

Weekly Report
February 24, 2023

GOVERNOR:

Operation Lone Star Update – On February 17th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that he and the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), and the Texas National Guard are continuing to work together to secure the border; stop the smuggling of drugs, weapons, and people into Texas; and prevent, detect, and interdict transnational criminal behavior between ports of entry. Since the launch of Operation Lone Star, the multi-agency effort has led to over 350,000 illegal immigrant apprehensions and more than 24,000 criminal arrests, with more than 22,000 felony charges reported. In the fight against fentanyl, DPS has seized over 362 million lethal doses of fentanyl during this border mission. Texas has also bused more than 9,100 migrants to Washington DC since April, over 5,200 migrants to New York City since August 5th, more than 1,500 migrants to Chicago since August 31st, and more than 890 migrants to Philadelphia since November 15th. Governor Abbott said, “Operation Lone Star continues to fill the dangerous gaps left by the Biden Administration's refusal to secure the border. Every individual who is apprehended or arrested and every ounce of drugs seized would have otherwise made their way into communities across Texas and the nation due to President Biden's open border policies.”

Ice Storm Disaster Declaration Expanded – On February 20th, Governor Greg Abbott expanded the state's disaster declaration to include additional counties impacted by the ice storm that began in January and continued into early February. The counties added to the governor's disaster declaration are: Anderson, Bastrop, Blanco, Burleson, Burnet, Caldwell, Delta, Falls, Hopkins, Hunt, Kendall, Lamar, Lee, Leon, Red River, Robertson, and Shelby counties. Governor Abbott said, “As the scope of damages sustained during the recent ice storm becomes clearer, it is important we continue to assist and provide full support to all impacted communities. The addition of these counties to our disaster declaration will ensure Texas communities have all resources available to them as they continue to recover from this storm. I thank TDEM and our emergency response partners for working to meet the needs of Texans during this recovery process.” These counties join Denton, Hays, Henderson, Milam, Smith, Travis, and Williamson counties, which were included in the governor's disaster declaration on February 4th. Additional counties may be added to the declaration as damage assessments are completed. The governor directed the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) to request the Federal Emergency Management Agency provide personnel to certify reported damages

through joint preliminary damage assessments in partnership with local and state officials. Additionally, TDEM has deployed specialized teams throughout Texas' recovery to work with utility providers and electric cooperatives in affected areas to capture infrastructure damages and identify potential opportunities for disaster assistance.

Request for Presidential Disaster Declaration – On February 21st, Governor Greg Abbott sent a letter to President Joe Biden requesting a Presidential Disaster Declaration for Texas communities impacted by the severe winter storm earlier this month. The governor's request includes Bastrop, Blanco, Burleson, Burnet, Caldwell, Delta, Denton, Falls, Hays, Henderson, Hopkins, Hunt, Kendall, Lamar, Lee, Leon, Milam, Red River, Robertson, Shelby, Smith, Travis, and Williamson counties. The letter said, "The severe winter storm that swept across our state caused damage of such severity and magnitude that I am requesting a Presidential Disaster Declaration. This critical federal assistance will allow Texas communities to rebuild and recover by providing necessary financial resources for emergency response, debris removal, and infrastructure damages. I thank TDEM and our emergency response partners for working around the clock to meet the needs of their fellow Texans." The request to declare a major disaster for the State of Texas comes after an initial review of damage sustained by significant ice accumulation, fallen tree branches, and damage to local electricity infrastructure. Local jurisdictions have reported more than \$63 million in public infrastructure damage estimates thus far, including disaster response costs and debris management. If the governor's request for a Presidential Disaster Declaration is granted, jurisdictions in the designated counties would be eligible for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance program, including grant funding for: debris removal, emergency protective measures, roads and bridges, water control facilities, public buildings and contents, public utilities, parks, recreational, and other facilities. Approval of the request would also authorize additional FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program resources statewide.

[View a copy of the letter.](#)

SENATE:

The Senate was in session on Tuesday and Wednesday this week conducting routine business.

