

SAM HARLESS

State Representative District 126
May 2021 Newsletter



Texas House of Representatives



**Texas
House District
126**

**News
and
Information**



The Final Month - Down to The Wire

The 87th Session has since passed into history and as is the norm, many more bills die than pass. This session started off pretty normal, other than the impact of COVID on the budget and operation of the legislature under the mask mandate. That was right up until the big freeze in mid-February, which not only cost the lives of over a hundred people, but caused damages across the state totaling nearly \$300 billion.

As a result, the focus of the entire Texas Legislature immediately shifted to

identify where failures occurred and address remedies that would provide for a more enduring and sustainable electrical energy industry, but also a better methodology for operational oversight. Every one of the board members on ERCOT and the PUC have been replaced. Improper action by ERCOT management revealed a number of weaknesses in our grid that this legislature has tried to address. Later on, we will do a deeper analysis of bills that passed addressing this issue.

We wrapped up the session on another low note as Democrats staged a walkout over Senate Bill 7, the "Election Integrity Bill". This was their first walkout in 18 years, choosing to abandon all legislation remaining on the calendar, rather than be forced to take a vote on the issue. Bills that had taken months going through the process all died for lack of a quorum.

Constituent Issues

One of our responsibilities is to coordinate and direct our constituents towards resources at other agencies to resolve their complaints. A couple of recent examples would be a homeless camp under the bridge at Theiss Gulley and Louetta. We reached out to the Harris County Sheriff's Office and coordinated with the Precinct 4 Commissioner's Office and Harris County Flood control to address the complaint. The Sheriff's Homeless Outreach Team directed the homeless individuals to the appropriate resources and Flood Control cleared out the debris under the bridge. A follow-up call on this complaint was received after a fire was observed under the bridge and the same resources were marshaled to respond.

Another example would be a complaint of alcohol sales to underage kids, also on Louetta. We reached out to Constable Mark Herman's Office and the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission. As a result of their investigations, an arrest was made at the location for sales of alcohol to minors.

Before and during the session, we have handled numerous requests for assistance in dealing with unemployment claims with the Texas Workforce Commission, as well as fraudulent claims involving identity theft.

Major Legislative Issues

Voter Integrity - Much of the intended legislation focused on voter integrity was contained in the omnibus Senate Bill 7 that died with the Democrat walkout just before midnight. The absence of a quorum killed all legislation on the calendar from that point on. A handful of the individual issues were passed in other bills.

No P. O. Box Voter Registration – SB 1111 by Sen Bettencourt prohibits a voter to register using a commercial P. O. Box as a valid registration address. This new law provides a list of documents with addresses to be used as evidence of a voter's residence address for purposes of a voter's response to a residence confirmation.

Interpreters – SB 331 amends the Election Code to make any person other than a voter's employer, an agent of a voter's employer, or an officer or agent of a labor union to which a voter belongs eligible to serve as a voter's interpreter. The interpreter is not allowed to go to the ballot station to translate the ballot. This ballot assistance is instead provided by election officers

Ballot By Mail - H.B. 1382 amends the Election Code to require the Secretary of State to develop or otherwise provide an online tool to each early voting clerk that enables a person who submits an application for a ballot to be voted by mail to track the location and status of the person's application and ballot on the secretary's website.

Removing Deceased Voters From the Voter Registration Rolls- HB 1264, which I co-authored with Rep. Keith Bell, which I co-sponsored, requires voter registrars to remove a name from the voter registration rolls by the 7th day after receipt of a death certificate (abstract). It also requires the clerk of the probate court to file a copy of that abstract death certificate with the voter registrar by the 10th of the month following the date when it was prepared.

Removing Invalid Voters from the Voter Registration Rolls – SB 113 by Sen Bettencourt requires voter registrars to cancel the voter registration of an ineligible voter upon the receipt of certain evidence or under certain conditions, such as a determination that a voter's residence is outside the county, the voter is deceased or a convicted felon, or a voter has applied for a limited ballot in another county.

