



GARY  
**VanDeaver**  
 State Representative

**District & Capitol Report - 86th Legislature  
 House District 1 -  
 Bowie, Franklin, Lamar & Red River  
 counties - April 2020**

***Coronavirus pandemic information.***

**Open Texas.** Earlier this week, Governor Greg Abbott announced a list of businesses that will be able to re-open beginning May 1. The governor unveiled his "Open Texas" plan and issued Executive Order GA-18 to begin reopening the state's businesses while trying to balance necessary safety protocols to stem the spread of COVID-19. Here are links to these two documents:  
<https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/open-texas/OpenTexas-Report.pdf>. Executive Order GA-18:  
<https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-issues-executive-order-relating-to-the-expanded-reopening-of-services>.

**Nursing homes and assisted living facilities.** The governor's plan also outlines a long-term comprehensive mitigation plan for nursing homes in Texas. Eight recommendations have been developed by HHSC to help mitigate the further spread of COVID-19 and decrease the risk of infection in these facilities. A summary of the recommendations is below, and full recommendations are in the Governor's Open Texas report linked above beginning on page 9:

1. Quantify the extent of infection immediately
2. Establish a comprehensive mitigation plan
3. Re-evaluate current COVID-19 positive facilities
4. Appropriate isolation and placement of COVID-19 patients
5. Implement enhanced access control
6. Enhance control of staff access
7. Effective notifications
8. Continue containment efforts

***Message from DSHS chief medical officer.***

Dr. John Hellerstedt, chief medical officer and commissioner of the state's Department of State Health Services (DSHS), issued the following message to all Texans in the governor's Open Texas plan:

"As we begin to open Texas, we must continue to follow these critical health guidelines:

- ♣ Stay home if you can.
- ♣ Wash hands often and for 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- ♣ Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue away.
- ♣ Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed

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hands. ♣ Disinfect surfaces, buttons, handles, doorknobs, and other places touched often. ♣ Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Continue to practice social distancing, avoid crowds, and limit physical contact.

"The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also recommends using simple cloth face coverings in public to help slow the spread of the virus. Special guidance for Texans over 65 is outlined on page 6, and for all Texans on page 8. Opening businesses have added responsibilities outlined beginning on page 19. Every Texan is part of the solution. You can protect yourself, your family, and your community." (Please note: see the link above to the governor's Open Texas plan for the specific references to certain pages for additional guidance and information.)

***CDC guidelines and expanded list of symptoms.*** Throughout the Open Texas plan are references to "CDC guidelines." Here is a link to the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>. The CDC recently added six additional symptoms of COVID-19 to the three original ones of fever, cough and shortness of breath to include: chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat and new loss of taste or smell.

***DSHS.*** The state Department of State Health Services (DSHS) also has a dashboard where you can track COVID-19-related data: <https://txdshs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/ed483ecd702b4298ab01e8b9cafc8b83>. Use this DSHS link:

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<https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/AdditionalData.aspx> to access additional, useful data including cases, deaths and tests by county over time.

***Meat Processing Outbreaks.*** DSHS continues to support response to two meat processing plants in the state: Tyson and JBS/Swift. DSHS has conducted on site investigations to inform actions to mitigate the spread of the virus, and contact tracing and surveillance is ongoing. Mobile testing teams have provided testing in these areas to further inform surveillance, and we have been working with local jurisdictions to ensure health care capacity.

Due to the unique challenges for these facilities, and other issues nationally, CDC and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) put out [protocols](#) to guide meat and poultry processing facilities implement infection control practices to reduce the risk of transmission and illness from COVID-19 in these facilities.

***Latest counts.*** The latest available COVID-19 numbers, as of April 29, from the state's Department of State Health Services (DSHS) include 27,054 confirmed cases with 732 deaths in 207 counties.

***Guidance for in-person religious services.*** Earlier in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, the governor declared worship and religious services as "essential services" that were allowed to continue operating under certain guidelines. The governor and attorney general have issued additional guidelines for worship services that can be found at this link: <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/de>

[fault/files/images/admin/2020/Press/Third%20Revised%20AG%20Guidance%20for%20Houses%20of%20Worship%20During%20the%20COVID-19%20Crisis%20-%20Final.pdf?utm\\_content=&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_name=&utm\\_source=govdelivery&utm\\_term=](http://fault/files/images/admin/2020/Press/Third%20Revised%20AG%20Guidance%20for%20Houses%20of%20Worship%20During%20the%20COVID-19%20Crisis%20-%20Final.pdf?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=). The health protocols in the above-referenced guidance document state that at-risk populations should be encouraged to participate in worship services remotely or have a designated area or separate service for them. Additionally, the guidance document also requires adherence to CDC guidelines on social distancing and sanitizing facilities.

