

# Senator Judith Zaffirini

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## Reports to the Families of District 21

### Dear Friends:

Representing you in the Texas Senate is a privilege, challenge and responsibility I embrace with heartfelt gratitude and dedication. Every day I am inspired by the families that make Senate District 21 so unique and strong. My work on your behalf continues with even greater passion and purpose that guided me when first elected.

This newsletter reflects our accomplishments during the 89<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature's Regular Legislative Session, when I passed 135 bills and helped secure millions in state funding for priorities important to South Texas families and communities. These pages tell the story of how your ideas, concerns and values guided my work throughout the session and how they continue to inspire my service.

What's more, they provide a window into the solutions we advanced together and the progress still to come. I am delighted to share these results with you and invite your continued feedback.

During the legislative interim between regular and special legislative sessions, I hope to travel across Senate District 21 to participate in community events, meet with constituents and explore changes that will benefit our schools, health care system, infrastructure and economy.

I welcome your ideas for new legislation and your opinions regarding issues that matter to you, your



**DEAN SENATOR JUDITH ZAFFIRINI**, the first Hispanic woman elected to the Texas Senate and the first woman to serve as Dean, tirelessly and relentlessly represents the hard-working families and communities of Senate District 21.

milestones by providing resolutions, proclamations and flags flown over the Texas Capitol.

Thank you for your trust. I am delighted to be your voice in the Texas Senate and will continue to represent you enthusiastically with diligence and integrity. My prayer is that the Lord will bless each of us with compassion and understanding so we may work together to build a better Texas. I hope to see you soon.

May God bless Texas!

*Judith Zaffirini*

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# Dean Zaffirini Fosters Civility, Decorum

“Dean of the Texas Senate” is a title traditionally bestowed on the longest-serving of the 31 Texas senators. In 2023 Senator Judith Zaffirini succeeded 24 men who held the title since 1909 and is the 7<sup>th</sup> of only 25 women who have served with 954 male senators.

The Dean’s duties include presiding over the Caucus of the Whole—that is, when members meet outside of session or beyond the Senate chamber—and helping maintain decorum.

In an era defined by turnover and shifting political tides, her decades of experience provide continuity and perspective, offering stability as the Senate continues to evolve.

She offers new senators guidance in navigating the expectations, traditions and rhythms of the chamber, while collaborating with veteran members to exemplify respect for the institution.

Her reputation for fairness and her mastery of Senate rules make her a trusted mentor.

“As Dean, I do my best to support my colleagues while helping ensure the Senate works effectively for all Texans,” she said.

Known for her consensus-building and no-nonsense business approach, Dean Senator Zaffirini fosters civility, decorum, collaboration and respectful debate. She works with key members and personnel so the Senate can operate smoothly and efficiently, assisting members so they can consider the greatest possible number of bills during each legislative session.

Although partisan conflicts often dominate headlines, she strives to encourage thoughtful debate and build bridges across political divides. Her emphasis on respect and fairness helps maintain a collegial environment in which members can

work together productively, even when considering difficult issues.

Reflecting her seniority and expertise in the Senate’s parliamentary procedure, she published her 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the chamber’s presiding guide in January, 2025. This handbook provides scripts for presiding over the Senate and its committees and outlines key protocols for passing legislation.

What’s more, to help witnesses do their best during committee testimony, she published a guide, *How to Testify Effectively at a Texas Senate Hearing*, which is available at her Capitol office or can be mailed upon request.

Above all, her tenure as Dean underscores her devotion to public service, her constituents and to the Senate as an institution. Her priorities include strengthening the Senate’s reputation as the “most deliberative body in the world.”



1. DUVAL COUNTY’S FAVORITE SON, U.S. District Judge Orlando Garcia (Former Chief Judge of the Western District), reflects hometown values in interacting with Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini and leaders in the judicial, executive and legislative branches. 2. Diana Ibarra from Starr County and Melissa Ramos from Wilson County present the Dean with a pin from the Texas Retired Teachers Association in recognition of her support for educators across Texas. 3. The Dean introduces Dr. Diego Moreno of San Marcos as Doctor of the Day in the Senate on Feb. 12.



1. LA SALLE COUNTY LEADERS AND THE 2025 ROYAL COURT display their patriotic colors during their Capitol visit with Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini. Shown are (Back, L-R) Commissioners Raul Ayala, Erasmo Ramirez and Joaquin Alba; (Middle, L-R) Aubriana Brielle Tellez, Victoria Rodriguez, County Judge Leodoro Martinez III, Hayden Ayala and Aliyah Arenas; and (Front, L-R) Ashton Flores and Penelope Grace Reyna. 2. Dimmit County constituents Robert Diaz and Sixto Ortega discuss local priorities with Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini at her Capitol office.