Publicly Funded Lobbying - These bills sought to prohibit the funding of lobbying efforts by units of local government. That would mean that cities, counties, school districts, port authorities, or any other taxing entity could not pay for outside lobbyists with public funds. While there were a number of bills to address these concerns only one actually made it through the process and it eventually died due to calendar restrictions.

A late amendment attached to SB 1 heard on the House floor on budget night addressed unfunded lobbying but allowed it to remain in place only for school districts.

Social Justice Reform - The George Floyd Act was a comprehensive overhaul package of police reform filed this session along with the Botham Jean Act and Sandra Bland Act. These reform bills placed an energized focus on retraining law enforcement as a result of incidents across the country, restricting specific types of restraints, or prohibitions on jailing people for citation type offenses.

A number of bills concentrated on tracking misconduct statewide in one form or another and one included a matrix for disciplinary actions. From taking away pensions to creating statewide databases for such investigations under oversight by the Texas Commission for Law Enforcement all came up short

with some exceptions as law enforcement groups worked with legislators to find compromises to some of the major issues.

Neck restraint restrictions and "no knock warrant" bills made it through both chambers and look like they will become law, as did the "Botham Jean Act" which requires investigative body cam video be maintained throughout investigative police interviews.

Public Camping Ban - This bill puts pressure on larger urban and metropolitan areas to find solutions for the public camping problems that have led to hundreds camping on streets, under bridges, and panhandling on streets and intersections. **Status - Sent to the Governor**

Public Education - Improvements in Public Education funding was assured when the budget passed with an additional \$4.1 billion over the previous biennium. A total of \$53 billion in direct budgeted funds which included as an initial \$11.2 billion of the CARES Act federal funds. Due to federal requirements, only two-thirds of the federal funds are available immediately under grants administered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), with the final one-third to be distributed contingent upon approval by the U.S. Department of Education.

Our attempts to provide a 13th check or cost of living adjustment for our retired teachers fell short due to reduced revenues and loss of time in the session. I'm sure it will be addressed again next session as we search for ways to better support our retired teachers.

Texas Electrical Grid & ERCOT Reform Bills

The Public Utility Commission has a new face with new board members being appointed to replace all those in place during winter storm Uri. Literally dozens of bills were filed in both chambers to address issues that ultimately contributed to the February outages. A number of news articles have addressed the failure of the legislature to enact strict timelines for the completion of the weatherization process, without including the issues that complicate that effort.

Before we can begin that process, we must first identify the critical components by mapping both sections of the energy infrastructure, including both gas and electric. We must also identify which components of the gas system contribute to the critical supply chain supporting electrical generation, to ensure they aren't included in any electrical load shedding. Add to this, the consideration of equipment and gas well aging, and the process becomes considerably more complicated. It may be unreasonable to expect it can all be done in one shot. A committee was established to complete systemwide mapping before January 2022 and report back to the Legislature and the Governor for next steps. Other key provisions of the legislation are outlined below.

I co-authored six of the bills that addressed preparedness, a statewide extreme weather alert system, creation of a Texas Energy Reliability Council, and

restricting regulations for the wholesale indexed products by retail electric providers. A number of these issues were also included in the omnibus Senate Bill 3.

Statewide Emergency Alert System/Communications
Texas Energy Reliability Council Expansion
Priority Designation for Gas providers
Weatherization/Winterization of electricity generators
Transmission Congestion across the state
Critical Supply Chain Management / Resource Mapping
Variable Rate Plan Prohibition

A lot of emphasis has been placed on these same critical areas in other energy bills as well in an omnibus bill, [Senate Bill 3](#) and ERCOT Membership and rules overhaul in [Senate Bill 2](#).

Key Provisions:

- Establishes an emergency alert system to ensure Texans are properly notified when power demand may exceed supply, and directs the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) to categorize winter storms similarly to how hurricanes are categorized
- Formalizes the Texas Energy Reliability Council (TERC) expansion and its duties related to ensuring the state's natural gas needs are met
- Mandates a review of weatherization of generation, transmission, and natural gas facilities and pipelines within the State of Texas. Establishes a penalty for non-compliance and creates a third party audit system to evaluate potential weatherization failures
- Ensures energy customers and generators are informed about procedures for rolling blackouts, and the necessary criteria for designation as a critical customer. Provides for more robust planning and oversight of load shedding during a rolling blackout.
- Requires generators to obtain approval before conducting maintenance during summer and winter peaks
- Requires wind and solar power generators to meet reliability standards by committing to providing a specific load, set by the generator.
- Prohibits retail electric variable rate plans.
- Directs the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) to establish an emergency system-wide offer cap.
- Strengthens reporting related to on-site generation to ensure the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) has a full picture of power generation in Texas.
- Requires the creation of an Energy Supply Chain Mapping Committee to review priority designations for all components of the gas and electric systems.

