



GENE WU

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ DISTRICT 137



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NEWSLETTER

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Child abuse and neglect is a national and statewide problem reaching epidemic proportions with disastrous consequences. It inhibits children from reaching their full potential and fractures the moral fabric of our society.

If you suspect the abuse or neglect of a child, you are required by Texas law to report it immediately. The Texas Department of Family Protective Services (DFPS) is the state agency responsible for investigating reports of abuse and neglect of children.

Report Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation

By phone: 1-800-252-5400

Online: [Texas Abuse Reporting Website](#)

The child population in Texas is 7,311,923. DFPS investigated 176,868 allegations of child abuse or neglect in Texas last year. 171 children died at the hands of a parent or other caregiver. 66,721 children and teens were victims of abuse or neglect and 17,151 were removed from their homes for their own protection. The table below shows how Houston compares to the statewide numbers.

	Texas	Houston
Child Population	7,311,923	1,804,107
CPS Investigations of Child Abuse/Neglect	176,868	34,691
Victims of Child Abuse/Neglect	66,721	9,629
CPS Removals	17,151	n/a
Child Fatalities due to Abuse/Neglect	171	34

**Source: DFPS 2015 Annual Report and Data Book*

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UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

- **Friday - Saturday, April 22-23**
Dolores Huerta
La Voz de las Mujeres
- **Saturday, April 30th**
24th Annual Gulfton Festival
- **Saturday, May 7th**
Open House for Texas House District 137

There are 31,197 children in foster care in Texas, and even more that rely on DFPS as their legal custodian. These children are wards of the state and more must be done to protect them.

State Representative Gene Wu has been working to improve the child welfare system and combat child abuse in his political tenure. In his first session, Rep. Wu authored a bill to create an independent ombudsman office for DFPS in an effort to improve the agency's accountability and transparency in dealing with complaints. A version of this proposal became law with the passage of SB 830 in the last legislative session (Note: Rep. Wu was a joint author for HB 1371, the House companion bill carried by Rep. Harold Dutton). The bill mandated a confidential reporting process for children and protected DFPS whistleblowers who experience or notice child abuse in foster care. Proposals like this one and many others were celebrated by child advocates who considered last session a success in bringing about change to the child protection system. But there is much more work to be done.



Rep. Wu's son, Winston, on opening day of the 84th Legislative Session, January 13, 2015.

In December, a federal judge ruled that the Texas foster care system was broken saying, "years of abuse, neglect and shuttling between inappropriate placements across the state has created a population that cannot contribute to society, and proves a continued strain on the government through welfare, incarceration or otherwise."

Rep. Wu is focusing on developing proposals during the current interim, and anticipates bigger reforms to the Texas foster care system next session. With the recent appointment of new leadership for DFPS by the Abbott administration, and announcement from House Speaker Joe Straus that child protection would be a priority for the Texas House in the next session, Rep. Wu is hopeful that the broken system will be overhauled.

"We are keeping a close eye on both the federal lawsuit and the reforms by the state. This is the system that protects the most vulnerable Texans. We will continue to be a part of the reform process for CPS."

Elderly Woman in Harris County Guardianship



Doris Davis is an 87 year old woman in Houston who went to the hospital for a bad headache. She was discharged to a nursing home where she was declared incapacitated. Now, two years later, Ms. Davis is still there. After being forced into Harris County guardianship against her will, the county had plans to sell her home to pay for her guardianship. Thankfully, a neighbor intervened and not only stopped the sale of her home, but found another physician who determined Ms. Davis capable of living on her own. While guardianship is a useful tool for those who need it, it can be a costly and excessive restriction for those who do not.

In the news: [Elderly Woman Claims Guardianship Program Holding Her Hostage](#)

"This upsetting situation was caused by failures of many people who just didn't care. But Ms. Davis will be saved by a neighbor who did care. If you know an elderly person who is in trouble or needs help please contact our office immediately."

