



# GENE WU

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ DISTRICT 137



Issue 7

August 2015

## NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends,

Thank you to everyone who came out to our Post-Session Legislative Town Hall last month. Nearly 50 people attended and we had a great discussion about the issues and legislation that we worked on during the 84th Legislative Session. There were a lot of great questions and I hope to hear from more of you in the interim as we continue our work.

Even though the next regular session of the Texas Legislature reconvenes in January 2017, my staff and I have not stopped working for you.

This month, we helped our kids and families prepare for another school year at two community events in the District: the WalMart Back To School Health Fair hosted at the Baker Ripley Neighborhood Center, and the Annual Back to School Drive, Health Fair and Business Expo hosted at PlazAmericas Mall. These events helped thousands by providing free supplies, resources, and support to families in need.



Rep. Wu volunteers at the Back to School event at PlazAmericas by distributing clothes and supplies to kids.

We have also been following a number of important issues, including: reviewing jail standards, safety, and reform; ensuring birth certificates for U.S. citizen children; and the impact of Medicaid reimbursement rate cuts in acute care therapy services. Recent stories at the national, state, and local level have also prompted me to release public statements to advocate on behalf our communities.

Please enjoy the seventh edition of our E-Newsletter. To view previous E-Newsletters, please visit my [Texas House Member page](#).

Sincerely,

Gene Wu, State Representative - District 137

### Office Contact Info:

District137.Wu@house.state.tx.us  
<http://www.house.state.tx.us/>

### District Address:

6500 Rookin, Building C  
Houston, TX 77074  
(713) 271-3900  
(713) 271-3902 Fax

## IN THIS ISSUE:

### Local

- Re-cap of recent Back-to-School events in Southwest Houston
- HISD Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) Program
- UPCOMING EVENT: HISD Grads Within Reach Walk on Saturday, September 12th
- Southwest Houston celebrates Mahatma Gandhi monument to greet visitors to the Gandhi/South-Asia District
- Houston Public Library services - a great community resource
- Rep. Wu Supports the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance

### State

- County Affairs Committee: in wake of Sandra Bland's death, momentum builds for jail reform
- DSHS denies birth certificates to U.S. citizen children born to immigrant parents
- HHSC and Medicaid reimbursement rate cuts in acute therapy services

### National

- The 50th Anniversary of Medicare and Medicaid
- The U.S. Fifth Circuit Affirms Need for Voting Rights Act
- Rep. Wu Comments On the Term 'Anchor Babies'



## Back-to-School Community Events

On August 15th, we participated in The Baker-Ripley Neighborhood Center for their annual **Walmart Back to School Health Fair**. The following weekend, we supported the **Annual Back to School Drive, Health Fair and Business Expo** at PlazAmericas Mall.

These events touch thousands of lives and the positive impact they have on our community cannot be overstated. At each event, through the generous sponsorship of numerous organizations and the dedication of countless volunteers, over 3,000 families were connected to resources and information to help prepare them for school. We are so grateful for the meaningful contributions of so many!

My office was honored to be a part of both of these events. We had fun giving back to our community, meeting constituents, and sharing information about our office and the issues!



The HISD HIPPY Program is a school readiness program for 3-, 4-, and 5-year old children that helps parents prepare their preschool child for academic success, free of charge.



HIPPY works through home instructors who are parents from the community that are trained to cover a highly structured 30-week curriculum in English or Spanish. These lessons take place every week for an hour in the parents' home. Parents learn educational activities from lessons taught by the other trained parents, and can practice with their children throughout the week.

Students who participated in the HIPPY program significantly outperformed all HISD kindergarten students in reading and math. The HIPPY program has been at **Gabriela Mistral CEC** and will now be expanding to **Neff Elementary** and **Sutton Elementary**.

I am thrilled that more families in our district will be able to access this program! Interested in becoming a [HIPPY family](#)? Call 713-967-5298 to find out how.