ERCOT REFORM

IN THE 87TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE

SB 3 REORGANIZING HOW WE MANAGE OUR POWER GRID

SB 3 makes multiple reforms to ensure that Texas is prepared for future natural disasters, including:

Making rules preventing lengthy rolling blackouts

Issuing fines to utilities that are not prepared for severe weather events

Creating a statewide power outage alert system so that utilities can quickly react to outages

Making changes to the membership of the PUC to provide greater government oversight

Ensuring that all services necessary to provide power to Texas' homes and businesses are budgeted for and protected from weather emergencies

Creating the Texas Electricity Supply Chain Security and Mapping Committee to better prepare Texas' grid for potential supply-chain disruptions

SB 2 TARGETED ERCOT REFORM

SB 2 reforms the governance of the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) by:

- ⚡ Establishing residential requirements for board members
- ⚡ Requires members to have expertise in industry-specific areas
- ⚡ Prohibits those with fiduciary standing in the electric market from participating
- ⚡ Creates a board member selection committee with representation appointed by the Governor and legislature

MORE BILLS ON THE POWER GRID

HB 16 protects consumers from sky-high electric bills by banning the sale of wholesale indexed products to residential customers, which can leave them vulnerable to extreme fluctuations in electricity prices.

HB 17 ensures homeowners, builders, and businesses have the ability to decide how best to meet their energy needs by preserving customer choice and access to energy sources in Texas.

HB 1510 provides the funding mechanism necessary to ensure winterization of Texas' power grids.

HB 1520 provides securitization financing for gas utilities to recover extraordinary costs from Winter Storm Uri and requires a study of measures to mitigate similar future costs.

Low Income Tax Credit \ Subsidized Housing Projects

I and my staff met with the representatives of the developers of the **Palladium Willowchase Project**, planned on a 3.24 acre site at the corner of Breton Ridge and Willowchase Blvd. The project was planned with only 10% of those 97 units paying the full market rate. The remainder of the units would be rented at a variable percentage of the market rate, with some percentage that could be partially subsidized.

Since our constituency has previously spoken out against more of these projects in our area, we do not routinely support them. To be fair, we met with the developers to give them an opportunity to generate support from area homeowner groups, utility districts, or businesses and landowners. We received one single email supporting the project out of 140 initial responses from three different homeowner areas. All of the remaining emails were

opposed. As such, our position on the future development of Pallidum Willowchase remains unchanged.

[House Bill 2027](#) - This bill filed by Representative Phillip Cortez, sought to eliminate the input from local jurisdictions and to eliminate hearings and input from the community. It also sought to remove all the points from state legislators from the process and provide for applications to be scored simply by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs straight from the application. We fought back against these major deviations from the existing process and in the end limited the bill to only a change in the limitation to construction of new housing development within a census tract with an existing project.

Our Legislation This Session

Authored Bills

[House Bill 759](#) - Relates to the creation of an electronic process to track school threat assessments created in the last session of the Texas Legislature. The student threat assessment database would take the by-product of the threat assessment teams and allow it to follow the students permanent school record electronically. **Status - Died In Committee**

[House Bill 766](#) - This is the same bill I filed and pursued last session. It creates a database that would contain any conditions of bond imposed on a defendant for violent offenses, like family violence. It is designed to protect the victims of family violence and responding police officers in the time between the initial arrest until a protective order is issued by a court. I worked with Senator Kolkhorst last session to pass a similar bill that was ultimately vetoed by the Governor due to a bad amendment that tainted the bill. Her version in SB 343 this session is coming to the House and I will be co-sponsoring it. **Status - Sent to the Governor.**