Next Week: The Senate adjourned until 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday, February 28, 2023.

HOUSE:

The House was also in session on Tuesday and Wednesday this week conducting routine business. On Wednesday, the House stood at ease until Thursday for the reading and referral of bills.

Speaker Phelan Announced Four Legislative Priorities – On February 23rd, House Speaker Dade Phelan (R-Beaumont) announced four key legislative priorities for the chamber that focus on improving the privacy and security of all Texans as well as better supporting mothers and children in the state. The following bills, which are part of the Texas House’s broader legislative priority package for the 88th Texas Legislature, have been recently filed:

- **HB 4** by Representative Giovanni Capriglione (R-Keller), also known as the Texas Data Privacy and Security Act, would grant Texans new online rights, including the ability to crack down on how companies collect, and in instances profit from, their personal data.
- **HB 12** by Representative Toni Rose (D-Dallas) would extend Medicaid eligibility to new mothers in Texas to a year after the delivery of their child, significantly increasing the length of time moms can access critical postpartum health coverage.
- **HB 18** by Representative Shelby Slawson (R-Stephenville), also known as the Securing Children Online through Parental Empowerment (SCOPE) Act, would equip Texas parents with tools to keep their children safe online, including the ability to put a stop to addictive algorithms and prevent companies from collecting private information.
- **HB 300** by Representative Donna Howard (D-Austin) would exempt, among other essential baby items, diapers and wipes, along with feminine hygiene products from the state’s sales tax, helping to make those items for mothers and families in the state more affordable.

Speaker Phelan said, “I am so proud of the hard work that members of the Texas House have already put into these four legislative proposals, which reflect some of the most pressing issues on the minds of Texans today. These bills are great starting points for our chamber as we work to get them over the finish line this legislative session, and I thank Representatives Capriglione, Rose, Slawson and Howard for their leadership. As I have said before, it is essential that the Texas House makes meaningful progress this year on better supporting mothers and children in the state - and that starts with extending health coverage for new moms to a full year. Additionally, I am eager to see our chamber take on Big Tech, which for too long has taken advantage of the data and privacy of Texans and especially our children, who are vulnerable to predatory and addicting algorithms and advertisements on social media platforms. Putting Texans and Texas parents back in the driver’s seat on this issue is a priority for our chamber this session.” Additional legislative priorities of the Texas House will be announced in the coming days.

House Select Committee on Community Safety – On February 23rd, House Speaker Dade Phelan formed the House Select Committee on Community Safety to consider gun-related legislative proposals that are filed during the 88th Legislature. The 13-member committee has jurisdiction over matters related to the possession, use, sale and transfer of all firearms and ammunition, as well as any associated criminal offenses and penalties. The membership of this committee supplements the membership of the Homeland Security & Public

Safety Committee, to which similar legislation was referred during the 87th Legislature, with members who served on the Robb Elementary Shooting Investigative Committee and members whose communities have experienced the unspeakable tragedy of a mass shooting in recent years. Speaker Phelan said, “The Texas House intends to do everything in our power to keep children and classrooms in our state safe. While there are many factors related to this wide-ranging issue that our chamber will discuss during the legislative session, such as mental health, social media and school safety, a necessary component to this conversation will be related to firearm safety. The individuals I have appointed to serve on this select committee bring extensive knowledge related to homeland security and public safety as well as their personal experiences from the districts they represent. I trust that the members of this committee will thoroughly examine the legislation that comes before them, guiding the rest of our chamber on a robust and much-needed conversation this legislative session.” The following members of the Texas House have been appointed to serve on the select committee:

- Representative Ryan Guillen (R-Rio Grande City), Chair
- Representative Jarvis Johnson (D-Houston), Vice Chair
- Representative Rhetta Andrews Bowers (D-Rowlett)
- Representative Dustin Burrows (R-Lubbock)
- Representative Terry Canales (D-Edinburg)
- Representative Mark Dorazio (R-San Antonio)
- Representative Vikki Goodwin (D-Austin)
- Representative Sam Harless (R-Spring)
- Representative Justin Holland (R-Rockwall)
- Representative Tracy King (D-Batesville)
- Representative Brooks Landgraf (R-Odessa)
- Representative Joe Moody (D-El Paso)
- Representative Ellen Troxclair (R-Austin)

Next Week: The House adjourned until 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 28, 2023.