- State Rep. Gene Wu

Last session, the Texas Legislature made several judiciary reforms related to court appointed attorneys including: requiring faster appointment upon defendant request, increasing funding to small county's public defenders offices, and shifting the appointment process to the public defender's office rather than the court in most cases. A significant bill passed last session was HB 39, which made a number of changes to the guardianship process in order to ensure it was used only as a last resort and prevent its improper use. While these new laws certainly help vulnerable defendants receive quality legal counsel, Ms. Davis' case illustrates the need for a closer review of this process and possible reforms next session.

[Click here to learn more about adult guardianship services in Texas.](#)

Texas House Select Committee on Federal Environmental Regulation

Last year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed new rules to reduce ozone levels from 75 to 70 parts per billion through the Clean Power Plan, the National Ambient Air Quality Standards, the "Waters of the United States" rules, and new standards regulating methane emissions from the oil and natural gas sector. It has long been understood that ozone contributes to asthma and lung disease because it is not water soluble. When inhaled, it can become trapped in the lungs and airways making it difficult to breathe.

The EPA estimates that on average the excess mortality risk from ozone increases .5% for every 20 parts per billion increase in ground-level ozone. Despite decades of research reporting the deleterious impact of ground-level ozone on human health, Texas is suing the EPA calling the regulation "arbitrary," "capricious" and "an abuse of discretion".

In November, Speaker Straus formed the Texas House Committee on Federal Environmental Regulation to investigate how federal environmental rules affect the state and its economy. Rep. Wu was appointed to serve on this select committee. On March 29, 2016 the committee heard testimony from three state agencies: the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUCT), and the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT).

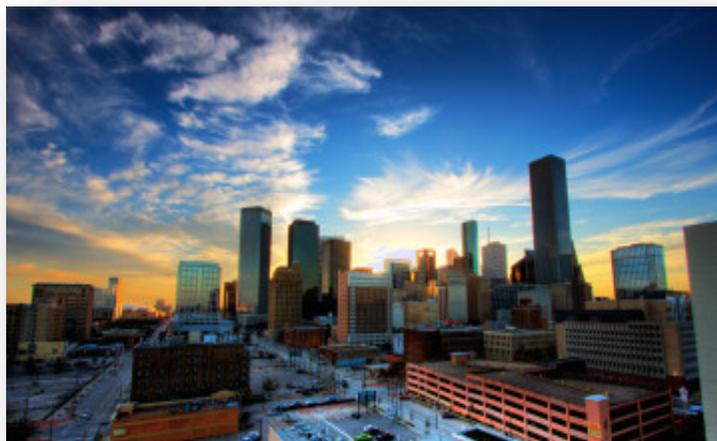


Photo credit: [telwink/flickr](#)

While the meeting was mostly informational in nature, some of the testimony was greatly concerning, especially to anyone concerned about Houston's air quality. TCEQ Chairman Bryan Shaw testified that the federal regulations would not lead to any public health benefit and would put undue burden on the struggling oil and gas industry. TCEQ's chief toxicologist, on the basis of a single cherry-picked 2009 study, estimates lowering ozone levels will actually increase deaths in the state. Baffled by TCEQ's position, Rep. Wu challenged by saying, "Thirty years of research and medical evidence says [ozone] does have an impact...so, if you find any of those studies, let me know."

[TCEQ Chairman: Reducing Smog Will Make Texans Sick](#)

Rep. Wu values public health and understands that when we jeopardize air and water quality, we jeopardize human life: "I know some of the federal regulations can be onerous and costly to state government and business. But we should always be careful in measuring cost versus benefits when the regulations deal directly with the quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink."

Workforce Solutions Roundtable

Workforce Solutions, the public workforce system in the 13-county Houston-Galveston region, helps employers meet human resource needs and area residents build careers, so both can better compete in the global economy. Workforce Solutions is funded by state and federal tax dollars, which are redirected back into the Gulf Coast region for employment and job training. Services are offered at no cost.



