



GENE WU

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ DISTRICT 137



Issue 16

May 2016

NEWSLETTER

Congratulations, Class of 2016!

Graduating from high school is an exciting and important milestone. Nearly 10,000 high school seniors from across the Houston Independent School District will receive their diploma this week. We congratulate all of our graduating seniors for this achievement, but I'm especially proud of the students in District 137.

Every graduating senior received a personal letter of congratulations from our office, celebrating their achievement and wishing them the best as they embark on the next chapter of their life.



Rep. Wu with Karol Castro and Ayat Bakora of Liberty HS, and Sandra Aguilar of Middle College HS at HCC Gulfton.

Additionally, we gave special recognition to the top two scholars from HISD schools in Southwest Houston. The following students graduated at the top of their class as the valedictorian and salutatorian. We couldn't be more proud!

Jane Long Academy

Shahrukh Ali and Kinza Rizwan

Lee High School

Oscar Wu and Karim Sabar

Liberty High School

Ayat Bakora and Karol Castro

Middle College High School at HCC Gulfton

Sandra Aguilar

Sharpstown High School

Raven McIntosh and Billy Ramos

Sharpstown International School

MaterDolorosa Osueke and Karen Ortiz

Table of Contents

- Congratulations, Class of 2016!
- Hurricane Season and Emergency Preparedness
- School Finance and the Texas Supreme Court Ruling
- House County Affairs Committee Considers CPS and Other Issues
- District 137 Open House a Success
- Recent events

Hurricane Season and Emergency Preparedness

While Houston is still recovering from the recent flooding, we are now entering Hurricane Season. To identify ways to ensure your safety, please visit ReadyHoustonTX.gov for a full list of resources, online training and information.

Here, you can find:

- A complete Neighborhood Ready Participant Guide to walk you through the process of being prepared for natural disasters.
- Video overviews of how residents can make themselves ready for disasters.
- Links to download mobile apps on your phone.



CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) training is a free 24-hour disaster preparedness training that is geared to the public, but taught by professional first responders and subject matter experts. Weekly topics include: General Disaster Preparedness, Fire Safety & Suppression, Basic Medical Operations, Light Search & Rescue, Disaster Psychology, Incident Command System and Terrorism Awareness.

The training culminates with a mock search and rescue drill where participants apply the concepts and skills introduced in the CERT training in an effort to "do the most good for the most amount of people".

There are two upcoming opportunities to participate and learn how to help your community be better prepared for potential hurricanes, flooding, and other natural disasters that impact our area:

- **June 4 - SW Hispanic CERT (Spanish language training)**
9:00 am - 12:00 pm | Southwest Multi-Service Center, 6400 High Star Dr., Houston, TX 77074
This training is free and open to the community. For further information and to register contact Anny Villanueva at anyv2003@yahoo.com or 832-814-5636.
- **June 18 - Sharpstown Area CERT Training**
9:00 am - 12:00 pm | HPD Midwest Patrol Station, 7277 Regency Square, Houston, TX 77036
Training is free and open to the public. Adults and responsible youth invited. To register contact Charmaine LeBlanc at cleblanc@libertyoffice.com or 281-687-1323.

School Finance and the Texas Supreme Court Ruling

The Texas Supreme Court recently ruled against Texas school districts to determine that the financing of public education is constitutional. The lawsuit dates back to the end of the 2011 legislative session, when \$5.4 billion was cut from public education. While the result is very disappointing, the court's opinion still leaves the legislature a great deal of guidance in areas to improve upon.

The most recent legislative sessions have begun to make up for a portion of those cuts. But our schools are still a long way away from being funded adequately. The future of our workforce, our economic wellbeing, and our ability to continue growing depends on how much we're willing to invest in Texas' 5.2 million schoolchildren.

"More than 2/3rds of all school districts in the state joined in this law suit. While the ruling upholds that our state's public school funding system is technically constitutional, the court agreed there was immense room for improvement. I hope that the 2017 Legislature will have the courage to solve this problem and not use the court's ruling as an excuse to shortchange our schools." - Rep. Wu

Also recently, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance to schools on how to ensure transgender students are not subject to discrimination. That led to threats that Texas will walk away from more than \$10 billion in federal education funding. Texas has since filed a lawsuit to block the federal government's guidelines regarding the civil rights of transgender students in public schools.

Last week, Representative Wu joined fellow legislators and education leaders in Houston to discuss the school finance ruling and the state's response to the federal guidelines that prevent discrimination against transgender students.

"LGBT students are suffering from too much bullying as it is. These guidelines are meant to help schools provide safe environments for all students. I am extremely disappointed that the state is choosing to reject nondiscriminatory guidelines and jeopardize federal education dollars. We should be focusing our energies on how to bring our state up from 38th in the nation on school spending." - Rep. Wu



Rep. Wu stands with local leaders in Houston at a press conference to discuss school finance on May 16th. Pictured left to right: HCC Trustee Zeph Capo, HISD Trustee Anna Eastman, Sen. Sylvia Garcia, Sen. Rodney Ellis, Rep. Borris Miles, NAACP Houston President Dr. James M. Douglas, HISD Trustee Jolanda Jones, and HCC Trustee Robert Glaser.