BUDGET:

Governor Abbott Releases His Budget Recommendations – On February 16th, Governor Greg Abbott released his budget recommendations for the 88th Session. It included:

“Property Taxes:

- I recommend the 88th Legislature utilize \$15 billion to build on the promises made in 2019 by strengthening the statutory compression mechanism and further compressing tax rates in a sustainable manner.
- I also recommend senior citizens should be automatically enrolled in the additional \$10,000 homestead exemption on school property taxes, and their county property taxes should be frozen.
- Furthermore, I recommend small businesses be provided targeted relief with an increased exemption for business personal property.

Public Education:

- **Education Savings Accounts** – I recommend the 88th Legislature further empower parents by establishing an Education Savings Account program that allows funding to follow the student to the educational provider and/or services of the parent's choosing.
- **TEA Curriculum Reform** - I recommend the 88th Legislature address curriculum challenges with outcomes that enhance student performance, minimize inappropriate and ideological content, improve quality of classroom instructional materials, help ease teachers' workloads, and ensure curriculum transparency for parents.
- **School Safety & TCHATT** - I recommend the 88th Legislature continue enhancing the security of our schools by:
 - Providing no less than \$600 million to make necessary school safety improvements including technology upgrades, hardening equipment, and expanded mental health resources, as well as other school safety needs;
 - Providing \$6.6 million for officer Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) training; and
 - Providing \$142 million to sustain the statewide implementation of Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHATT) ,
- **Special Education Funding** - I recommend the 88th Legislature align special education funding with the student-first school finance system established in HB 3 by implementing the recommendations of the Texas Commission on Special Education Funding, which include transitioning to a service intensity-based formula system, investments in the special education educator workforce, and increased funding for evaluations.
- **Teacher Workforce** - I recommend the 88th Legislature invest in our teaching professionals by (1) increasing pay and supports for current teachers, including through the Teacher Incentive Allotment, (2) expanding access to high-quality educator preparation programs such as teacher residencies and apprenticeships, and (3) improving teacher supports in the classrooms.
- **Benefit Enhancement for Retired Teachers** - I recommend that the 88th Legislature authorize a benefit enhancement for retired teachers in the Teacher Retirement System. to honor our commitment to those who have educated our Texas children.

Higher Education:

- **Community College Performance Funding Structure** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide the resources necessary to fully implement the Texas Commission on Community College Finance (TXCCCF) recommendations.
- **My Texas Future** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide \$20M to the THECB to further expand My Texas Future tool and other advising services to reach all Texas students.
- **Healthcare Workforce** - I recommend the 88th Legislature increase our investment in new and existing programs like GME funding, nursing

shortage reduction incentives, and physician and behavioral health loan repayment programs to bolster the healthcare workforce.

- **University Endowment to Enhance Research Excellence** - I recommend the 88th Legislature create permanent endowments for the emerging research universities that do not currently have access to the Permanent University Fund, including \$1 billion each for the University of Houston and Texas Tech University, as well as new resources for Texas State University and the University of North Texas.

Building Stronger Families:

- **Family Resources** - I recommend the 88th Legislature continue the expansion of Alternatives to Abortion program and provide necessary funding to continue the ongoing development of the Family Resources website.
- **Women's Health** - I recommend the 88th Legislature appropriate sufficient funds to extend postpartum coverage up to 12 months and to continue the Healthy Texas Women program.
- **State Employee Paid Family Leave** - I recommend the 88th Legislature appropriate sufficient funds to cover any expansion in personnel costs related to implementing a paid parental leave program for state employees.

