



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
JAMES WHITE

CORRECTIONS - CHAIR
INTERNATIONAL TRADE &
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

DISTRICT 19
HARDIN, JASPER
NEWTON, POLK, TYLER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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85th Legislative Session Comes to an End; Sine Die
- Final Legislative Update -

(Austin, TX) - The 85th Legislative Session has adjourned sine die, a Latin phrase, that means “without a day.” Myself along with my other 149 colleagues spent 140 days under the State Capitol discussing legislation that will go into effect in the coming months. I was proud to pass many pieces of conservative commonsense legislation, which will help our youth in the foster and juvenile justice systems and improve public safety and rehabilitation in our adult criminal justice system. I was also proud to co-author, joint author, and vote for bills that will boost our local prosperity, secure our Texas border, provide testing relief for our public education students, protect our 2nd Amendment rights, uplift religious freedom and the sanctity of life, and preserve our states’ rights. Lastly, I was honored to chair the House Corrections Committee. I am proud of the work that the committee achieved in promoting public safety and look forward to our interim work over the next few months.

The House passed our most important and only bill, the State Budget (Senate Bill (SB) 1), required by the Texas Constitution. SB 1 appropriates about \$107 billion in General Revenue and almost \$1 billion from the state’s Economic Stabilization Fund (also known as the Rainy Day Fund). Including federal funds and other dollars, the budget totals \$217 billion. This is \$1 billion dollars less than the previous biennial budget.

The Legislature and Governor Greg Abbott have made it a priority during this year’s legislative session to improve Child Protective Services (CPS) and the state’s foster care system. The budget provides an additional \$508 million for child protection, including \$88 million in new funding for almost 600 CPS caseworkers and \$85.4 million to enhance foster care provider rates. The budget also has \$32.5 million in additional support for kinship care or for family members who take in abused children.

The additional CPS caseworkers are in addition to the 829 new caseworkers that state leaders authorized in late December and that legislators formally approved with the passage of House



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Bill (HB) 2, which is the supplemental budget for the rest of the current fiscal year ending on August 31.

I was proud to be an author, joint-author, and co-author of legislation that will make our foster care system more efficient. This session, I authored HB 928, which will assist foster care youth through the college admissions process. I also authored and passed HB 3338, that will mandate that the Department of Family and Protective Services coordinate getting foster children a proper form of identification when they age out of the system.

I joined as a co-author of HB 1549 and HB 3859 and I co-sponsored SB 11. HB 1549 proposes to improve CPS workforce development through retention and staffing strategies, increase foster care parent recruitment and placements, and better evaluate of Prevention and Early Intervention services and outcomes. HB 3859, seeks to protect the rights of conscience for child welfare service providers. SB 11 creates a community-based foster care system. With the aim of improving the lives of our foster youth, all of these pieces of legislation have passed both chambers of the Texas Legislature. Governor Abbott has either signed them into law or they are pending his review and signature.

Another top priority for the Texas House has been mental health care. The budget provides \$300 million for new construction, significant repairs and increased capacity at state mental health hospitals. It also appropriates \$62.7 million to eliminate projected waiting lists for community mental health services for adults and children and \$37.5 million for a new mental health jail diversion program.

The budget also appropriates \$350 million to increase the contribution rate and address a projected shortfall in TRS-Care, which is the health care program for retired teachers. Without that funding, retired educators would have faced significant increases in their health care premiums and deductibles or the TRS-Care would have just cratered. In addition, the budget forces public community colleges and universities to seek savings and provide more affordable higher education opportunities.

I am thankful for the work of Appropriations Chairman Zerwas and my colleagues on the House budget writing committee. There were many moving parts shaping the budget and I acknowledge the negotiations involved in crafting a budget. I voted for SB 1 conditionally, because House and Senate public education leaders were still discussing public school finance and funding. After finding out that they failed to reach a compromise, I submitted a House Journal statement in opposition to SB 1. I believe this budget does not satisfy the constitutional provisions set out in Article 7, Section 1 of the Texas Constitution which states that "it shall be the duty of the



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Legislature of the State to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools.” This budget has millions of dollars for subsidies to pick winners and losers in the marketplace, but fails to provide the minimal funding commitment for our students in Southeast Texas.

Additionally, HB 2, the supplemental budget provided \$15 million to the Department of State Health Services for a shortfall with State Hospitals and appropriated \$4.5 million to Health and Human Services Commission to provide for Early Childhood Intervention. I appreciate the work that was put into this bill, but ultimately, I was unable to cast my vote in support of it. Throughout the past year, I have heard from parents and had constituents come to Austin to testify against the severe therapy cuts that the Legislature imposed in 2015. These cuts continue to hurt two- and three-year old children. Although child therapy involves medical procedures, the Legislature based these cuts on a highly controversial and questionable study that was not conducted by a medical institution or even medical practitioners. This supplemental failed to restore those cuts that some of the most vulnerable children in my district need desperately. In the future, these cuts will cost the state and local school district taxpayers billions of more in health care and special education costs, respectively.

Aside from the budgetary appropriations, I voted for SB 5 that strengthens our existing photo Voter ID law and attempts to protect it from a federal court challenge. The bill outlines the proper forms of ID that voters may use and requires the Secretary of State to establish a program using mobile units to provide election identification certificates to voters in order to satisfy the requirements of the voter ID law. SB 5 prohibits the Secretary of State from charging a fee for these mobile units. The voting process in Texas demands the highest level of integrity. Voter ID requirements are in place to uphold and protect the most fundamental right of Americans: to protect ballot box integrity. Texans and all Americans are accustomed to presenting valid photo identification in many places to gain access or privilege – in airports, hotels, offices, government buildings, and even courtrooms. The voting process is no less important than any of these and should have the same safeguards to insure the fairest outcome in every election.

Additionally, I joined my House and Senate colleagues in voting for SB 12, which creates a grant program to assist law enforcement agencies with the purchase of bulletproof vests and body armor.

During the last remaining days of the session, a few great Southeast Texans visited their State Capitol. Silsbee native, Kimberly Roach, is a recent graduate of Sam Houston State University, and future graduate student at the Texas A&M Bush School of Government and Public Service. Throughout the session, she interned with the Texas Association of Counties. I thanked her for



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fighting for county government and wished her the best as she continues her studies in College Station.

May usually brings many UIL students to their State Capitol. We visited with band and choir students from Livingston, Silsbee, and Kountze High Schools. The Silsbee choir group sang during their visit in the House Chamber. Later, the Kountze band had the opportunity to perform their ensembles in the Capitol rotunda. It was truly a fitting end to a long session.

During the legislative interim, both my Capitol and Woodville offices are open to those who need assistance. If there is anything I can ever do for you do not hesitate to contact us at 512-463-0490 or 409-283-3700.

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