

Weekly Legislative Report

The Texas Senate and House were not in session last week, but there were some noteworthy announcements and bill filings

GOVERNOR:

Governor's Public Safety Priorities

On January 21, Governor Greg Abbott held a roundtable discussion in Austin with law enforcement and public safety advocates to discuss the governor's legislative priorities to ensure a safer future for the Lone Star State. Following the roundtable, the governor held a brief press conference to provide a summary of the discussion and outline proposed legislative strategies to keep Texans safe and provide law enforcement with the support and resources they need to serve and protect their communities.

During the roundtable, the governor and participants discussed the importance of supporting law enforcement and combatting efforts to defund the police. The leaders and Governor Abbott also discussed bail reform. The governor noted that he is working with the legislature this session to reform the bail system in Texas by expanding the criteria that judges must consider when setting bail and increasing the qualifications of judges who can set bail. Governor Abbott said, "Here in Texas, we will never turn our back on our law enforcement officers. Texas will always be a law-and-order state, and we must lead the way for the rest of the nation when it comes to supporting our police."

"The government's number one responsibility is to keep its citizens safe, and we will not allow cities to recklessly defund the police and put innocent lives in danger. We must also act this session to reform a broken bail system that allows dangerous criminals to go free, and I applaud Senator John Whitmire (D-Houston) and Representatives Kyle Kacal (R-College Station) and Andrew Murr (R-Junction) for their leadership on this important issue. I look forward to working with my partners in the legislature this session to build a safer future for the Lone Star State."

The governor was joined for the roundtable by:

- Frederick Frazier – 1st Vice President, Dallas Police Association; State Legislative Chair, Texas Fraternal Order of Police
- Mitch Landry – Deputy Executive Director, Texas Municipal Police Association
- Kevin Masters – Senior Strategy Analyst, Office of the Governor's Public Safety Office
- Colonel Steve McCraw – Executive Director, Texas Department of Public Safety
- Manny Ramirez – President, Fort Worth Police Officers Association
- Marvin Ryals – President, Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas
- Alden Southmayd – Sheriff, Bee County
- Joell Sullivan-McNew – President, SafeHorns
- Jennifer Tharp – Criminal District Attorney, Comal County

SENATE:

The Senate was not in session last week.

Senate Committee Assignments

On January 15, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick announced his Senate committee assignments for the 87th Session. Lt. Governor Patrick also appointed the Select Committee on Ports and the Special Committee on Redistricting. He said, "The Texas Senate is comprised of proven leaders with the expertise and experience that makes them more than prepared to take on the difficult challenges we face in this new legislative session. The committee appointments I am making today call on all senators—Republicans and Democrats, freshmen and senior members—to play an integral role in crafting public policy that will ensure our state remains strong and every Texan can prosper. No one works harder than the members of the Texas Senate. Their commitment to public service is unparalleled and I am proud to serve with them. They have been working throughout the interim and are hitting the ground running. I look forward to a productive legislative session."

Senate Committees and Chairs:

Administration – Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown)
Business & Commerce – Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills)
Criminal Justice – John Whitmire (D-Houston)
Education – Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood)
Finance – Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound)
Health & Human Services – Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham)
Higher Education – Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe)
Jurisprudence – Joan Huffman (R-Houston)
Local Government – Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston)
Natural Resources & Economic Development – Brian Birdwell (R-Granbury)
Nominations – Dawn Buckingham (R-Lakeway)
State Affairs – Bryan Hughes (R-Mineola)
Transportation – Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville)
Veteran Affairs & Border Security – Donna Campbell (R-New Braunfels)
Water, Agriculture & Rural Affairs – Charles Perry (R-Lubbock)
Select Committee on Ports – Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe)
Special Committee on Redistricting – Joan Huffman (R-Houston)

Facts About Senate Committees:

Number of Committees – The number of Senate standing committees decreased from 16 to 15.

Republican Committee Chairs – In 2017, Republicans chaired 12 of the Senate's 14 committees. In 2019, Republicans chaired 14 of the Senate's 16 committees. In 2021, Republicans chair 14 of the Senate's 15 committees.

Democratic Committee Chairs – In 2017, Democrats chaired two of the Senate's 14 committees: Eddie Lucio, Jr. (Intergovernmental Relations) and John Whitmire (Criminal Justice). Those chairs remained the same in 2019. In 2021, one Democrat chairs a Senate Committee: John Whitmire (Criminal Justice).