Caring For the Vulnerable:

- **Foster Care** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide funds to enable both the Department of Family and Protective Services and providers to transition to an updated rate methodology and provide bridge rate increases until the new rate methodology can be implemented.
- **Community-Based Care Services** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide the funding, including planning grants, to more expeditiously transition from the legacy foster care system to true, functional community-based care.
- **Child and Adult Protective Services** - I recommend the 88th Legislature appropriate adequate funding to support DFPS reform, improve CPS investigative response, maximize the use of kinship care, and support the continuation of APS elder financial exploitation units across the state of Texas.
- **Community Attendants** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide the funds necessary to increase the rates paid to maintain safe and comfortable homes for some of our most vulnerable Texans.
- **Nursing Homes** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide \$450 million to increase nursing home rates to allow facilities to hire and retain the staff needed and provide the safe facilities our senior citizens deserve.
- **Behavioral Health Treatment Capacity** - I recommend the 88th Legislature continue the modernization and expansion of the state and community behavioral health system, prioritizing a Regional Behavioral Health Campus in Uvalde, and supporting behavioral health workforce initiatives.

- **Veterans Mental Health** - I recommend the 88th Legislature increase funding for programs like the Texas Veterans + Family Alliance Grant Program to fully leverage available matching dollars and expand mental health services for our veteran community.

Investments In Infrastructure:

- **Texas' Highway & Roadway Capacity** - I recommend the 88th Legislature build on the \$26.5 billion dedicated for highway funding under Proposition 1 (2014) and Proposition 7 (2015) so that TxDOT can continue to adequately address Texas' roadway needs.
- **Ship Channel Improvement Revolving Fund** - I recommend the 88th Legislature fund the Ship Channel Improvement Revolving Fund, which will provide low-cost loans to non-federal sponsors of Texas' waterways to deliver these critical channel deepening and widening projects.
- **Flood & Water Infrastructure** - I recommend the 88th Legislature appropriate \$500 million to protect millions of residents, businesses, and critical ports and refineries along the Gulf Coast from catastrophic damage from storms. Additionally, the Legislature should prioritize funding for water, wastewater, and flood prevention projects.
- **Broadband Development Office** - I recommend the 88th Legislature fully fund the Broadband Development Office to ensure Texas is prepared and ready to leverage federal funds to continue expansion broadband across the state.

Economic Development:

- **Governor's Economic Development & Tourism Office** - I recommend the 88th Legislature replenish the Texas Enterprise Fund, provide adequate funding to the Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program, and appropriate all hotel and motel occupancy taxes dedicated for Texas' tourism promotion programs.
- **CHIPS Act** - I recommend the 88th Legislature consider a cross-government approach to ensure Texas is competitive for CHIPS Act related opportunities, as well as ensure state funding is available to fully leverage the federal funding provided through the CHIPS Act.
- **Economic Incentive Tools** - I recommend the 88th Legislature develop necessary economic incentives to continue attracting major capital investment and manufacturing to Texas while also incentivizing the creation of new energy production.
- **Space** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide \$350 million for the creation of The Texas Space Commission to support the development of a coordinated strategic plan that will position Texas as a global leader in space travel, research, and technology.
- **Business Courts** - I recommend the 88th Legislature approve and fund the creation of business courts in which complex commercial litigation will be heard by judges chosen for their specialized expertise.

Public Safety:

- **Operation Lone Star** - I recommend the 88th Legislature maintain funding for Border Security and provide all the resources necessary to secure our southern border.
- **Texas National Guard Benefits** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide additional education and enhanced death benefits for Texas National Guard service members who are deployed on state active duty.
- **Public Safety Grants** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide additional funding to supply law enforcement agencies with Narcan and consider how to address the effects of increased indigent healthcare costs.
- **Texas Anti-Gang (TAG) Grant Program** - recommend the 88th Legislature increase the TAG Grant Program Rider by \$1 million per fiscal year for the establishment of a new TAG Center in the Midland-Odessa region.
- **Bail Data Systems Reform** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide the Office of Court Administration with the resources necessary to make information technology upgrades for bail-related data systems including \$6 million to replace judicial branch legacy systems.
- **Victims of Crime** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide \$120 million to sustain vital victim assistance services in Texas.
- **Guardianship** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide \$5 million to establish the Elder Abuse Grant Program.
- **Rural Law Enforcement Grants** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide \$350 million for rural law enforcement grants.
- **High-Risk Absconder Task Force** - I recommend the 88th Legislature appropriate \$3 million to support the creation of a statewide OIG Absconder Task Force. Office of the Inspector General