[House Bill 1049](#) - This bill clarifies the peace officer authority of deputy sheriffs and constables in the time after the expiration of the term of the Sheriff or Constable at midnight December 31st, until the deputy can be issued a new oath of office for a new term of office or under new office holder. **Status - Sent to the Governor.**

[House Bill 1417](#) - Relates to the development of a campus improvement plan that includes, violence and bullying prevention and intervention on campus for dropout deterrence, including providing a research-based teacher development program that provides teachers continuing education that includes creating a nurturing classroom environment; developing respectful and caring relationships with students; promoting student emotional health, and more. **Status - Died In Committee**

[House Bill 1681](#) - Relates to restrictions for issuance of permits for

construction of any new assisted living facility within a 100 year floodplain. Many of our constituents complained when an assisted living center was built immediately adjacent to Cypress Creek after the Harvey Flood exposing many of our vulnerable seniors to hazards that could impair a rescue in an area known to flood. **Sent to the Governor.**

House Bill 1684 - This is an omnibus crime bill to enhance the penalties for offenses committed during mass riot events. While peaceful protests are an American right, damage to property and injury are not. Last year rioters in Austin did \$60 thousand dollars in damage to our State Capitol and vehicles. **Status - Died in Committee (Several independent bills passed)**

House Bill 2610 - Relates to the time for completion of a fire code inspection following submission of an application request. This bill extends the timeline to 10 business days. **Indoor retail fireworks sites are the sole exception, and remain on a 5 business day timeline* **Sent to the Governor.**

House Bill 3256 - This bill addresses the confidentiality of a public school employee's home or residence address in certain government records and documents to protect their home and families from potential retaliation from school related actions or decisions. It permits them the option to "opt out" of public access to tax records, vehicle registration, or driver's license data. **Status - Died in Senate Committee**

House Bill 3363 - The bill addresses issues currently being experienced by law enforcement and prosecutors in dealing with social media companies such as Facebook responding to search warrants issued under Texas law. **Status - Sent to the Governor**

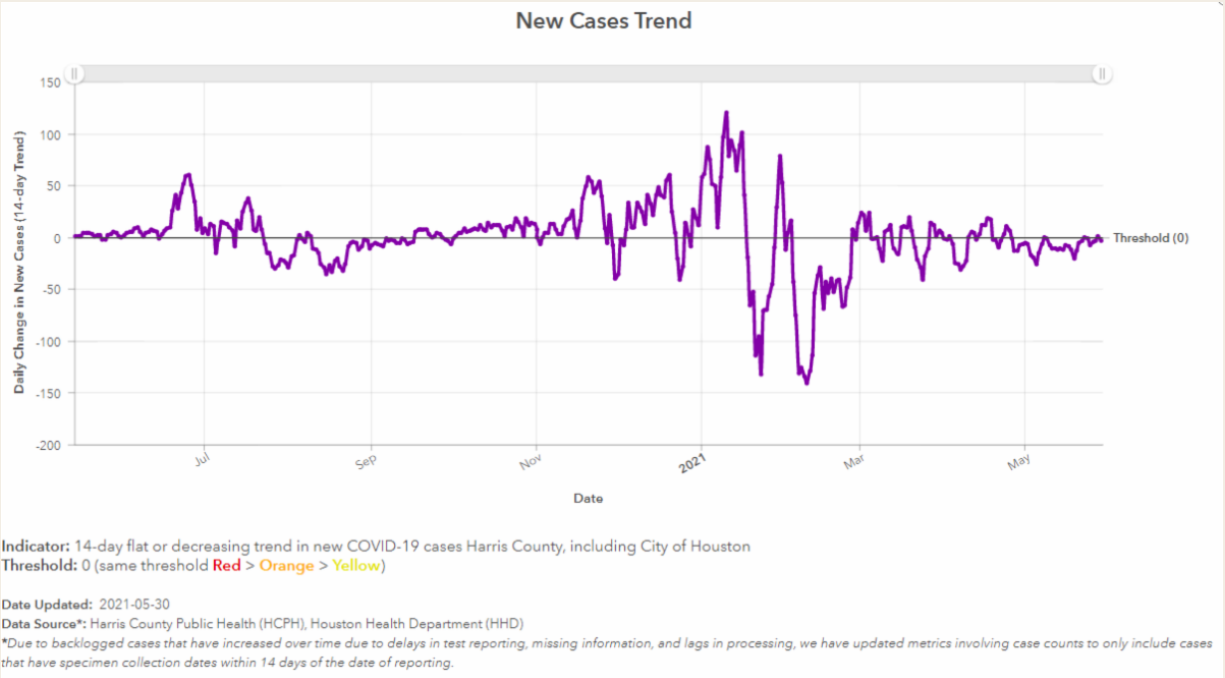
House Resolution 23 - Relates to congratulating the Champions Golf Club on their hosting the 75th Annual US Women's Open the 10th through the 14th of December.

