

DISTRICT
76

Legislative Update

REPRESENTATIVE SULEMAN LALANI, M.D.

TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Dear HD 76 Neighbors,

When people elect a representative they are not giving power or authority but rather giving their faith and trust. Thus, with a clear mind and a servant's heart I took the oath of office.

On November 7, 2023 Texans will vote on 14 proposed amendments to the state constitution. Representatives send these special newsletters to constituents as a way to familiarize voters with proposed amendments using neutral, non-partisan language created by the Texas Legislative Council and House Research Organization.

These newsletters are also important for updating constituents on the recent legislative session, especially new legislation and other developments which will impact them. The 88th Legislative Session offers Texans a very mixed picture. Through it all, I worked constantly on behalf of legislation supporting the kind of Texas HD 76 residents want and standing firm against bills that were bad for Texas and Texans.

Everything I have done in Austin has been in service to each resident of the district HD 76, one of the most diverse districts in Texas

It is an honor representing all of you. I've been able to deliver tangible legislative success on my legislative priorities: healthcare, education, mental health, and technology, excepting only common sense firearms policies. Even there I amplified the voices of all those calling for the policies Texans want and need to end gun violence.

Thirty-six pieces of legislation with my name attached as author, co-author, joint author, sponsor, or co-sponsor have been signed into law as well as two riders on the state budget. These bills touch on everything from strengthening postpartum healthcare to increasing higher education opportunities in Fort Bend County to ensuring the Texas workforce is ready for the challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence.

Everything I have done in Austin has been in service to each resident of the district HD 76, one of the most diverse districts in Texas. That diversity is a source of our strength. You are a model of what Texas and America should be.

Remember, this is your Government. You are the most important part of the process. Get involved, stay involved, and make your voice heard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Suleman Lalani M.D.", written in a cursive style.

Suleman Lalani, M.D.
State Representative
House District 76



TEXAS HEALTH & WELLNESS

Healthcare

Texas faces many challenges regarding healthcare and it is a key legislative priority for me. The 88th Legislature accomplished some important things for the health of Texans. HB 12 allows people who have given birth to keep their Medicaid benefits through the first 12 months postpartum. By making assault of on-duty hospital medical personnel a third degree felony SB 840 helps protect those who care for Texans in our hospitals. The legislature helped control medical costs by requiring hospitals to provide patients with itemized bills, enacting a temporary ban on out-of-network ambulance charges, and making it easier to obtain prescription drugs for autoimmune and blood disorders. A pilot project for rural telehealth/telemedicine is a step toward improving healthcare access in many parts of the state. Alzheimer's patients received new protections with increased training requirements for healthcare workers and law enforcement. We helped keep students safe with SB 294 by increasing the types of medications that are allowed on public school campuses to treat respiratory illnesses such as asthma. HB 1164 requires insurance plans to provide coverage for wigs or hairpieces for breast cancer patients in most cases.

Unfortunately, the 88th Legislature also saw many bills introduced, and some signed into law, driven by politicians' personal opinions of Texans' lifestyles rather than sound medical or healthcare policy. The patient-physician relationship, not the legislature, is the proper place for healthcare decisions

I was proud to pass two riders to the budget. One allocates funds for the Family Practice Residency Program, helping Texas retain general practitioners and primary care physicians. The other lays groundwork for Texas' participation in the Strategic National Stockpile for Health Emergency Preparedness.