General Budget:

- **Compact for Seniors** - I recommend the 88th Legislature provide Texas senior citizens with automatic enrollment in the additional \$10,000 homestead exemption, implement a freeze on county property taxes for homesteads, reduce state fees, and increase access to information on state and local services.
- **State Park Investments** - I recommend the 88th legislature make additional investments to meet growing demands and to further develop our state park system.
- **Cyber Security Enhancements and IT Modernization** - I recommend the 88th Legislature continue to address long-term investment needs and solutions for cyber security enhancements and technology modernization.
- **Election Integrity** - I recommend the 88th Legislature ensure the continued integrity of Texas elections by fully funding the Secretary of State's Forensic Audit and Election Division.
- **Pension Stabilization** - I recommend the 88th Legislature ensure ERS, LECOSRF, and JRS-2 retirement funds remain fully solvent and actuarially

sound and use the one-time surplus to further reduce the ERS Legacy Fund liability, saving taxpayers money in future years.

- **Federal Funds** - I recommend the 88th Legislature review programs created by the IIJA, CHIPS Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act to determine which, if any, programs may be beneficial for Texas to pursue and provide any necessary non-federal matching dollars in the General Appropriations Act.”

House Appropriations Committee:

Tuesday, February 21, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Article III (Education) took up:

- Lamar Colleges and TSTC
- Health Related Institutions

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

- University of Houston System and Component institutions
- Texas Tech University System and Component Institutions
- University of Texas System and Component Institutions

Witnesses in addition to the Legislative Budget Board and the institutions included representatives of MassResistance TX, Texas Hospital Association, Texas Medical Association, Texas Academy of Family Physicians, Teaching Hospitals of Texas, Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, and Texas 2036.

Tuesday, February 21, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Articles I, IV, and V (General Government, Judiciary, and Public Safety & Criminal Justice) took up:

- Office of the Attorney General
- Comptroller of Public Accounts
- Texas Commission on the Arts
- Bond Review Board
- Cancer Prevention & Research Institute of Texas
- Texas Commission on State Emergency Communications
- Emergency Services Retirement System
- Employees Retirement System & Social Security Benefit Replacement
- Texas Ethics Commission
- Texas Historical Commission

Witnesses in addition to the Legislative Budget Board and the state agencies included representatives of Texas Public Employees Association, Texans for the Arts, Texas Cultural Trust, Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, Texas 2036, American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Retired State Employees Association, DPS Officer Association, Texas State Employees Union, Texas 2036, Texas Association Against Sexual Assault, Texas Council on Family Violence, and three individuals.

Tuesday, February 21, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Articles VI, VII, and VIII (Natural Resources, Business & Economic Development, and Regulatory) took up:

- Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs
- Texas Lottery Commission
- Texas Department of Motor Vehicles
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Texas Workforce Commission
- Reimbursement to the Unemployment Compensation Benefit Account

Witnesses in addition to the Legislative Budget Board and the state agencies included representatives of Texas Public Employees Association, Haven for Hope, LifeWorks, Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, Texas Network of Youth Services, Young Adult Leadership Council, Tax Assessor-Collectors Association of Texas, Texans Care for Children, Gingerbread Kids Academy, Children at Risk, Texas 2036, Texas Restaurant Association, Texas Association for the Education of Young Children, and one individual.

