

STATE REPRESENTATIVE LINA ORTEGA

Capitol Report • District 77

Representing El Paso County (part)

Capitol Report • Fall 2021



TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

State Representative • District 77

Dear Neighbor,

It has continued to be an honor to serve this community as your State Representative during the 87th Legislative Session.

We had the opportunity to address the important issues facing our state this session, including the COVID-19 pandemic, common-sense gun reform, expanding access to healthcare, and securing the electric grid, which failed our fellow Texans this past winter. Unfortunately, this session became dedicated to partisan issues that divide us instead of uniting us. During the regular session, the Legislature failed to pass Medicaid expansion or respond to the health disparities highlighted by the pandemic. Still more, the Legislature passed a “permitless carry” bill which allows anyone over the age of 21 to carry firearms without training. This law is especially painful to those who hoped the Legislature would act in response to the tragedy in El Paso and the Odessa shooting which followed.

I successfully passed bills relating to mortgage consumer protection, transportation projects, and county commissioner continuing education. I co-authored legislation that expands Medicaid for new mothers for 6 months after delivery, expands telemedicine and broadband access, and authorizes counties to create investment zones for transportation projects. Additionally, El Paso will receive millions of dollars for our institutions and projects in the state budget.

The regular session ended with a group of House members choosing to leave the chamber to prevent the passage of new restrictive voting laws. In response, the Governor defunded the legislative branch, threatening the salaries and benefits of our staff and other legislative agencies and ensuring that we would need to return for a special session over the summer. During the first special session, I made the difficult decision to leave the state to advocate for federal voting legislation in Washington, D.C., and delay the passage of harmful voting reforms. I returned the payment from the state, known as per diem during this time. We were successful and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act has passed the U.S. House of Representatives and a form of voter protection has been introduced in the U.S. Senate, at the time of publication of this newsletter. Unfortunately, harmful state voting reforms passed during the second special session. Now more than ever, it is important to educate you about these reforms and continue encouraging more people to register and turn out to vote.



Between now and the next session, the Legislature will likely have completed the redistricting process and the redrawn maps may mean that I will no longer represent some of you. Thank you for the opportunity to serve and please know that I am always willing to work with you on any issues important to El Paso, constituent or not.

I look forward to returning home to begin meeting with constituents about the legislative session and continue working together for a stronger El Paso. As always, please contact the office should you have any issues or concerns.

Sincerely,

Lina Ortega



Committees: Higher Education • Transportation

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87TH REGULAR SESSION POLICY REFORMS

COVID-19 RESPONSE

The session convened during the winter peak of the pandemic and the Legislature made some reforms in response. **HB 2063** establishes a state employee family leave pool. **SB 22** removes the requirement that public employees prove that they contracted COVID-19 at work. **SB 907** allows for remote marriage licenses. **SB 226** establishes educator training for virtual instruction. **SB 437** creates a personal protective equipment reserve advisory committee. **HB 2211** requires hospitals to allow one family member to visit a hospitalized family member. While these policy changes are helpful, the Legislature should have done more to assist in our recovery.



Rep. Ortega stands with the El Paso delegation against dangerous expansion of gun laws.



Rep. Ortega raises a technical issue to stop a bad bill from passing alongside Chairman Rafael Anchia (Dallas).

GUN REFORM

The August 3, 2019 shooting in El Paso was unfortunately not the only mass shooting in Texas since the last legislative session. Instead of taking the necessary steps to pass common-sense gun reform, the Legislature passed several harmful gun laws. **HB 1927** allows anyone over the age of 21 to carry a firearm in public without any training. **SB 20** prohibits hotel owners from banning the carrying or storage of firearms in their hotels. **HB 957** prohibits federal regulation of silencers. **HB 1500** gives full authority to the governor to regulate firearms and ammunition during a declared disaster or emergency. One strong reform was **SB 162**, which makes it illegal to lie or make a misleading statement when providing information to comply with the required criminal background check necessary to purchase a firearm in a store.

HEALTHCARE AND FAMILIES

The State continues to make progress in improving our healthcare systems and supporting Texas families.

HB 18 increases access to affordable prescription drugs for uninsured individuals. **SB 1137** requires hospitals to disclose certain health care cost information. **HB 2658** extends coverage for children's Medicaid.