Our 87th Session Statistics

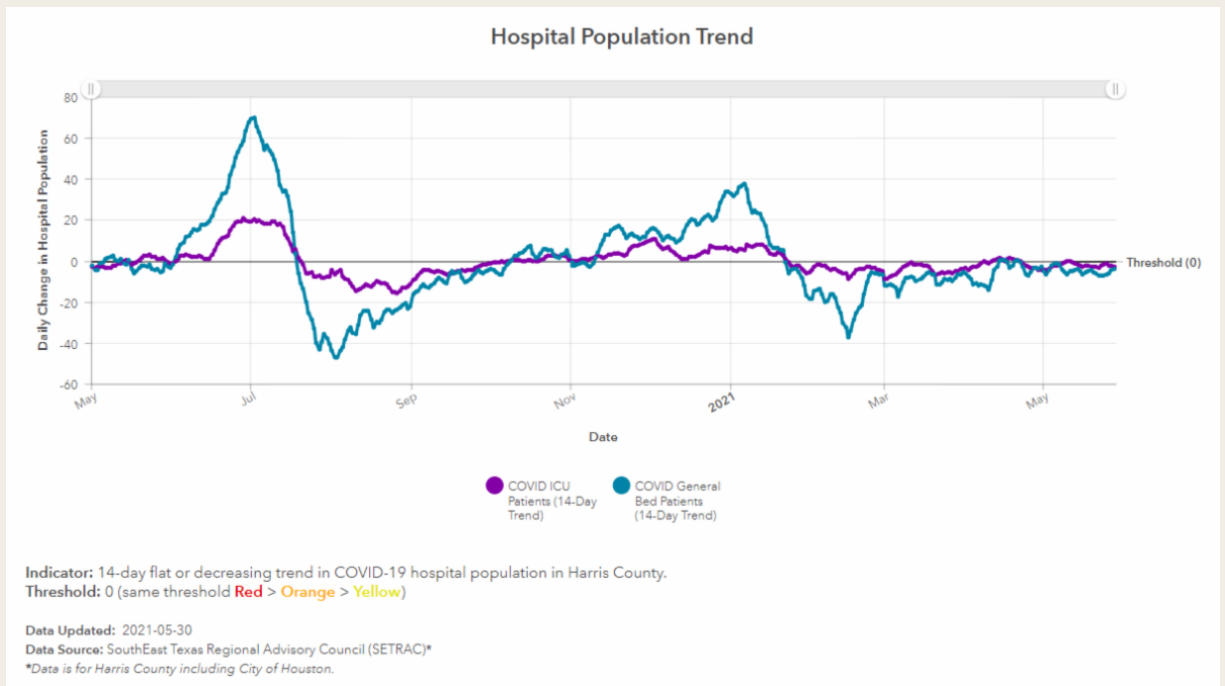
Filed Bills	Conference Committees
Bills Filed - 9 (passed - 5)	House Bill 2483
Resolutions filed - 2	Senate Bill 2
Joint Author - 28	Senate Bill 13
Co-Authored - 75	Senate Bill 23
Sponsored - 2	Senate Bill 1281
Joint Sponsor - 3	Senate Bill 2154
Co-Sponsor - 17	
Amendments - 2	

COVID STATS & INFO

COVID In Harris County



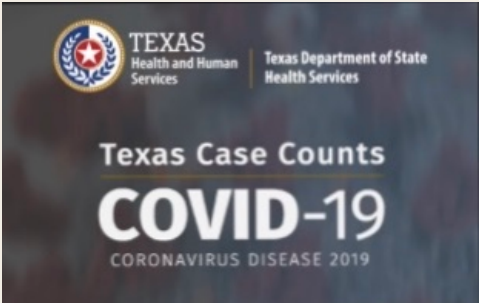
The chart above provides a reflection of the trend for COVID-19 cases reported for all of Harris County during the last 14 days.