Meeting with Texas Medical Association on First Tuesday

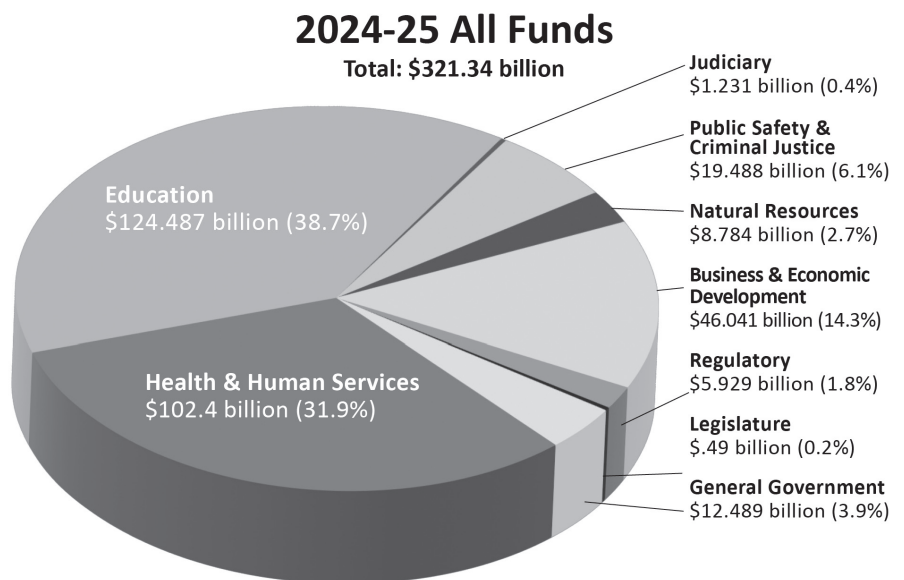
Mental Health

Some metrics place Texas last among states for access to mental healthcare. The 88th legislature will be remembered as the session when the Texas government got serious about mental health. The legislature allocated more than a quarter billion dollars for various initiatives including community mental health grants, increasing capacity and offsetting rising costs for state-supported living centers and mental health hospitals, establishing mobile youth crisis outreach teams, and expanding programs for at-risk children. Texas needs to do more but this is progress.

I am proud to have contributed to this shift by sponsoring SB 532, creating the Mental Health Loan Repayment Assistance Program, increasing the number of mental healthcare professionals in our state by providing incentives for those who are educated in Texas to practice in Texas. SB 532 included my amendment to also require that colleges and universities include a stop at the primary mental health clinic on campus during new student tours, giving them the knowledge that they need before a mental health crisis occurs.

The Budget

The most important task of any legislative session is passing the state budget, always known as House Bill 1, which determines the extent and nature of state expenditures. Indeed, passing a budget is the legislature's only constitutionally mandated task. Under the budget passed by the 88th Legislature, state government will spend \$321.3 billion over the next two years. This legislative session occurred at a time when state government enjoyed an unprecedented budget surplus, which allowed the legislature to do more for Texas and Texans. However, after the passage of HB1, \$32.7 billion of available money remained unspent. The accompanying chart from the Legislative Budget Board shows a general breakdown of the budget passed by the 88th legislature.



Funding excludes Interagency Contracts. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Legislative Budget Board

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Education

Education and Higher Education were personal legislative priorities, and it was an honor to serve on the House Higher Education Committee.



House Committee on Higher Education

The session saw some good education and higher education bills signed into law. This includes a pair of bills I was privileged to be involved with. HB 4005 creates the Texas Competency-Based Education Grant Program, making higher education more accessible and affordable for Texans involved in competence-based education and workforce programs. These programs allow Texans to translate their professional experience into college credit. HB 4363 serves our state's young people by establishing the Future Texas Teachers Scholarship Program.

The University of Houston system, Harris County Community College system, Texas State Technical College, and Wharton College will share in the benefits of \$5 billion in new overall funding, including allocations for low-income student grants and a two-year freeze in tuition. If approved by voters, it also includes a revamped \$3 billion research fund for select institutions, including the University of Houston system.

But all this new money comes with strings attached. New appropriations were tied to bills eliminating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices on college campuses and regulating universities' faculty tenure. Both of these harm Texas universities, and the Texas students who depend on them, by reducing their competitiveness in attracting top quality academic talent.

Public education was a notably bleak spot in the budget, especially at a time of record surplus, seeing no significant new appropriations for our children, our teachers, or our schools. The basic allotment remains at \$6,160 per student which, at a time of concerning inflation, means the legislature effectively decreased school funding. The only notable new appropriations for public education this session came in HB 3, which gives schools \$10 per student and a flat \$15,000 for campus security.

Technology

Technology is a challenging subject for elected officials. It advances so quickly it is difficult for legislatures to keep up with its evolving uses and misuses. Between workforce investment, building on broadband access, and protecting consumers, the legislature did a tremendous job to meet the ever changing needs of the technology sector.

This session I advocated for legislation that would address a myriad of issues associated with managing advances in technology. HB 2060 creates an AI Advisory Council to oversee the growth and regulation in Artificial Intelligence in Texas. Understanding how fundamental AI is becoming to our state's economy and workforce, I amended this bill to require a study be conducted which would allow the Texas Workforce Commission to create a training program for the use of Artificial Intelligence. AI is the defining technology of our day. We must be proactive utilizing the good AI offers while safeguarding Texans from its unintended consequences.

SB 768 protects Texans from cyber-crime by shortening the timeline in which companies must notify the Attorney General and consumers after a data breach involving personal data.