HB 3041 establishes a pilot program for family preservation services, allowing children who are at risk of entering the foster care system to remain safely at home while their parent or guardian works to complete prevention services.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Supporting businesses and workers is important to rebuilding our economy during the recovery from the pandemic. **HB 7** creates a stopgap solution to ensure the Texas unemployment fund remains solvent without harming small businesses. **HB 1024** permits restaurants to sell alcohol for pickup or delivery to consumers. **HB 1195** protects small businesses who received Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans by not taxing the loans as income.

STATE BUDGET SENDS MONEY TO EL PASO

2022-2023 Budget (Senate Bill 1)

I was proud to vote in support of the state budget this session, which makes smart investments in the future of Texas. The Legislature maintained the school funding increases from the previous session by spending \$64.6 billion, invests \$110 million in Texas higher education financial aid programs, and spends \$353.6 million on our critical women's health programs. **SB 1** also includes \$1.2 billion for community mental health for adults, children, and crisis services. These are just a few examples of the benefits you will experience as a result of the budget we passed this session.

El Paso Budget Highlights

- The University of Texas at El Paso received \$239.4 million for the biennium, in addition to \$6.2 million for the School of Pharmacy and \$13.5 million in Core Research Support
- Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center-El Paso received \$304.9 million for the biennium
- El Paso Community College received \$63 million for the biennium
- \$5 million has been allocated for Hueco Tanks State Park and Historic Site
- \$5 million has been allocated to support repairs to the Wylar Aerial Tramway in Franklin Mountains State Park

87TH SPECIAL SESSION POLICY REFORMS

VOTING

As the regular session drew to a close, the Governor called for special sessions to address some of his priority bills that failed to pass including voting rights reform. **SB 1**: the voter suppression bill is one of the most harmful pieces of legislation that gained national attention. Texas is already one of the hardest states to cast a ballot in, yet the 75-page bill further restricts access to the ballot box, especially for minorities and marginalized communities.

SB 1 bans COVID-19 safety measures that counties across our state implemented like 24 hour and drive-through voting. These methods of voting were mostly used by minorities, women, and shift workers. It also empowers partisan poll watchers granting them "free movement" at the poll site and allowing them to intimidate voters at the voting booth. It adds more rules to voting by mail and voter assistance. People assisting voters, including the disabled, will be required to sign a form under penalty of perjury affirming the need for their assistance and stating their relationship to the voter. These are just a few of the provisions of this bill.

Voting is the fight of our time. Although this harmful legislation eventually became law, we were able to delay its passage and advocate for federal voting protection reform. Now, we must do everything we can to engage more people in our democracy. Increased voter participation will result in a more accurate reflection of community values, priorities, and culture through the people we elect and the policies they put forward.

BAIL REFORM

The special session focused heavily on bail reform. While our state's justice system is in dire need of reform, the legislation proposed and passed this session only exacerbates the systemic racism in the Texas criminal justice system, where minorities are disproportionately arrested and imprisoned. **SB 6** changes how and if legally presumed innocent defendants can be released from jail before their criminal cases are resolved. The bill bans the release of those accused of violent crimes unless they have the cash to make bail. While lawmakers proposed this legislation with public safety in mind, **SB 6** will not keep dangerous people locked up; it will keep poor people locked up. County jails are already overflowing with people awaiting trial, and these provisions will only worsen the issue at the expense of taxpayers.

BORDER WALL FUNDING

Sadly, during the second special session, the Legislature passed unnecessary funding for border security and a border wall. **HB 9** allocates \$1.8 billion for increased policing and the construction of a wall along the Mexico-Texas border. The State could make better use of this funding by investing in the people who live in our border communities through additional funding for public schools, expanding access to healthcare, and increased funding for border transportation and infrastructure projects.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

This committee saw many pieces of legislation, several of which target the LGBTQ students and minority populations. As of the publication of this newsletter, no anti-LGBTQ reforms have passed the Legislature. **SB 3** restricts discussions of diversity and inclusion issues in Texas classrooms. I was proud to support **SB 15**, which allows school districts to set up their own virtual learning programs and guarantees funding for virtual learning through September 2023. Our school districts have been resilient in responding to the pandemic and they deserve to be adequately funded for all education they provide for our students.

