashby (R-Lufkin), for the Texas Historical Commission (THC), which is responsible for preserving Texas' historic archeology, architecture and heritage landmarks. The new law improves and clarifies THC's operations by allowing it to purchase property and to support its work by selling merchandise online.

SD 21 Constituents at Heart of Key Policy-Making

Senator Judith Zaffirini's legislative agenda exemplifies her unwavering dedication to constituent-focused governance. She and Rep. Lulu Flores (D-Austin) collaborated to pass Senate Bill (SB) 2325, ensuring the Formula One automobile race, a major economic driver for Central Texas, qualifies for the Major Event Reimbursement program; and House Bill (HB) 4645, providing a tax exemption for affordable housing improvements by Community First Villages in Travis County.

Her SB 580, sponsored by Rep. Tracy King (D-Batesville), authorizes commissioners courts in border counties to prevent housing developments lacking infrastructure within municipal extraterritorial jurisdictions. She and Reps. Stan Gerdes (R-Smithville), John Kuempel (R-Seguin), Ryan Guillen (R-Rio Grande City), and Richard Peña Raymond (D-

Laredo) also passed legislation regarding utilities or water control districts in Caldwell, Guadalupe, McMullen and Webb counties, respectively.

The senator's constituent-oriented approach is exemplified in her SB 365, sponsored by Rep. Brooks Landgraf (R-Odessa). Suggested by constituent Tim Ottinger, who learned belatedly



KARNES COUNTY JUDGE WADE HEDTKE honors the legacy of his predecessor, the late Walter Long, by accepting the Texas flag that Senator Judith Zaffirini had flown in his memory over the State Capitol.

about a large substation being constructed across the street from his home, this new law empowers landowners to stay informed about nearby electrical substation developments.

Recognizing the importance of religious and cultural preferences, Senator Zaffirini sponsored HB 2732 by Rep. King, allowing religious organizations to establish or use a cemetery in Laredo to ensure impacted persons can choose this city as their final resting place.

"Listening to the concerns and needs of my constituents is at the heart of my legislative agenda," Senator Zaffirini said. She and her staff are eager to assist Senate District 21 residents who have issues with state agencies; to recognize community members with Senate resolutions, proclamations or Texas flags; and to attend local events or meet with constituents.



HISPANIC WOMEN STATE REPRESENTATIVES celebrate the 70,000th consecutive vote cast by Senator Judith Zaffirini, the first Mexican American woman elected to the Texas Senate. Among the 17 are (L-R) Reps. Penny Morales-Shaw (D-Houston), Terry Meza (D-Irving), Janie Lopez (R-San Benito), Ana Hernandez (D-Houston), Mary Ann Perez (D-Houston), Lulu Flores (D-Austin), Josey Garcia (D-San Antonio), Lina Ortega (D-El Paso), Liz Campos (D-San Antonio), Gina Hinojosa (D-Austin) and Victoria Neave-Criado (D-Dallas).

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Senator Zaffirini Breaks Own Legislative Records

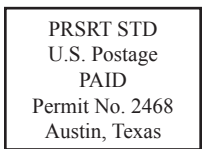
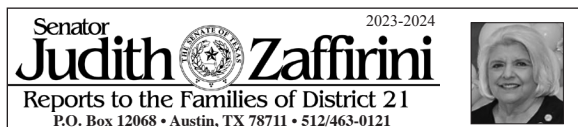
Often recognized by Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and others as the “Dean-in-Waiting,” Senator Judith Zaffirini is the second highest-ranking senator and the highest-ranking woman and Hispanic senator. In 2023 she was the highest bill-passer for the fifth consecutive session, passing 122 bills and bringing her career total to 1,388 bills passed. She has passed more bills than any other legislator in the history of the State of Texas.

Her work ethic is reflected not only in her 100 percent career-long voting record, having cast 72,028 consecutive votes, but also in receiving more than 1,200 honors for her legislative, public service and professional work.

Of these, more than 600 are in communication, including 70 in 2023—53 statewide and 17 national in the Press Women of Texas’ 2023 Professional Communication

Contest and the National Federation of Press Women’s (NFPW) 2023 Professional Communication Contest, respectively. Overall, she received 29 first place honors and the National Sweepstakes Award for being the top award winner in 2023. The senator earned the same distinction in 2021.

What’s more, in 2022 the Texas Access to Justice Foundation again named her a Legislative Hero for



her leadership in promoting access to justice. A communication specialist, educator and business-woman, she holds B.S., M.A. and PhD degrees from The University of Texas at Austin.

In 2023 the Texas Association of Rural Schools and the Texas Association of Mid-Sized Schools bestowed her with the Golden Apple Award for her efforts to reform and protect special education funding, and the Laredo Rotary Club named her the “Rotarian of the Century.”



EMPOWERING FAMILIES AND CHILDREN: Inspired by her beloved grandsons, Asher (6) and George (4), Senator Judith Zaffirini works hard to improve the lives of all children.

At the groundbreaking ceremony for the Senator Judith Zaffirini Soccer Mini-Pitch funded by the U.S. Soccer Foundation and her son at the park also recently named in her honor, the City of Laredo presented her the Key to the City.

She is inspired by the families of SD 21 and her family—her husband of 58 years, Carlos Sr.; their son, Carlos Jr., and his wife, Audrey; and her two darling grandsons, Asher Maxwell (6) and George William (4).