Wednesday, February 22, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Article III (Education) took up:

- Texas State University System and Component Institutions
- Texas A&M University System and Component Institutions

Witnesses in addition to the Legislative Budget Board and the institutions included representatives of the Texas Green Building Council, State Firefighters and Fire Marshals Association of Texas, and the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club.

Wednesday, February 22, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Articles I, IV, and V (General Government, Judiciary, and Public Safety & Criminal Justice) took up:

- Office of the Governor and Trusteed Programs
- Texas Facilities Commission and Revenue Bonds for Lease Payments
- Department of Information Resources
- Texas State Library & Archives Commission
- Texas Public Finance Authority & GO Bond Debt Service
- Pension Review Board
- State Office of Risk Management
- Texas Secretary of State
- Texas Veterans Commission

Witnesses in addition to the Legislative Budget Board and the state agencies included representatives of Texas Public Employees Association, Texas 2036, Children’s Advocacy Centers, Texas Border Prosecution Unit, Texas Travel Alliance, and Audits in the Public Interest.

Wednesday, February 22, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Articles VI, VII, and VIII (Natural Resources, Business & Economic Development, and Regulatory) took up:

- Health-Related Agencies
- Behavioral Health Executive Council

- Board of Chiropractic Examiners
- Texas State Dental Examiners
- Health Professions Council
- Texas Medical Board
- Texas Board of Nursing
- Optometry Board
- Board of Pharmacy
- Executive Council on Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy Examiners
- Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners

Witnesses in addition to the Legislative Budget Board and the state agencies included representatives of Texas Pharmacy Association, Texas Veterinary Medical Association, and two individuals.

Thursday, February 23, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Article III (Education) took up:

- Higher Education Fund
- Available University Fund
- National Research University Fund
- Support for Military and Veteran’s Exemptions
- Higher Education Group Insurance
- Junior Colleges and Community Colleges
- Texas State Technical College System and Component Institutions
- Stephen F. Austin State University
- Texas Southern University
- Baylor College of Medicine
- Texas Woman’s University System and Component Institutions
- University of North Texas System and Component Institutions
- Special Provisions Relating Only to Higher Education Agencies
- Special Provisions Relating Only to Components of TSTC

Thursday, February 23, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Articles I, IV, and V (General Government, Judiciary, and Public Safety & Criminal Justice) took up:

- Supreme Court of Texas
- Office of the State Prosecuting Attorney
- Court of Criminal Appeals
- 14 Courts of Appeals
- Office of Court Administration, Texas Judicial Council
- Texas Indigent Defense Commission
- Comptroller’s Judiciary Section
- Special Prosecution Unit
- Office of Capital and Forensic Writs
- State Law Library

- State Commission on Judicial Conduct
- Special Provisions Relating to the Judiciary

Thursday, February 23, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Articles VI, VII, and VIII (Natural Resources, Business & Economic Development, and Regulatory) took up:

- Public Utility Commission of Texas
- Office of Public Utility Counsel
- State Office of Administrative Hearings
- Funeral Service Commission
- Board of Professional Geoscientists
- Office of Injured Employee Counsel
- Texas Department of Insurance
- Office of Public Insurance Counsel
- Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation
- Board of Plumbing Examiners
- Texas Racing Commission
- Securities Board
- Special Provisions Relating to All Regulatory Agencies

Senate Finance Committee:

Tuesday, February 21, 2023 – Senate Finance Committee took public testimony on Article II – Health and Human Services.