The second chart displays the hospital population trend of COVID cases. It should be noted there will be occasional time lags or delays in reporting that can affect total numbers.

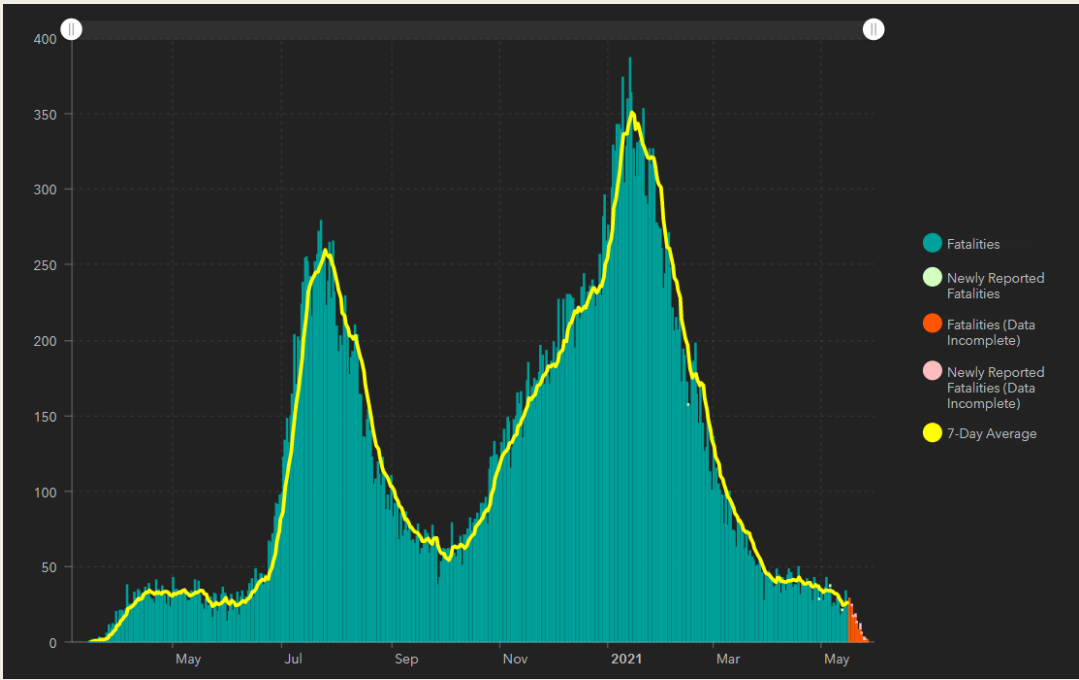
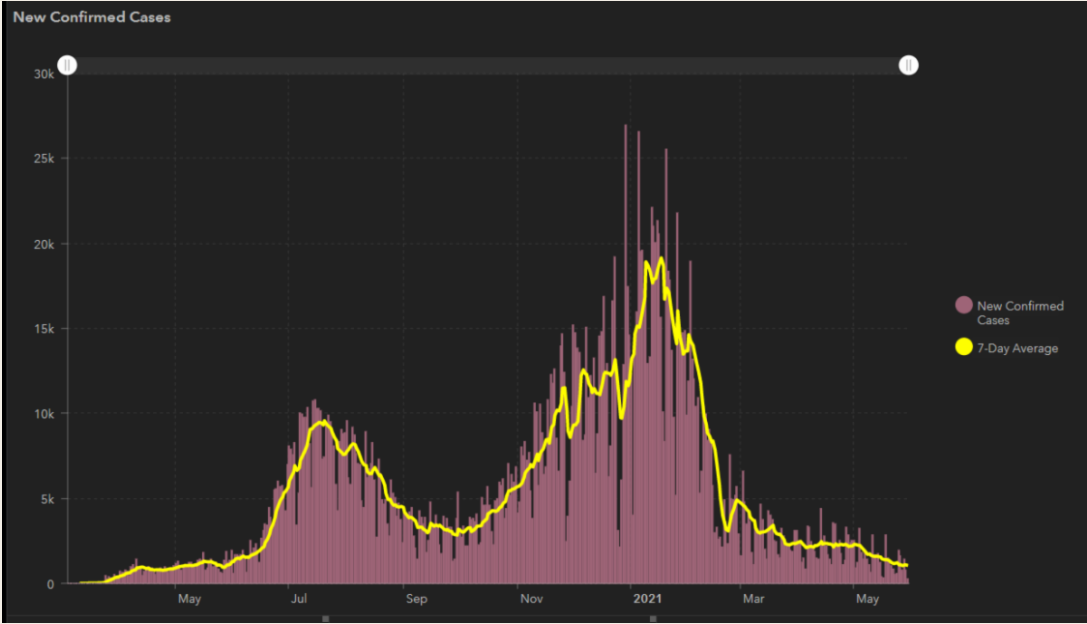
These charts can be found at the Harris County COVID Dashboard www.readyharris.org