---

## **HISD Grads Within Reach Walk - September 12th**

September is National Attendance Awareness Month. Held every year since 2002, the Grads Within Reach Walk attracts hundreds of community volunteers who team up with school district employees and visit the homes of students who have not yet returned to class by the second week of the regular academic year. This year, the walk is Sept. 12th.

**I urge you to join this community outreach event** to prevent students from dropping out and to get those who have left back in class. My office looks forward to supporting Lee High School and Sharpstown High School in this effort. Please sign up [here](#) to register as a volunteer or contact our office if you are interested in participating!

---

## **Mahatma Gandhi Monument in Southwest Houston**

This month I helped commemorate the unveiling of an important monument at the entrance of the Mahatma Gandhi District.

The Mahatma Gandhi Monument is a wonderful addition to a vibrant cultural district, and its placement is a reflection of neighborhood pride and the dedication of civic-minded residents.

Many thanks to the India Culture Center, City of Houston, Southwest Management District, and the generous donors who all contributed to this notable project.



Our community libraries offer many invaluable resources beyond just checking out books. All you need is a Houston Public Library Card (MY link card). A MY link card is free for all residents and gives access to the entirety of the HPL collection of books, e-books, DVDS, magazines and research materials. You also get access to more than 130 electronic resources and databases, free Wi-Fi and computer access, computer classes, nutrition classes, and so much more.

Visit your [local community library](#) to learn how HPL can help connect you to the world.

## Representative Gene Wu Supports the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO)

The Houston City Council last year adopted the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO). Last month, the Texas Supreme Court ruled that the city must repeal the ordinance or place it on the November Ballot.

HERO protects the rights of everyone who lives and works in the City of Houston. The ordinance provides an extra layer of security against discrimination in city employment, city services, city contracting practices, housing, public accommodations, and private employment. The ordinance specifically protects against discrimination based on sex, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, familial status, marital status, military status, religion, disability, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender identity, or pregnancy.

Houston is among the last major cities in the nation to pass such an ordinance. If HERO is repealed, victims of discrimination would only be able to rely on the federal courts for redress; as the State laws provide little protection against discrimination.

*“I’m proud to support Houston’s Equal Rights Ordinance. Houston has worked so hard to be known as an international city that attracts businesses from all around the world. Like real heroes, this ordinance protects everyone from discrimination and bigotry. We want the world to know that they will find a warm and welcoming home in Houston; a place where everyone has the opportunity to be successful.”*

- State Rep. Gene Wu

---

## County Affairs House Committee Hears Testimony on Jails

I am a member of the Texas House Committee on County Affairs. Last month we heard testimony on jail standards, mental health, and officer conduct. The hearing followed the disturbing arrest and subsequent tragic death of Sandra Bland in the Waller County Jail.



**Texas jails have become modern debtors’ prisons – those with means can leave, but the poor languish.**

Approximately 61% of people in Texas county jails are being held pre-trial; meaning that a court has not found them guilty of any crime. Many others sit in jail because they are unable to pay fines and fees assessed by the court.

**Suicide is the leading cause of death in local jails, and more than a third of jail deaths occur within the first 7-days after booking.**

The hearing also highlighted pervasive mental health issues in jails. Following Bland’s death, the Texas Commission on Jail Standards found the Waller County Jail to be noncompliant with mental health standards; citing a lack of staff training on mental health and failure to check on inmates every hour.

Bland’s tragic death highlights injustices in Texas law enforcement and jail systems. I will be working with my colleagues over the interim and during the next legislative session to push for meaningful change.

## DSHS Birth Certificate Denial Issue

In late July, there were reports that the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) may be denying birth certificates to certain U.S. citizen children of undocumented parents. Children born on U.S. soil are citizens under the 14th Amendment of the constitution.

The denial of birth certificates to U.S. citizen children born to immigrant parents not only jeopardizes their dignity and well-being, without them they are left functionally stateless, with no proof of identity, nationality, or formal ties to their family.

Rep. Wu joined several other legislators who have expressed their objections to the practice, and called for immediate explanation and action from DSHS.