## SD 21 Constituents Visit Texas Capitol

Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini’s Capitol office, 1E.13, is more than a workspace. It’s a welcoming destination for families, students, community leaders, advocates and other constituents from Senate District 21 to engage with their state senator in the legislative process. For many, visiting the Dean’s office is an opportunity to meet with their senator and experience Texas history.

Designed as “A Tribute to Texas,” her office reflects the Texas spirit of freedom, independence, multiculturalism, access to justice for all, and extended friendship and family values.

Artifacts from across Texas and around the world inspire visitors, especially schoolchildren, who marvel at the historic displays while learning about the state’s history.

Community delegations often begin their schedules in 1E.13, where staff members host meetings, provide tours and escort guests to

the Senate gallery for introductions and to see senators in action.

“Welcoming constituents to the Texas Capitol always is a joy,” Dean Senator Zaffirini said. “This office belongs to the families of Senate District 21, so I encourage them to drop by, share their priorities and provide feedback.”

The historic suite officially was assigned to Dean Senator Zaffirini in May, 2024. The largest of any senator’s office, 1E.13 spans 1,503 square feet across two floors (1,000 downstairs and 503 upstairs) and features commissioned art, historic flags and seals, mementos and Capitol antiques.

The first floor houses the Dean Senator’s office, her Chief of Staff’s office, and her front office staff. The second floor is a reconfigured vault that has been converted to accommodate staff and interns.

It housed the Texas Comptroller’s Department in 1888 when the

Texas Capitol was completed and originally included a cloakroom with wash basins and a kitchenette. Following a major Capitol renovation, 1992–94, the space was reconfigured into two Senate offices, and in 2003, 1E.13 became the Dean Senator’s office.

Its unique décor and thoughtful layout create a warm and inviting atmosphere that facilitates open dialogue and civic engagement. Especially during legislative sessions, it is the perfect meeting place for students and others interested in their government.

No matter the issue or occasion, Senate District 21 constituents can count on a warm greeting from Dean Senator Zaffirini or her staff. They embrace every opportunity to reflect their continued commitment to transparency, accessibility and exceptional constituent service. Please consider visiting her office to share your ideas or concerns.

# Dean Senator Zaffirini Promotes Bipartisanship in Texas Legislature

The 2025 Legislature delivered significant achievements from investing in education and healthcare to protecting consumers and promoting economic opportunity. Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini worked across the aisle to address priorities for Senate District 21.

Her bipartisan approach and work ethic enabled her to pass more bills than any other legislator in state history and to secure billions of dollars in statewide investments.

## Committee Appointments

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick re-appointed her to the Senate Committees on Finance, Business and Commerce, State Affairs and Natural Resources, of which she is Vice-Chair, positioning her to influence policy decisions across a wide spectrum of critical issues.

Finance Chair Joan Huffman (R-Houston) also appointed her anew to the Finance Committee's Task Force on Higher Education. Reflecting her longtime interest in access to justice for all, Dean Senator Zaffirini also continued her leadership via the Texas Judicial Council and the Texas Access to Justice Commission, to which Lt. Gov. Patrick appointed her in 2017.



LIVE OAK COUNTY LEADERS AND FAMILIES discuss issues impacting rural communities with Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini at the State Capitol. Shown are (L-R) Sheriff Larry Busby, County Commissioner Lucio Morin, County Judge James Liska, and Hank and Shelley Liska.



1. VISITING WITH CONSTITUENTS IS A HIGHLIGHT OF THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION. Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini meets with Carlos Vela from Jim Hogg County. 2. Retired Teachers Day always attracts outstanding educators. Joining the Senator at the Texas Capitol are (L-R) Luisa Collett, Joaquín Solis, Sylvia Solis, Diana Ramírez, José Medina, Sylvia Medina, Esther Gallegos, Amparo Montés-Gutiérrez, Rosie Bigler and Jorge Montés III of the Zapata County Retired School Employees Association. 3. Children brighten any day at the Capitol. The Dean welcomes (L-R) Serenity Smith, Baby Truett Martinez and their mother, Mattie Martinez, during McMullen County Day, celebrating the traditions, values and rural resilience of this community within Senate District 21.

“Serving on the Senate’s most powerful committees affords me countless opportunities to shape legislation that truly reflects our state’s priorities,” Dean Senator Zaffirini said.

## Funding Priorities

Her efforts in the Senate Finance Committee helped secure \$8.5 billion for Texas public schools, an investment that will support teacher and staff pay raises, improve student achievement and expand special education services, as well as \$3 billion to establish the Dementia Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (DPRIT).