Thankfully, Harris county has reduced it's threat level to YELLOW.



Texas COVID Cases Statewide

The two charts below come from the [Texas Covid Dashboard](#) and reflect the recent information on daily reported cases statewide along with the trend in fatalities.



COVID VIRUS & VACCINES IN TEXAS

COVID cases in Texas now number at 2,517,000 confirmed cases and the death toll stands just over 50,000 and everyone 12 years old and older are now approved to receive the vaccines. While these are just statistics, remember these cases and fatalities are friends, neighbors, and loved ones.

Since COVID news and statistics have now become a pervasive part of our daily lives, I will be dedicating less space in this newsletter to the virus and more to the recent legislative session and its impact.

To find a vaccine distribution site near you, the state has created this map:
[COVID Vaccine Provider Map](#)

If you are in the eligible tier, to find doses available in your area, check this link:
[Vaccine Dose Availability Map:](#)

If you need to find a testing site near you, follow this link:
[COVID Testing Locations](#)

As your State Representative, I continue to maintain contact with our county and state officials and provide you details and updates from those calls. I try to keep you posted on updates to news and announcements about local actions and state efforts to contain this virus and to provide the highlights so you aren't inundated and hope you find our information useful. Like many of you I am concerned about the growing restrictions on our lives and businesses and I hope it yields a continued improvement in the spread of the virus in the coming months.

Let me say again how proud I am to be chosen once again to represent the residents of House District 126. I will continue to work to make our business and communities better places to work and live, even during these trying times.

Sam Harless
State Representative, District 126

Please follow my Facebook page for daily updates and new information at:
www.Facebook.com/samharless126

or our Twitter Page at
<https://twitter.com/SamHarless126>

COVID-19 Resources

Texas Workforce Commission

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) continues to explore options to keep the 2021 tax rates as low as possible for Texas employers as Texas and the entire nation continue to deal with the economic disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. [Read more about 2021 tax rates in the press release.](#)

TWC Website to Apply for Benefits: [TWC Unemployment Benefits](#)

Texas Workforce TeleCenter - 800-939-6631

TWC has a new Chat service on their website in the bottom right of the screen, called "Chat With Us". This new function will be able to answer most general questions from individual. <https://www.twc.texas.gov>

Harris County COVID Resources

ReadyHarris Website: <https://www.readyharris.org/#resources>

Harris County Fire Marshal hotline to report businesses who are in violation of the County and State COVID-19 health and safety policies - 832-839-6941

Precinct 4 Commissioner Community Assistance -
[Pct 4 Community assistance](#)

People can sign up to receive emergency alerts from Harris County at: [Ready Harris Alert Signup](#).

Also, 2-1-1 is a resource hotline set up by Harris County. If someone is in need of resources fast they can call that number and they will be connected to resources in their community. They can also text CV19 to 888-777. This hotline is available 24/7.