Senate Finance Committee Work Groups – On February 22nd, Senate Finance Committee Chair Joan Huffman (R-Houston) announced Senate Budget Work Groups:

Work Group on Articles I, IV & V (General Government, Judiciary, and Public Safety & Criminal Justice):

Senator Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa (D-McAllen), Chair

Senator Donna Campbell (R-New Braunfels)

Senator Pete Flores (R-Pleasanton)

Senator John Whitmire (D-Houston)

Work Group on Article II (Health & Human Services)

Senator Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham), Chair

Senator Bob Hall (R-Edgewood)

Senator Bryan Hughes (R-Mineola)

Senator Angela Paxton (R-McKinney)

Work Group on Article III (for Public Education)

Senator Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe), Chair

Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston)

Senator Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills)

Senator Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo)

Work Group on Articles VI, VII & VIII (Natural Resources, Business & Economic Development, and Regulatory)

Senator Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville), Chair

Senator Charles Perry (R-Lubbock)
Senator Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown)
Senator Royce West (D-Dallas)

Next Week:

Monday, February 27, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Articles I, IV, and V (General Government, Judiciary, and Public Safety & Criminal Justice) will meet at 8:00 a.m. in E2.030 of the capitol extension to take up:

- Department of Public Safety
- Overview of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Correctional Populations
- Texas Juvenile Justice Department
- Texas Department of Criminal Justice
- Board of Pardons & Paroles
- Texas Military Department
- Texas Commission on Fire Protection
- Texas Commission on Jail Standards
- Texas Commission on Law Enforcement
- Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission

Monday, February 27, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Articles VI, VII, and VIII (Natural Resources, Business & Economic Development, and Regulatory) will meet at 8:00 a.m. in E2.026 of the capitol extension to take up:

- Texas Railroad Commission
- Department of Agriculture
- Texas Animal Health Commission
- Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
- General Land Office and Veterans’ Land Board
- Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Compact Commission
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
- Texas Water Development Board
- Texas State Soil & Water Conservation Board

Monday, February 27, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Article III (Education) will meet at 9:00 a.m. in E1.026 in the capitol extension to take up:

- Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and special provisions
- Texas School for the Deaf and special provisions
- Texas Education Agency
- Texas Permanent School Corporation
- Teacher Retirement System
- Optional Retirement Program

Monday, February 27, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Article II (Health & Human Services) will meet at 10:00 a.m. in E1.030 in the capitol extension to take up:

- Health & Human Services Commission and Office of Inspector General

- Texas Civil Commitment Office
- Department of State Health Services
- Department of Family & Protective Services

Tuesday, February 28, 2023 – House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Article II (Health & Human Services) will meet at 8:00 a.m. in E1.030 in the capitol extension to take up:

- Health & Human Services Commission and Office of Inspector General
- Texas Civil Commitment Office
- Department of State Health Services
- Department of Family & Protective Services

HIGHER EDUCATION:

Coordinating Board Announces FORWARD Loan Program – On February 23rd, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board announced that it is offering a new low-interest loan option for Texas students. The Future Occupations & Reskilling Workforce Advancement to Reach Demand (FORWARD) Loan Program, which is designed to increase the number of students who obtain high-value credentials in high-demand occupations. The FORWARD Loan is structured to help students complete their degrees with manageable to low debt levels and for students to be able to repay the loan within 10 years. Commissioner of Higher Education Harrison Keller said, “The FORWARD Loan Program will help more Texans secure careers in high-demand fields and complete their degrees with manageable debt as they enter the workforce. We are committed to increasing educational attainment for Texans of all ages, with the goal of 95 percent of all undergraduates completing their credentials with manageable or no debt. This program can be a key piece in achieving those goals.” The program is open to students who are enrolled in a high-demand credential program that the student will be able to complete in two years or less. Eligible programs include technology, nursing/patient care, teaching, supply chain/transportation and logistics, and energy. Chairman of the Coordinating Board Dr. Fred Farias said, “Texas’ economic competitiveness depends on an educated workforce. The FORWARD Loan is one more program that will help more Texas students enter high-demand jobs and allow them to contribute to, participate in, and benefit from our world class economy.”