13TH CHECK FOR RETIRED TEACHERS

The Legislature passed **SB 7** which secures a well deserved one-time supplemental payment of up to \$2,400 for Texas retired educators similar to the one that was passed during the last regular session in 2019. I was a co-author in this bill. Although **SB 7** provides some relief for retired public schools teachers, it is a short term solution. The Legislature should strive to maintain the solvency and soundness of the Teachers Retirement System of Texas, and push for a long overdue cost of living adjustment for our retirees.



Rep. Ortega stands in support of healthcare with other women members of the Texas House.



Rep. Ortega assists House colleagues on the back microphone.

REPRESENTATIVE ORTEGA'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

AUTHORED

Senate Bill 43 closes loopholes in current mortgage lending laws to help deter, detect, and prevent bad actors who use wrap financing to scam unsuspecting homebuyers and later default on mortgage loans.

House Bill 3399 maximizes public funding for road projects by authorizing the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to enter into agreements with the Department of Defense to provide certain road services.

Senate Bill 230 modernizes county commissioner continuing education by allowing for online completion of mandatory hours.

CO-AUTHORED

House Bill 4 expands the use of telemedicine for our Medicaid and public benefit programs.

House Bill 5 establishes the State Broadband Development Office to expand the availability of high speed internet across the entire state.

House Bill 133 extends Medicaid coverage for new mothers to 6 months postpartum, which will have positive maternal and infant health outcomes.

House Bill 1535 improves the Texas Compassionate Use Program so patients with debilitating medical conditions may access low-THC cannabis programs for treatment.

House Bill 1802 in collaboration with Baylor College of Medicine and in partnership with a military veterans hospital or a medical center that provides medical care to veterans, to conduct a study on the efficacy of using alternative therapies in the treatment of veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.



Rep. Ortega presents a bill on mortgage lending in front of the House Chamber.

House Bill 2633 creates the trafficked persons grant program to give grants to applicants to provide dedicated housing and treatment facilities for certain human trafficking victims.

House Joint Resolution 99 proposes a constitutional amendment authorizing a county to finance the development or redevelopment of transportation infrastructure in unproductive, underdeveloped, or blighted areas in the county.

Senate Bill 763 creates the Urban Air Mobility (UAM) Advisory Committee at the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to assess the current state law and any potential changes that are needed to facilitate the development of UAM operations and infrastructure in this state.

Senate Bill 827 caps the cost of insulin for insured patients to \$25.

DISTRICT 77 RESOLUTIONS

HR 514 congratulates Clendenin Elementary on its nomination for a 2021 Blue Ribbon School Award.

HR 515 congratulates Lamar Elementary on its nomination for a 2021 Blue Ribbon School Award.

HR 876 congratulates constituent Jacob Halter on attaining the rank of Eagle Scout.

HR 1103 congratulates Austin High on receiving the Texas Purple Star Campus Designation.

HR 1104 congratulates Logan Elementary on receiving the Texas Purple Star Campus Designation.

HR 1105 congratulates Colin L. Powell Elementary on receiving the Texas Purple Star Campus Designation.

HRs 1362-1371 congratulates UTEP's 2020 Top Ten Seniors.

HRs 1361, 1372-1380 congratulates UTEP's 2021 Top Ten Seniors.



Rep. Ortega working with Representative Johnson (Dallas) and Representative Hinojosa (Austin) on the House floor.

Interstate 10 Improvement Project Receives State Funding

In August 2021, the Texas Transportation Commission adopted the Unified Transportation Plan, which is a 10-year planning document that includes funding for priority transportation projects. After working tirelessly on this effort along with local partners, I am proud to share that the Interstate 10 improvement project was selected for funding during the upcoming year. Increasing the capacity of I-10 will ensure that El Paso continues to play a critical role in promoting trade between Texas and Mexico. The award of state funding for this project is a victory for our community.

DISPUTADO ESTATAL LINA ORTEGA

Reporte desde el Capitolio • Distrito 77

Representando parte del Condado de El Paso

Reporte desde el Capitolio • Otoño 2021



TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

State Representative • District 77

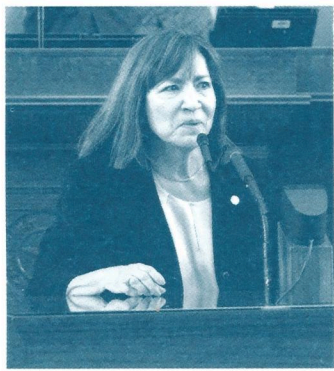
Estimado vecino(a),

Sigue siendo un honor servir a esta comunidad como su Representante Estatal durante la 87ª Sesión Legislativa.