### ***Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).***

Hundreds of thousands of Texans have recently lost their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic and have turned to the state's TWC to file unemployment insurance claims. Unfortunately, TWC was not prepared to handle such a crisis. Judging by the calls to my office, the agency is still failing to meet Texans' needs at this time. Since March 14, TWC has processed 1.9 million unemployment claims and has paid out \$1.8 billion in benefits. The agency has added four call centers bringing their total number to eight that are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week with 1200 people working in the call centers, and they have doubled the number of servers to handle the increased online filings. TWC is receiving between 700,000 to 800,000 calls a day.

***New TWC guidance.*** The governor's office announced late on April 30, that the TWC has issued new guidance for unemployed claimants concerning their eligibility for unemployment benefits should they choose

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not to return to work at this time due to COVID-19. Texans receiving unemployment benefits in response to COVID-19 can continue receiving those benefits if they choose to not return to work for the following reasons as specified by the TWC:

- At high risk - people 65 and over;
- Household member at high risk;
- Diagnosed with COVID-19 and not recovered;
- Family member diagnosed with COVID-19;
- Quarantined for 14 days due to close-contact exposure to COVID-19;
- Child care: child's school or daycare is closed and there are not alternatives available.

Each unemployment insurance claim is currently evaluated on an individual basis, and any other situation will be subject to a case-by-case review of individual circumstances by TWC.

***Data tracking - new TWC dashboard.*** The agency recently added a new feature to their homepage that can be used to track claims data and is searchable for various categories including legislative districts, counties, zip codes, etc.: <https://texasmapsonline.com/portal/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=e3e490c4196a45868610f65b72e9f303>. The data for House District 1 shows there are 5,114 unemployment claims out of a population of 166,334 residents. The five-top affected industries in HD 1 are full-service restaurants; general medical and surgical hospitals; truck trailer

manufacturing; offices of dentists; and department stores.

### ***Non-coronavirus pandemic information.***

#### ***Disaster declaration for mid-April storms.***

On April 29, the governor issued a disaster declaration for six Texas counties as a result of severe weather sustained in east and northeast Texas last week. The declaration authorizes the use of all available resources of state government and of political subdivisions to aid in response efforts. I appreciate this declaration by Governor Abbott so the state can help Lamar and Red River counties clean up storm damage and help get things get back to normal. Here is a link to the governor's disaster declaration: [https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/DISASTER\\_east\\_Texas\\_severe\\_storms\\_April\\_22.pdf](https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/DISASTER_east_Texas_severe_storms_April_22.pdf). Governor Abbott said: "This disaster declaration will help the state of Texas provide local officials with the resources they need to respond to the aftermath of these storms, and the state is committed to working alongside these communities throughout the recovery process."

***U.S. Census 2020.*** Please don't forget that it is time to respond to the US Census either by computer, phone or mail. If you have questions about responding to the census, you can contact the Census Bureau's Customer Service Center between 6 a.m. and 1 a.m., seven days a week at the numbers listed below:

English: [844-330-2020](tel:844-330-2020)

Spanish: [844-468-2020](tel:844-468-2020)

***Peace officer loan repayment assistance program (POLRAP).*** The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (the Board) announced plans this month for a September launch of a new loan repayment program benefitting recently appointed peace officers who have student loan debt.

Many law enforcement agencies have difficulty filling vacant positions, and last year the legislature enacted Senate Bill 16, authorizing the Peace Officer Loan Repayment Assistance Program (POLRAP) to provide an incentive for Texans to pursue law enforcement careers and remain on the job to help pay off their student loan debt.

The legislation defines "peace officer" in the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, which describes 35 distinct positions and roles. To be eligible to apply for loan repayment assistance through POLRAP, an initial applicant must have been initially appointed as a full-time peace officer on or after Sept. 1, 2019, have completed at least one year of employment as a full-time peace officer in Texas, and have earned at least 60 credit hours at an eligible Texas higher education institution prior to initial appointment as a peace officer.

Upon admittance to the POLRAP, recipients will receive an initial award based on their one year of prior service. A successful applicant may receive up to \$20,000 in loan repayment assistance over a period of five years (\$4,000 annually or one-fifth of the outstanding loan balance, whichever is less). Awards are contingent on available funding. In the initial year of the program, applications will be selected on a first-

come-first-served basis until funds are no longer available. After the initial program year, priority will be given to prior year recipients and initial applications will be selected on a first-come-first-served basis until funds are no longer available.

Additional program requirements are posted on this link:

[http://www.hhloans.com/index.cfm?objectid=E32BBAB0-37DF-11EA-](http://www.hhloans.com/index.cfm?objectid=E32BBAB0-37DF-11EA-87D10050560100A9)

[87D10050560100A9](http://www.hhloans.com/index.cfm?objectid=E32BBAB0-37DF-11EA-87D10050560100A9). The Board anticipates posting the online application in September.

***Social media.*** Please follow me on both my Facebook and Twitter accounts!

***My office is here to help.*** Please know that my staff and I are here, as always, to help you however we can. Though my staff are working remotely, please continue to call the District office at 903-628-0361 or the Capitol office at 512-463-0692.