The Gulf Coast Workforce Board is the local board of directors for Workforce Solutions. With participation from the region's chief local elected officials, the Workforce Board sets the strategic direction for the regional workforce system and guides the area's workforce agenda focusing on four key results: competitive employers, an educated workforce, more and better jobs, and higher incomes.

Rep. Wu attended a recent roundtable to discuss the [2015 Report Card](#) which measures how the Houston-Galveston region fits into the larger global economy. When considering how prepared Texas is for the new economy, the majority of the discussion was focused on the Texas education system.

HB 5, passed in the 83rd Legislative Session, was designed to change the way we think about high school graduation paths and workforce development in Texas. The landmark legislation allows students more flexibility and places greater emphasis on the connection between coursework and postsecondary plans, be they college or career.



Employers and business leaders see high quality early education as another critical component to school outcomes and workforce readiness. HB 4, passed in the 84th Legislative Session, established a grant program to incentivize and reward districts who meet certain quality standards by providing additional funding to boost the quality of their pre-k programs. While HB 4 was a step in the right direction, the entire panel was in agreement that Texas needs a more robust pre-k program.

"One of our top priorities next session will be to continue our push for a high quality, full day Pre-K program for all Texans."

- State Rep. Gene Wu

Houston Latino Policy Summit



On Saturday, April 2nd, the Senate Hispanic Caucus hosted the Houston Latino Summit along with Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (TX H.O.P.E.) and other groups.

Panelists at the Summit discussed four main issue areas affecting Latinos in the Houston area: education, economic opportunity, health care, and immigration.

With over half of District 137 residents being of Hispanic origin, these issues are especially significant.

In preparation for the next legislative session, the Senate Hispanic Caucus is holding similar summits throughout the state in an effort to discuss and collect feedback on the most important issues facing the Latino community. State Senator Sylvia Garcia, Vice Chair of the Senate Hispanic Caucus, moderated the discussion. Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner addressed the audience as the keynote speaker for the event, highlighting the importance of improving opportunities for all Houstonians.

As a state, Texas remains well below average in terms of access and quality of early childhood education opportunities. District 137 also trails the state average in health insurance coverage, in large part due to a shortage of affordable options that hit our new immigrant communities hardest.



Pictured left to right: Dean of the UH Graduate College of Social Work, Alan Dettlaff; Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner; and State Senator Sylvia Garcia.

These shortcomings have the most detrimental impact on our low-income and immigrant families. The discussion at the Summit highlights a number of issues that Representative Wu is committed to improving for our state, our county, and within District 137.

April is Oral Cancer Awareness Month

On Saturday, April 9th in honor of Oral Cancer Awareness Month, the [Greater Houston Dental Hygienists' Society](#) partnered with The Oral Cancer Foundation and Catholic Charities to offer free oral cancer screenings. The event was a great success and they were able to screen 87 individuals.



Oral cancer is not a rare disease. It kills one person every hour of every day in the United States. 48,250 Americans will be newly diagnosed this year alone. Tobacco and alcohol use, and exposure to the HPV-16 virus are the two distinct pathways by which most people come to oral cancer. When found early, oral cancers have an 80% survival rate. Unfortunately, the majorities are found as late stage cancers and this accounts for the very high death rate of about 45% at five years from diagnosis. Late stage diagnosis is occurring not because these cancers are hard to discover, but due to lack of public awareness.

Free oral cancer screenings are taking place throughout this month. Please visit [The Oral Cancer Foundation](#) to find the next free oral cancer screening event in Houston.



Houston Janitors 10th Anniversary Convention

On Saturday, April 2nd, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) celebrated the Houston Janitors 10th Anniversary Convention.

In 2006, Houston janitors launched a victorious campaign to win higher wages, and dignity and respect on the job. Ten years later, the janitors gathered to celebrate past victories, but also to reflect on the future of Houston families, and recommit to fighting for a better future for all.



Janitors celebrate past victories and rally for their future at their 10th Anniversary Convention.