*"I am asking the Department to be transparent about when and why it initiated this policy. DSHS is not above the law, and needs to come into compliance with the US constitution and issue birth certificates to all citizens. If DSHS' motives are discriminatory or political in nature, we want to know that and take appropriate action to hold the agency accountable."*

- State Rep. Gene Wu



*Photo from HHSC July 20, 2015 Public Hearing on Proposed Medicaid Payment Rates for Physical, Occupational, and Speech Therapy*

## HHSC Medicaid Reimbursement Rate Cuts

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) has proposed cuts to Medicaid reimbursement rates for physical, occupational, and speech therapy. Such cuts are projected to result in a tremendous loss of access to medically necessary services for tens of thousands of low-income children with developmental delays and special needs. Rep. Wu voiced his concerns and opposition to these rate reductions in a letter to Commissioner Traylor. Vulnerable Texans must be able to have access to these health services.

Medical communities agree that children with disabilities reach their fullest potential when they have access to early and consistent intervention. Kids who use these evidence-based therapies are more likely to succeed in school and later in the workforce, which reduces their dependence on care and services later in life.

*"This rate cut will have the worst impact on low-income families who will no longer have access to necessary care. It is our state's legal and ethical obligation to ensure access to care for children with special needs."*

- State Rep. Gene Wu

## **Rep. Wu on the 50th Anniversary of Medicaid and Medicare**

July 30 marked the 50th anniversary of two landmark pieces of legislation authored by Texas democrat, President Lyndon B. Johnson. Medicaid and Medicare became law on July 30, 1965 creating health insurance programs for low-income and elderly Americans.

Today, Texas has the highest rate of people without health insurance in the nation. The Affordable Care Act provides states with additional federal funding to expand their Medicaid programs to provide health insurance to low-income Texans. Texas has refused to expand Medicaid or implement a state health insurance exchange leaving many Texans in a coverage gap with limited access to health care.

*“So many people in our district work 12 and 14 hour days to provide for their families. When they get sick, we just tell them to ‘tough it out’ because they can’t afford basic health coverage. Every Texan who earns an honest day’s wage should be able to get basic medical care. When hardworking Americans reach retirement, they have earned the vital benefits of hospital and medical insurance, and affordable prescription drugs. We must ensure that this health coverage is protected for future generations. Health care is a right, not a privilege. It should be available to all Texans, regardless of their age or income.”*

- State Rep. Gene Wu

---

## **The U.S. Fifth Circuit Affirms Need for Voting Rights Act**

August 6th marked the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act which was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Most notably, the Act has accomplished greater access to the ballot box by eliminating obstacles used to keep racial and ethnic minorities from registering to vote.

On the eve of this historic anniversary, the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Texas’ Voter ID law has a “discriminatory effect” that violates Section Two of the Voting Rights Act. This ruling strikes down one of the most onerous and controversial voting laws in the nation.

*“Our democracy owes much to the Voting Rights Act for providing greater access to the ballot box. Today’s ruling by the Fifth Circuit affirms the continued need for strong protections of our right to vote.” Wu adds, “We should protect our voting process, but that effort should be weighed carefully against measures that disenfranchise voters because they are poor or live in rural areas.”*

- State Rep. Gene Wu

---

## **Rep. Wu Comments On the Term 'Anchor Babies'**

Under current immigration law, a U.S. Citizen child can only petition for their parents after their 21st birthday. In addition, undocumented immigrant parents would need to return to their native country for at least 10 years to be eligible to re-enter. Combined, if a parent were to use their child to keep them in the US, then they have, at minimum, a 31 year wait.

*“Virtually every American is an immigrant or a descendant of an immigrant, but, every political season, some politician will think it’s funny to pin the ills of the nation on immigrants because they are convenient targets. America was built and made strong on the backs of immigrant labor. Latinos and Asian immigrants alike have contributed immeasurably to the wealth and prosperity of this great nation.”*

- State Rep. Gene Wu

---