Senate Finance Committee Chair Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) said, "I am grateful for the opportunity to craft a fiscally responsible budget that bolsters our state at a time when many are struggling. Our task is clear—keep our commitment to education, defeat the coronavirus, and

make the investments necessary to speed up our economic recovery. Earlier this week, Comptroller Glenn Hegar delivered a revenue estimate that was better than many had anticipated but framed the difficult appropriations process facing the legislature this session. Through hurricanes and recessions, Texas has proven time after time that, working together, we can overcome any adversity and come out stronger on the other side. We are up to this challenge."

This Week: The Senate reconvened at 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 26, 2021.

HOUSE:

The House was not in session last week.

This Week: The House reconvened at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 26, 2021.

SENATOR NELSON FILES BUDGET BILL:

On January 21, Senator Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound), Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, filed **SB 1**, the Senate's base budget, beginning the legislative process for developing the state's FY 2022-23 biennial budget. Senator Nelson said, "Texas' economic strength—and the work we did to scrutinize agency budgets—puts us in a better than anticipated position to keep our commitment to education, defeat the coronavirus, and invest in our economic recovery. SB 1 funds essential services, keeps up with growth, and meets our obligations to vulnerable citizens. It is a starting point. We have many tools available to balance this budget, which will require us to re-establish our priorities, stretch every dollar, and find more efficient ways to deliver services." SB 1, as filed, appropriates \$251.2 billion in All Funds and \$119.7 billion in General Revenue. This represents 4 percent growth in General Revenue, is well within population and inflation, and reflects the 5 percent reductions agencies were asked to make in the current biennium.

Highlights of SB 1 include:

- Funding for the full Foundation School Program entitlement, reflecting changes made last session to the school finance formula, including:
 - \$3.1 billion to fund enrollment growth for public education, based on an estimated 36,000 additional students per year;
 - \$1 billion in additional state aid related to property tax compression in the 2022-23 biennium;
- \$5 billion, an increase of \$452.8 million, for payroll growth and continued reforms to the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) passed last session through SB 12;
- \$897.6 million, an increase of \$39.5 million, for statutorily required contributions to TRS-Care to maintain current health insurance premiums and benefits for our retired teachers;
- \$8.1 billion to fund higher education institution formulas;
- Maintained funding for Graduate Medical Education formulas;
- Funding to cover projected caseloads for the Medicaid program;
- Combined projected funding of \$8 billion for mental health across 24 state agencies, including:
 - an increase of \$19.5 million to maintain operations for the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium;

- over \$1 million in new funding for Senator Nelson's SB 64, to create a peer-to-peer counseling network and increase access to licensed mental health providers for Texas' law enforcement officers;
 - \$145 million to continue community mental health grant programs;
- \$352.6 million, an increase of \$10.2 million, for women's health programs, including the continuation of the Healthy Texas Women program's enhanced post-partum care services implemented by the legislature last session;
- Lower target caseloads for conservatorship workers at Child Protective Services;
- \$589 million to continue funding for Community Based Care catchment areas authorized by the legislature;
- \$7 million to maintain funding for Maternal Mortality and Morbidity safety initiatives as well as public awareness and prevention activities;
- Funding for priority victim's assistance programs, including \$29.7 million for Rape Crisis Centers and \$1.8 million for the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners program;
- \$57.6 million across all articles to continue fighting human trafficking through prevention, detection, victim services, and the justice system;
- \$1.3 million to perform necessary maintenance on the Texas Election Administration Management System, which manages voter registrations in Texas;
- \$271.2 million to meet the contract obligations of the Guaranteed Tuition Plan for Texas college students, providing a more affordable college experience for Texas families;
- \$128.5 million to fund Department of Public Safety Crime Lab services, including maintaining prioritization and timely testing of sexual assault kits;
- \$39.1 million in new appropriations to fortify security at the Texas Capitol, including additional troopers and enhanced safety measures;
- \$30.4 billion to the Texas Department of Transportation to address the state's transportation needs, including \$26.4 billion dedicated for highway planning, design, construction, and maintenance;
- 100 percent appropriation of estimated available sporting goods sales tax, totaling \$332.3 million to support state parks and historical sites;
- \$10.2 million for the Surplus Agricultural Products Grant Program at the Texas Department of Agriculture, a continuation of 2020-21 appropriated levels to support Texas food banks;
- Maintained \$36.9 million to address structural repair, operation, and maintenance of earthen flood control dams;
- Increase of \$19.2 million for air quality and monitoring, water quality and monitoring, and operations at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality; and
- \$21.5 million in capital budget authority for Phase II of the Mainframe Transformation IT Project at the Texas Railroad Commission, which will replace aging technology to allow for a more efficient and secure application process.