The Texas economy relies on a larger share of minimum- and low-wage jobs than most other states. Yet, we are one of 19 states with a law that prohibits cities from setting their own minimum wage standards, effectively suppressing wages across the state.

There are 400,000 workers in Texas who make at or below the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour – more than any other state – and all of them need a raise. A full-time job paying minimum wage provides an annual income of only \$15,080, which is far below the minimum needed to support an individual, let alone a family. Workers living in Houston need an income of more than \$28,000 a year to meet the basic expenses of housing, food, transportation, and health care. The situation becomes even more challenging for workers trying to support a family.

Representative Wu supports raising minimum wages for working families. No working moms and dads should struggle to provide for their children.

Harris County Wins Grant for Criminal Justice Reform

On April 13th, Representative Wu joined local leaders for a press conference announcing a \$2 million dollar grant to reform Harris County's criminal justice system from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The main goals for reform will be to safely reduce the county's jail population and address racial and ethnic disparities.

As a former prosecutor in the Harris County District Attorney's Office, Rep. Wu is passionate about criminal justice reform. Rep. Wu had this to say about the news: "It is great to see bi-partisan support for these new initiatives at the local level. In the next legislative session, I look forward to building on this progress with criminal justice reforms that make our system more fair and equitable while keeping everyone safe."



Dolores Huerta - La Voz de las Mujeres Civic Engagement Event

Friday, April 22nd from 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Saturday, April 23rd from 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Baker-Ripley Neighborhood Centers
6500 Rookin St, Houston, TX 77074

We are thrilled to welcome to District 137 one of the most revered and celebrated civil rights activists, Dolores Huerta. This event is free and open to the public, and will feature Ms. Huerta, as well as panel discussions on voter outreach, civic engagement, and community mobilization, and more!

Check out the event on Facebook: [Dolores Huerta La Voz de Las Mujeres](#)

- Dolores Huerta -
La Voz de las Mujeres
April 22 & 23, 2016
Neighborhood Centers, Baker-Ripley
6500 Rookin, Houston, TX 77074
Friday, April 22, 2016 from 5:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
Saturday, April 23, 2016 from 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Dolores Huerta
Human rights activist, labor leader and Presidential Medal of Freedom award winner

Register to Vote † Local Vendors
Panel Discussions on Voter Outreach, Civic Engagement and Community Mobilization
DONATE AT <http://bit.ly/DHuerta2016>
With additional support from:

ALUMNI
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"Advocating for the People"
"Providing Services to the underserved."

THE 24TH ANNUAL GULFTON PARADE & FESTIVAL

"STRENGTHENING THE COMMUNITY ONE BLOCK AT A TIME"



Saturday, April 30th - 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

The parade will begin at Benavidez Elementary (6262 Gulfton St) at 11:00am, travel east on Gulfton and end at Burnett Bayland Park, 6200 Chimney Rock, Houston, TX 77081. The festival will begin at 11:30am.

This annual community event raises funds to support the Gulfton HPD Storefront and establishes a healthy relationship between the police and the community. Gulfton is largely Hispanic and has a growing immigrant community.

Law enforcement, governmental, social service agencies and neighboring schools strive to meet the needs of the local community. This event provides agencies the opportunity to meet the families and learn how they can support. The festival will showcase a wide range of these services, children's games, activities, live music and dance performances. At the same time, families will have an opportunity to meet their local police officers and establish a healthy connection with them.

Volunteers are needed to help with event set up and clean up. Contact Sandra Rodriguez at (281) 901-9006.

SAVE THE DATE - District 137 Open House on Saturday, May 7, 2016

What: District 137 Open House and Workshop
When: Saturday, May 7, 2016 at 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM
Where: Sharpstown Community Center, 6600 Harbor Town, Houston, TX 77036

Please join us for our upcoming District 137 Open House and Workshop. We will be focusing on three main policy areas for discussion: public safety, education, and health and human services. There will be brief presentations, followed by break-out sessions. We look forward to visiting with you and getting your input!