Los miembros de la Legislatura tuvimos la oportunidad de poner como prioridad los problemas importantes que nuestro estado enfrenta, incluyendo la pandemia de COVID-19, la falta de reformas para un sensato control de armas, el acceso limitado a la atención médica y la necesidad de regular la infraestructura eléctrica estatal para prevenir apagones fatales como el de febrero. Desafortunadamente, esta sesión se dedicó a temas partidistas que nos dividen en lugar de unirnos. Durante la sesión regular, la Legislatura no aprobó la expansión de Medicaid ni respondió a la falta al acceso a servicios de salud destacada por la pandemia. La Legislatura aprobó el “porte de armas sin licencia”, que permite a cualquier persona mayor de 21 años portar armas sin el entrenamiento adecuado ni verificación de antecedentes. Esta ley es especialmente dolorosa para aquellos que esperaban que la Legislatura actuara en respuesta a las tragedias de El Paso y Odessa.

Aprobé con éxito proyectos de ley relacionados con la protección del consumidor en el mercado hipotecario, con proyectos de transporte y con la educación continua de los comisionados del condado. Fui coautora de varios proyectos de ley que extienden el plazo de Medicaid a 6 meses postparto, expanden el acceso a la telemedicina y al internet de banda ancha y autorizan a los condados a crear fondos de inversión para proyectos de transporte. Además, El Paso recibirá millones de dólares para la educación pública y superior a través del presupuesto estatal. El presupuesto también contiene \$5 millones de dólares adicionales para Wyler Aerial Tramway, que orgullosamente está en nuestro distrito.

Durante el último día de la sesión, un grupo de legisladores tuvimos que salirnos de la Cámara de Diputados para evitar la aprobación de leyes de votación restrictivas. En respuesta, el gobernador le quitó los fondos a la rama legislativa, arriesgando los sueldos y beneficios de nuestro personal y otras agencias legislativas y asegurándose de que tendríamos que regresar para una sesión especial durante el verano. Durante la primera sesión especial, tomé la difícil decisión de salir del estado para abogar por protecciones electorales a nivel federal en Washington, D.C. y retrasar la aprobación de reformas de votación dañinas. Devolví mis viáticos diarios que recibí durante este tiempo, conocido como per diem. Tuvimos éxito y la ley conocida como John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act fue aprobada por la Cámara de Representantes de los Estados Unidos. Al momento de esta publicación el Senado también introdujo una propuesta de ley protegiendo el derecho del voto. Desafortunadamente, las reformas estatales con restricciones al voto se aprobaron durante la segunda sesión especial. Ahora más que nunca, es importante educarlo sobre estas reformas y continuar promoviendo el voto.



Entre ahora y la próxima sesión legislativa, seguramente la Legislatura habrá completado el proceso de redefinir los distritos, el cual se lleva a cabo cada diez años de acuerdo al censo de la población. Quizá ya no represente algunos de ustedes pero muchas gracias por darme la oportunidad de darles una voz en Austin. Quiero que sepan que siempre estaré dispuesta a trabajar con ustedes en cualquier tema importante para El Paso, constituyente o no.

Espero volver a casa para comenzar a reunirme con los constituyentes sobre la sesión legislativa y continuar trabajando juntos por un El Paso más fuerte. Como siempre, comuníquese con nuestra oficina de distrito si tiene algún problema o inquietud.

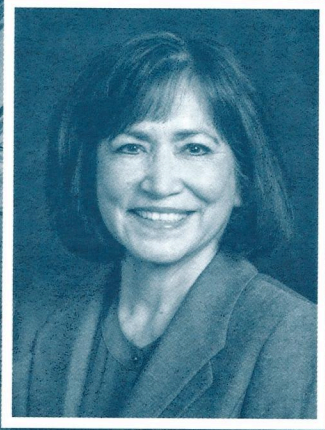
Atentamente,

Lina Ortega



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Lina Ortega
State Representative



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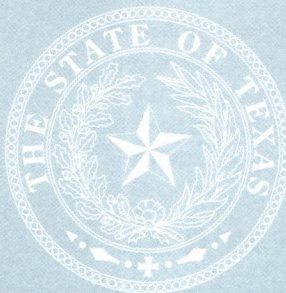
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