Rep. Lalani introduces first bills on the House floor

The legislature also created the Texas Energy Fund, which dedicates \$5 billion for strengthening the electric grid in Texas and increasing its generation capacity. The funds cannot be used for projects related to renewable energy, batteries, or emissions capture. This is regrettable at a time when renewables are repeatedly demonstrating their value helping the Texas electrical grid cope with summer demand.

Safety

The 88th Legislature's highest-profile safety bill was HB 3, the "School Safety Bill." It requires school districts to maintain at least one armed officer per campus. Rather than insisting upon trained, sworn peace officers to protect our children, the bill regrettably allows the hiring of private security workers to meet this requirement. As the Robb Elementary School Shooting in Uvalde demonstrates, Texas cannot and should not rely on the presence of armed officers as its primary strategy for keeping children safe.

Gun violence is more than a tragedy, it is a public health crisis. Making common sense expressions of our second amendment rights a legislative priority, I introduced six bills promoting steps which polls show are supported by a majority of Americans from both major parties. Regrettably, in a year seeing the Allen Outlet Mall Shooting and the one year anniversary of the Robb Elementary Shooting, none of these bills received a hearing. I will continue to make this necessary legislation a priority in the future.



Senior Texans

The 88th Legislature delivered several pieces of new legislation strengthening quality of life and dignity for Texans 65 and over. HB 25 allows certain prescription medicines to be imported from Canada helping control costs. SB 576 strengthens protections for seniors against financial exploitation. SB 1780 makes permanent the ability of notaries public to remotely notarize will and estate documents.

As seniors were another legislative priority I worked to support and pass legislation that will be of special benefit to Texas seniors. HB 54 increases the monthly allowance for basic needs received by Medicaid recipients in nursing homes. HB 1275 allows qualifying seniors who have had to surrender their driver's license to request a Texas photo ID via phone or email.

One of the biggest steps Texas could take in serving seniors, expanding Medicaid, continues to remain politically challenging in our state. I am continuing to work toward a "Texas Way" to accomplish something which would benefit so many Texans.



As a geriatric general practitioner, Rep. Lalani's key issue is taking care of seniors.



Ft. Bend County in the Capitol

Local Government & Fort Bend County

For Fort Bend County I authored or sponsored and had signed into law five bills which will benefit HD 76 residents. HB 5330 expands the Houston Community College System so that all Ft. Bend ISD students will have a campus that they can take academic advantage of. HB 5395 creates Fort Bend County Water Control and Improvement District #11 in the city of Richmond, helping families and businesses in this growing area. SB 876 strengthens licensing requirements for commercial dog and cat breeders. Compassionate animal protection was one of Fort Bend County's legislative priorities and is an issue many people in HD 76 care deeply about. This bill helps safeguard the well-being of four-legged Texans. HB 4250 allows district

clerks to deduct postage when notifying property owners of the excess proceeds from the ad valorem sale of property from the excess sale amount, helping local governments do their jobs more efficiently while delivering a reduction in upfront costs.

Even though legislation was passed that will specifically help Fort Bend County, the preemption bill, HB 2127, gives the state enormous power to nullify or preempt community ordinances and regulations, effectively ending local control as we know it. Some of the actions previously available to local governments are no longer options. This critically hinders the ability of cities and counties to implement ordinances locally without state oversight.

Diversity & Religious Freedom

Rice University has identified Greater Houston as America's most diverse urban area and HD 76 is one of the most diverse parts of the Greater Houston area. The district is a model for what Texas should be and representing HD 76 carries an obligation to support and defend the diversity which is a source of its strength.

Regrettably the 88th legislature witnessed significant pushback in respecting the state's diversity, undercutting the dignity and empowerment of many Texans. This includes weakening the ability of higher education to benefit all Texans, preempting the ability of many Texans to make their own health and medical decisions in consultation with their doctor, and creating new barriers for Texans to defend their interests and the ballot box.

Even within that climate, the legislature passed some legislation encouraging diversity and protecting genuine religious freedom for Texans of all faiths. I was pleased to be associated with two of them. HB 1212 makes it easier for Texas parents to obtain excused absences for their schoolchildren in order to observe religious holidays. The bill defines parental notes as acceptable documentation for such absences and schools can not require documentation from a religious leader. HB 1883 ensures that standardized tests such as the STAAR test and end-of-course exams are not scheduled on dates of holy days or periods of observation. This protects students of minority faiths from being forced to choose between academic performance and religious observance.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Proposition 1 – HJR 126

The constitutional amendment protecting the right to engage in farming, ranching, timber production, horticulture, and wildlife management.