To continue to expand access to mental health care, Dean Senator Zaffirini secured \$54 million for Texas’ Youth Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams. The funding will help respond to young Texans experiencing mental crises.

Dean Senator Zaffirini also championed \$965 million to raise wages for Community Attendants, persons who provide vital care to Texans with disabilities and seniors, to retain qualified staff and ensure consistent high-quality care.

To improve safety and reduce delays at railroad crossings, she advanced appropriations totaling \$250 million for railroad separation projects.

What’s more, she helped secure \$17.7 million for a new Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Driver’s License Office to serve eastern Hays and western Caldwell counties. The new facility will help reduce wait times and meet increasing demand for essential DPS services, including driver’s license renewals, identification services and driver testing, in one of the fastest-growing regions in the state.

“Crafting the state budget requires decisions that benefit Texas families today and for generations to come,” she said.

## Higher Education Investments

She also supported historic investments in higher education in general and in Senate District 21’s colleges and universities in particular.

These included \$25 million for Texas State University’s Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center to enhance active shooter response training; \$23.9 million

in combined formula and nonformula funding for Laredo College to support institutional needs; \$3 million for new civil engineering and computer science degree programs at Texas A&M International University; and \$1.4 million for dementia research at the UT Education and Research Center at Laredo.

These funding victories reflect her priorities of serving vulnerable Texans, rural communities and underserved populations.

## Signature Accomplishments

Signature accomplishments include her Senate Bill (SB) 916, eliminating surprise billing for emergency ambulance rides through 2027; SB 1036, regulating the residential solar industry and protecting consumers; and SB 1164, improving emergency detention procedures for persons with severe mental health challenges.

What’s more, her SB 1535 creates a nuclear workforce development program, and her SB 1559 prevents conflicting rulings in child protective cases.

She also authored and passed SBs 1662 and 1663, strengthening notification require-

ments and emergency responses to contamination in public and private water wells; SB 1619, authorizing schools to stock nasal spray epinephrine for anaphylaxis emergencies; and SB 800, requiring colleges to include clear Title IX information in student orientations.

## Priority House Bills

She also passed House Bill (HB) 322, expanding eligibility for Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) grants to non-profit job training programs; HB 272, allowing prosecution of digital card fraud in counties where victims reside; and HB 4238, protecting victims of identity theft and coerced debt.

Building upon her success in combating dementia through DPRIT and research funding for the UT Education and Research Center at Laredo, Dean Senator Zaffirini’s HB 3376 will require Alzheimer’s disease training for legal guardians.

Cumulatively, her legislation reflects her commitment to bipartisan solutions grounded in cooperation, mutual respect and the common good of all Texans, strengthening families and communities statewide.



ENHANCING ACCESS TO EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE is the focus of Karnes County EMS Paramedic Hayden Tucker and EMS Chief Casey Ebrom at their meeting with Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini before testifying in committee.

# Community Voices Guide Dean Zaffirini

Constituent service is a cornerstone of Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini's legislative work. Her experienced team helps constituents navigate bureaucratic roadblocks and access government services swiftly and compassionately.

When Clarissa Quiroz of Laredo urgently needed Medicaid authorization for a life-saving organ transplant, her doctors turned to the Dean for help. She and her staff immediately coordinated with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to cut through red tape and

get the required approval, ultimately allowing Clarissa to undergo her procedure without delay.

She also transforms her constituents' feedback into action. A powerful example is her water legislation: Senate Bills (SBs) 1662 and 1663, laws passed during the Texas Legislature's 89<sup>th</sup> Regular Legislative Session after Wilson County residents raised concerns regarding contamination in their drinking water.

Families in the Arrowhead subdivision reported illness and murky tap water, but the Texas Commission

on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) often alerted public water supply systems before testing. This allowed operators to treat their water before inspectors arrived, potentially skewing results.

Her SB 1662 requires TCEQ to notify public water systems no more than 24 hours before conducting water testing in response to a consumer complaint, ensuring test results reflect actual water conditions.

What's more, her SB 1663 explicitly authorizes the agency to notify residents within one mile, private well owners and groundwater conservation districts of any new known contamination using any communication method available.

Wilson County constituent Carrie Wilcoxson traveled to the Capitol to testify in support, emphasizing how essential timely, transparent communication is for the health and safety of rural families.

"Helping constituents is the most rewarding part of public service," Dean Senator Zaffirini said. "If you need help, my door is always open."