[View information on the FORWARD Loan Program.](#)

PUBLIC EDUCATION:

TEF Supports Educational Freedom – On February 17th, Texans for Educational Freedom President, Christopher Zook, Jr., announced his support for Governor Greg Abbott as he took a stand for educational freedom during his State of the State Address. Zook said, “Governor Abbott declaring educational freedom as a legislative emergency item in his State of the State address highlights the sense of urgency surrounding this ongoing issue. Since inception, Texans for Educational Freedom has been fighting to ensure parents have a voice in their child’s education, and we applaud Governor Abbott for making this

issue one of his priorities. Texans for Educational Freedom is dedicated to electing local and state school board members with the ultimate goal of ensuring all students have access to a high-quality education and making certain that parents are able to make decisions on their child's schooling. Texans for Educational Freedom was founded in 2021 in response to radical indoctrination making its way into Texas classrooms. Centering its resources on local and state school board elections, Texans for Educational Freedom touts an 88 percent win rate in races in which it participated. Most notably, the largest school board focused PAC in Texas guided newly elected state board member, LJ Francis, to victory, flipping a historically democratic district."

TCASE Opposes Education Savings Accounts – On February 17th, Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education (TCASE) Executive Director Theresa Parsons explained why TCASE opposes the Special Education Services Grant Program. She said, "In 2020, Governor Abbott used federal coronavirus relief funds to create the Supplemental Special Education Services (SSES) grant program to 'offset learning disruptions related to COVID-19' for students served by special education. In his State-of-the-State address, Abbott alluded that the SSES program was an 'education savings account' (ESA) for students with disabilities and indicated he'd like to expand it to all students. Abbott made 'education freedom' an emergency item, allowing a voucher to fast-track through the legislature. ESAs will not provide 'education freedom' to all students because private schools do not have to follow the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that protect students with disabilities. These laws afford parents and students rights and remedies, like due process and a complaints mechanism. To justify an ESA, Governor Abbott claimed in his address that Texas public schools are well-funded, but Texas is 42nd in the nation in per student funding and has been cited multiple times by the federal government for failing to maintain financial support for special education funding. The Texas Education Agency reported last year that in 2020, districts spent almost \$2 billion more on special education than the state and federal funding they received for it. The SSES program was originally sold as a way to support students with disabilities. Converting this program to an ESA for all students tells me it was a smoke screen to usher in vouchers."

Governor Speaks at Parent Empowerment Night in Temple – On February 20th, Governor Greg Abbott spotlighted the need for education freedom and parental rights in children's education at a Parent Empowerment Night with over 380 Texas parents, students, and advocates at Central Texas Christian School in Temple. Governor Abbott said, "Public schools play an essential role in our state. They educate our future entrepreneurs, scientists, and leaders. We must ensure that our education system works for every child. Parents also deserve education freedom. Without it, some parents are hindered in helping their child succeed. That must change this year." During his remarks, the governor discussed working with the Texas legislature this session not only to continue providing more funding for public education and teacher pay raises, but also to empower parents

to be the primary decisionmakers in their child's education. The governor noted the way to empower parents with the ability to choose the best education option for their child is by expanding school choice options available through state-funded Education Savings Accounts to all Texas students. Governor Abbott also highlighted the importance of parents being able to access their child's curriculum, school libraries, and what is being taught. The governor was joined by Representative Hugh Shine, Texas Public Policy Foundation Campaign Director Mandy Drogin, Head of Central Texas Christian School Brenda Russell, and other parent empowerment advocates. Hosted by the Parent Empowerment Coalition, Parent Empowerment Night brought together education leaders and stakeholders to discuss education reform and the need for parental empowerment in their children's education.

Next Week:

Tuesday, February 28, 2023 – House Public Education Committee will meet at 8:00 a.m. in E2.036 of the capitol extension for an organizational meeting and to hear invited testimony from:

- Texas Education Agency
- Texas School Safety Center

Key Dates – 88th Legislative Session:

88th Legislative Session Began: January 10, 2023

Inauguration of Governor and Lt. Governor – January 17, 2023

Bill Filing Deadline: March 10, 2023

88th Legislative Session Ends: May 29, 2023

Governor's Veto Deadline: June 18, 2023

State Websites - Additional information can be obtained via the Senate, House, and capitol websites:

www.senate.state.tx.us

www.house.state.tx.us

www.capitol.state.tx.us