Proposition 2 – SJR 64

The constitutional amendment authorizing a local option exemption from ad valorem taxation by a county or municipality of all or part of the appraised value of real property used to operate a child-care facility.

Proposition 3 – HJR 132

The constitutional amendment prohibiting the imposition of an individual wealth or net worth tax, including a tax on the difference between the assets and liabilities of an individual or family.

Proposition 4 – HJR 2 from the Second Special Session

The constitutional amendment to authorize the legislature to establish a temporary limit on the maximum appraised value of real property other than a residence homestead for ad valorem tax purposes; to increase the amount of the exemption from ad valorem taxation by a school district applicable to residence homesteads from \$40,000 to \$100,000; to adjust the amount of the limitation on school district ad valorem taxes imposed on the residence homesteads of the elderly or disabled to reflect increases in certain exemption amounts; to except certain appropriations to pay for ad valorem tax relief from the constitutional limitation on the rate of growth of appropriations; and to authorize the legislature to provide for a four-year term of office for a member of the board of directors of certain appraisal districts.

Proposition 5 – HJR 3

The constitutional amendment relating to the Texas University Fund, which provides funding to certain institutions of higher education to achieve national prominence as major research universities and drive the state economy.

Proposition 6 – SJR 75

The constitutional amendment creating the Texas water fund to assist in financing water projects in this state.

Proposition 7 – SJR 93

The constitutional amendment providing for the creation of the Texas energy fund to support the construction, maintenance, modernization, and operation of electric generating facilities.

Proposition 8 – HJR 125

The constitutional amendment creating the broadband infrastructure fund to expand high-speed broadband access and assist in the financing of connectivity projects.

Proposition 9 – HJR 2, Regular Session

“The constitutional amendment authorizing the 88th Legislature to provide a cost-of-living adjustment to certain annuitants of the Teacher Retirement System of Texas.

Proposition 10 – SJR 87

The constitutional amendment to authorize the legislature to exempt from ad valorem taxation equipment or inventory held by a manufacturer of medical or biomedical products to protect the Texas healthcare network and strengthen our medical supply chain.

Proposition 11 – SJR 32

The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to permit conservation and reclamation districts in El Paso County to issue bonds supported by ad valorem taxes to fund the development and maintenance of parks and recreational facilities.

Proposition 12 – HJR 134

The constitutional amendment providing for the abolition of the office of county treasurer in Galveston County.

Proposition 13 – HJR 107

The constitutional amendment to increase the mandatory age of retirement for state justices and judges.

Proposition 14 – SJR 74

The constitutional amendment providing for the creation of the centennial parks conservation fund to be used for the creation and improvement of state parks.

District 76 ★ Contact Us

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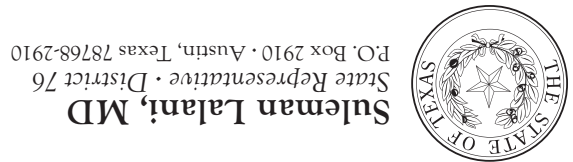
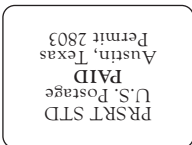
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Committees: Higher Education • Natural Resources • Resolutions Calendars

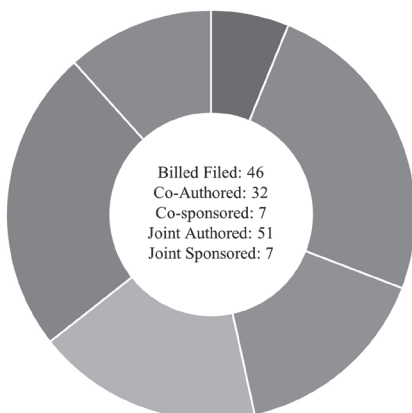
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REPRESENTATIVE SULEMAN LALANI, M.D.

88th Legislative Update and Constitutional Amendment Newsletter • Fall 2023



Lalani Legislation At-a Glance



- Amendments Adopted = 9
- Resolutions Passed = 23
- No Hearing in the House = 35
- Signed into Law by Governor = 36
- Passed the House = 26
- Left Pending in House Committee = 17

Our 88th Legislative Session by the Numbers:

- 2 riders on the state budget
- 46 individual pieces of legislation authored
- 97 additional pieces of legislation joint authored, co-authored, sponsored or co-sponsored
- 143 pieces of legislation that navigated through the 88th legislature had the Lalani name on them
- 36 pieces of legislation sent to the Governor for signature
- 36 pieces signed by the Governor with effective dates
- 0 vetoes