1. CALDWELL COUNTY COMMISSIONER DYRAL "COACH T" THOMAS visits Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini in her Capitol Office. 2. Debbie Gonzalez of Elmendorf briefs the Dean about education issues affecting Bexar County. Constituents and advocates always are welcome. 3. Expanding rural health care is cause for celebration at the groundbreaking of the Guadalupe Regional Medical Center's new office building in Seguin. Shown are (L-R) Daniel Long, Dr. James C. Lee, Seguin Mayor Donna Dodgen, Tony Schaker, Elaine Bennett, former Rep. John Kuempel (R-Seguin), Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini, Texas Facilities Commission Executive Director Mike Novak, Paul Mueller and CEO Robert G. Haynes.



1. FAMILY MEMBERS MAKE SENATE SESSIONS SPECIAL AND MORE MEMORABLE. Opening day guests include (Back, L-R) Commissioners John and Anna Galo, Leslie and Tom Benavides, Carlos Jr. and Audrey Zaffirini, and the Dean's grandsons (L-R) George and Asher. 2. The Dean welcomes her husband, Carlos Sr., to her Capitol office. While students at UT-Austin, they worked for Senator Wayne Connally of Floresville.

## Focusing on What Matters Most: Our Families

As a wife, mother and grandmother, Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini understands firsthand the challenges Texas families face, from navigating school and healthcare systems to balancing work and caregiving responsibilities. These shared experiences shape her approach to public service and strengthen her resolve to build a better Texas for all.

Led by her Catholic faith and the belief that success at the expense of family is failure, the Dean lives her values daily through service to others—an ethic rooted in her upbringing and in her education by the Ursuline Nuns at St. Peter's Catholic School and Ursuline Academy in Laredo.

That is where she learned that faith and family should be not only personal priorities, but also the foundation of a meaningful life. Guided by that perspective, she has championed legislation that strengthens and protects Texas families.

This includes legislation such as Senate Bill 1559, which ensures protective orders in divorce cases are automatically transferred to safeguard families; House Bill (HB) 2294, which supports working parents by increasing reimbursement rates for child-care providers in the Texas Rising Star program; and HB 2530, which expands court-appointed protections in lawsuits affecting parent-child relationships.

Dean Senator Zaffirini often credits her own family with keeping her grounded and motivated. Her beloved husband, Carlos Sr.; their son, Carlos Jr.; her daughter-by-marriage, Audrey; and their two grandsons, Asher (8) and George (6), provide treasured inspiration and joy. Their love fuels her commitment to building a more responsive government.

"What happens in the Texas Legislature should reflect the best that happens in our homes and communities," Dean Senator Zaffirini said. "When I cast my votes or pass a bill, I think not only of the families I represent, but also of my own. That's what keeps me focused, determined and optimistic."

*We're here to help you and your family. Please contact us if we can be of assistance.*

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# Dean Zaffirini Achieves Results for All Texans

Reflecting her mantra of “Serving,” meaning “I shall serve,” Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini’s highest priorities are education in general, with a focus on early and higher education; health and human services, especially for the very young, the very old, the very poor and persons with disabilities; and veterans.

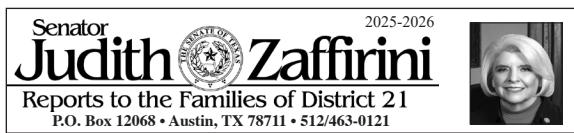
In a Republican-dominated Legislature, she has been the highest bill-passing for six straight sessions.

Her bills address issues including enhancing consumer protections, bolstering economic development and improving the Texas judiciary. She also helped secure millions in critical funding, especially for education and healthcare. She has passed 1,524 bills, more than any other legislator in Texas history.

The Texas Senate and the House of Representatives honored her for casting her 75,000<sup>th</sup> consecutive vote

and for becoming the first woman Dean of the Texas Senate.

Her substantial impact on the judiciary caused the Webb County Judge and Commissioners to rename the Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini Justice Center, the first state courthouse in Texas named for a woman. She holds B.S., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from The University of Texas at Austin, which has honored her with its highest awards, including



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naming her a Distinguished Alumna. The award-winning Communication Specialist, educator and businesswoman owns Zaffirini Communications and is President of the Alexander entities, including investment, development and construction companies.

Her favorite titles are wife, mother and grandmother (Ma Z), and she has won 1,300+ state and national awards for her legislative, professional and public service, including 600+ in communication.



TRAVIS COUNTY PROCLAIMS Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini Day with (Front, L-R) Commissioners Brigid Shea; Margaret Gómez; (Back, L-R) Constable George Morales; Judge Andy Brown; her niece, Valerie Borchers; Commissioner Jeff Travillion; and Rep. Richard Peña Raymond.