House County Affairs Committee Considers CPS and Other Issues

On Monday, May 16th, the House Committee on County Affairs met to review the following timely issues: the role of counties in Child Protective Services (CPS) cases; Texas' Healthcare Transformation and Quality Improvement Program (1115 Waiver); and a review of current programs aimed at decreasing the risk and impact of wildfires, floods, and other natural hazards.



Rep. Wu in a County Affairs hearing (July 2015). Photo credit: KTRK Photojournalist, Willie Dixon.

The segment on CPS cases is particularly important given the recent ruling that Texas' foster care system violates children's right. In the hearing, we heard directly from the Harris County Attorney's Office and the state Department of Family Protective Services about the high caseloads and working conditions that contribute to CPS workers stretched too thin to manage the number of cases on hand. Although CPS caseworkers are among the most committed and hard-working state employees that we have, they are also among the most over-worked, with caseloads nearly double the national standard.

Governor Greg Abbott and Lt. Governor Dan Patrick have stated their intention to make CPS reform a priority in the next legislative session.

Representative Wu has successfully passed into law several proposals in the last two sessions that protect children: 83R HB 3259, 84R HB 331, 84R HB 418, and 84R SB 830 (84R HB 1371, related to 83R HB 2218). In preparation for next session, Rep. Wu is focusing on developing policy ideas to fix the foster care system.

District 137 Open House a Success

On Saturday, May 7th, over fifty District 137 residents attended our Open House to discuss issues that are important for Southwest Houston and the state of Texas. We received a great deal of feedback from the event that will help guide us in the next legislative session. We thank everyone who was able to attend, and are grateful to have had some exceptional speakers as we focused on the following policy areas:



Education

District 137 includes parts of Houston ISD and Alief ISD, both of which are characterized by the diversity of their student populations. Alief Superintendent H.D. Chambers has been a leader in transforming public education to meet the workforce needs of tomorrow. Chambers offered his insight on the challenges we have as a state to educate 5.2 million children and also spoke about the significant reforms enacted during the 2013 legislative session.



Health Care

Freddy Warner, System Executive for Memorial Hermann Healthcare System and Januari Leo, Government Relations for Legacy Community Health Services both discussed issues surrounding public health. Memorial Hermann is the largest health care provider in the region and Legacy has three clinics in District 137 that provide a full range of services for the uninsured and underinsured in our community.



Warner discussed the cost of health care and the burden on hospitals in providing indigent care for Texas' large uninsured population and gave an overview of the funding battles over how the state pays for our health care systems. Leo talked about the different programs and services offered by Legacy. Both Warner and Leo discussed the impact of Texas' refusal to expand Medicaid and the overwhelming strain it puts on our hospitals, clinics and healthcare system as a whole.



Public Safety

Celena Vinson, Assistant County Attorney discussed nuisance abatement through civil lawsuits and the different tools that can be used to fight illegal game rooms, gang activity, human trafficking, and other related crimes. Houston Police Lieutenant H. H. Conn talked about law enforcement efforts to build relationships in the community and the support her officers receive in return.

Recent events



Rep. Wu and fellow Houston legislators at the State of the City event.

On May 4th, Mayor Sylvester Turner delivered his first address at the annual **State of the City** event. Mayor Turner previously served as a member of the Texas House of Representatives. Representative Wu and fellow Texas House colleagues attended to hear his plan for the city over the next two years.

Mayor Turner discussed the city's response to the recent flood, announced former City Councilman Steve Costello as Houston's new flood czar, highlighted the success of his pothole repair initiative, and shared his strategy to address the city's finances.

[Click here to read Mayor Turner's State of the City speech.](#)

At a luncheon on May 20th, police officers, fire fighters, and members of the clergy gathered to recognize outstanding individuals for their service through the **Police and Clergy Alliance (PACA)**.

Rep. Wu expressed his gratitude and support for the program which delivers a compassionate approach to prevent crime, enforce the law, and preserve the peace. Through PACA, faith leaders help build trust in the community and provide spiritual and emotional assistance to crime victims.

PACA was created by former Police Chief Charles McClelland, Jr. in 2012. [Click here to learn more about PACA.](#)



Rep. Wu and Gulfton community leader, Sandra Rodriguez.

On May 21st, Representative Wu and staff participated in the 24th Annual **Gulfton Parade and Festival**.

This event celebrates the Gulfton neighborhood and showcases different organizations working together to support the community. It also raises money to support our law enforcement at the Gulfton HPD Storefront and their work in building community relationships.

We led the parade on bicycles, traveling east on Gulfton Street from Benavidez Elementary to the festival at Burnett Bayland Park. At least 300 people came out and enjoyed the live performances, games and activities; and accessed a plethora of community resources regarding health and wellbeing, education, transportation, youth programs, and community advocacy groups like the Gulfton Super Neighborhood Council.

We had a great time and look forward to next year's event!