City of Houston

Houston Public Health Dept - <https://houstonemergency.org/covid19/>

Federal Resources / Websites

CDC- Center for Disease Control: [CDC Coronavirus](#)

Small Business Administration: [SBA](#)

SBA Paycheck Protection Program - [Paycheck Protection Loans](#)
An SBA loan that helps businesses keep their workforce employed (during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis.)

FEMA Corona Response: [FEMA CoronaVirus](#)

Around The District

Our Schools and COVID

Fortunately, we haven't seen the dramatic spike in COVID cases associated with school reopening that was anticipated by some, largely as a result of the planning and preparation by each of our districts, their leadership, and superintendents. We should all be very thankful that they are monitoring the health and safety of our children.

Our School Districts are closely monitoring COVID cases in the staff and student population. You can see the COVID Campus Dashboards for each of our area districts here:

[Klein ISD COVID Dashboard](#)

[Cy-Fair ISD COVID Dashboard](#)

[Tomball ISD COVID Dashboard](#)

[Spring ISD COVID Dashboard](#)

COVID statistics in Texas Public Schools may be found here:

[TEA School Campus COVID Link](#)

Scroll down and you can get Excel reports that are searchable by school district or campus.

In The District

Cypress Creek F.A.C.E. Summer Strings Camp

A promotional banner for the Summer Strings Camp 2021. The banner features a blue background with a red violin on the left and musical notes scattered around. The text is white and yellow. It includes the title 'SUMMER STRINGS CAMP 2021', the description 'Full day summer orchestra camp for 7th & 8th graders. (Daily lunch & t-shirt included!)', the location 'Klein Collins High School', the dates 'July 12 - 16, 2021', and the time '9:00am - 3:00pm'. It also mentions 'Limited enrollment! Sign-up today!' and provides the website 'www.cypresscreekface.org' and phone number '281-440-4850'.

The Summer Strings camp is week-long all day orchestra program for students who are entering 7th and 8th grade. We are focused on helping the students to improve their individual technique as well as provide enrichment opportunities on their instruments.

Camp Dates: July 12 – 16, 2021

All students will participate in Orchestra, sectionals, and technique classes each day. Additionally, each student will select two electives from our list of classes to take each day. They will also all take part in recreation time and lunch is provided for all campers each day.

Cost per student: \$200

[Summer Strings Camp Registration Link](#)

Centrum Summer Strings Website

Pearl Fincher Museum of fine Arts

Summer Art School Program

Registration is now open for the Pearl's Summer 2021 Art Camps! These week-long camps invite young artists to engage their imagination as they explore different mediums and techniques. Sessions are offered for ages 5-8 and 9-12, and provide fun art enrichment experiences for kids in a small group environment. Summer Art Camp is a great way for kids to make art while making new friends! There is a cost associated for registration.

Pearl Summer Camp Info



Pearl Summer Art Camp Registration - Single

Pearl Summer Art Camp Registration - Multiple

Precinct 4 Commissioner Capital Project Status Update

(Our thanks to Pct 4 Commissioner Cagle's Office and Pamela Rocchi)

Due to time and space limitations, we will come back to the Capitol Projects Update next month

Greater Tomball Area



Chamber of Commerce

Greater Tomball Area Chamber of Commerce

Transportation and Mobility Committee

2nd Tuesday of each month
Meeting Location:
29201 Quinn Rd.
Tomball, Texas 77375
Upstairs Conference Room

Tomball Government Affairs Committee

Cy-Fair Chamber of Commerce Transportation/Government Affairs Committee

The committee meets the 1st Thursday of each month to discuss governmental issues that confront their Cy-Fair area. They meet at the Chamber offices located at 8711 Highway 6 North, Ste. 120 Houston, TX 77095.

CY-FAIR HOUSTON Chamber of Commerce

Cy-Fair Chamber Website



Houston NW Chamber Website

Houston NW Chamber Public Safety Forum

Public Safety Forum Meeting:
4th Thursday each month
8:30 am - 9:30 am
Champions Emergency Services District
12730 Champion Forest Dr.
Houston, TX 77066

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