



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
JAMES WHITE

CORRECTIONS - CHAIR
INTERNATIONAL TRADE &
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

DISTRICT 19
HARDIN, JASPER
NEWTON, POLK, TYLER

May 11, 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chairman James White Votes for Education Reforms, Passes Foster Care Legislation
- Weekly Legislative Update 5/8/17 -

(Austin, TX) - Last week, the Texas House passed legislation that supports our retired teachers and public schools.

I was proud to vote for House Bill (HB) 3976 which overhauled the TRS-Program that is currently in an estimated \$1.06 billion shortfall. Without this reform the shortfall would be fully borne by our retired teachers. Under the legislation, there are two options for retirees. First, a plan for Pre-65 retirees who are not Medicare eligible. Targeted premiums for these participants would gradually increase over the course of a four-year period, until 2021. Second, the bill provides a Medicare Advantage plan for Medicare eligible participants aged 65 and older at a consistent premium cost of \$146. It is important to note that this bill would maintain the Medicare Part D Plan for prescription drug benefits. The bill additionally allows for the waiver of a premium charge to disabled retirees who retired before January 1, 2017, are currently receiving disability retirement benefits, and are not eligible to enroll in Medicare.

The Texas House voted to address a concern that we consistently hear from parents and educators: excessive testing. HB 22 would reduce the number of STAAR tests required in schools and make key reforms to our testing program and schedule. The bill changes current school accountability by moving from the current five-domain model with numbered indicators, to a three-domain model with more indicators that are unnumbered to better signify their intent. The implementation is postponed until 2019 to prevent a repeat of the problems that existed in the roll-out of the current system and requires two models prior to implementation. In addition, the "A-F" rating is reformed in order to give parents a better understanding of how schools are performing.

I also supported HB 23 which created a grant program for the purpose of providing innovative, personalized, and educational public school environments to students with autism. The Texas



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Education Agency would set aside \$20 million to establish a maximum of 10 programs to benefit these students.

Two Ethics reform bills were also passed by the House. HB 501, which expands transparency and disclosure requirements for state ethics reporting by requiring elected officials to disclose contracts with governmental entities, including bond counsel services, and legal referral fees, and HB 505, which prohibits the use of campaign funds by a former officeholder that has registered as a lobbyist for two years following their retirement from office. This change establishes a two-year cooling off period before former elected officials can use their campaign war chests for lobbying purposes.

HB 45 mandating that a ruling or a decision of a state court, arbitrator, or administrative law judge (ALJ) may not be based on a foreign law, if the application of that law would violate a right guaranteed by the Texas or federal Constitution was also passed. This bill is commonly known as American Laws for American Courts and provides necessary reform by clarifying and enforcing the rule of law that which says that state courts may not enforce foreign laws or practices that violate the public policy of the State of Texas or violate the U.S. Constitution.

Lastly, HB 1290 was passed that requires an agency to repeal an existing rule each time a new rule is adopted. It is the intent that this will create more transparency and efficiency and encourage agencies to prioritize their rules.

I am pleased to announce that this last week, a number of my bills were passed by the full house to be considered by the Senate. These bills were filed in an attempt to strengthen families, by increasing efficiency with our state agencies providing our families and juveniles with services, and helping to protect our community from drunk drivers. In addition, I have put forth legislation that will help our incarcerated citizens have the best chance at achieving gainful employment upon their release.

House Bill 928 looks to help children who have been adopted or who are in foster care with the application process for higher education. This population is eligible for higher education programs designed specifically for children who have been adopted or are in foster care, and many miss out on these opportunities due to a lack of knowledge of the program, or lack of guidance throughout the process. These children have already had to endure many hardships that many of us will never face. This piece of legislation is not in an effort to give foster kids an unfair advantage over other children, but rather to level the playing field to help them grow beyond circumstances that were thrust upon them, and give them the best shot for entering higher education.



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House Bill 1521 addresses youths who are involved in both the CPS and juvenile systems receive services that are not coordinated and sometimes are counterintuitive to each other. These concerns by allowing the Department of Family and Protective Services, and Texas Juvenile Justice Department to share information and promoting communication between the agencies. Too often these families who are in need of assistance get mired in the red tape of bureaucracy, and are forced to go through a repetitive process that leaves them feeling frustrated rather than motivated by their involvement in the justice system. It is my intention with this legislation to clean up this process, and make sure our Texas families are getting the best help available to them

House Bill 117 deals with ethyl alcohol monitoring as a condition of community supervision for certain intoxication offenses. Often times, when someone is arrested for a DWI, they are ordered by a judge to have an ignition interlock system, commonly referred to as a Breathalyzer, installed in their vehicle. However, a loophole has existed that allows one to sign an affidavit saying they don't own a vehicle. This has been problematic because even though they may not own a car themselves, they may still have unrestricted access to a vehicle, and are at the highest probability of reoffending. I have heard countless stories in these last months about people who were seriously injured, or killed; families and lives destroyed by a drunk driver. My bill seeks to correct this by giving the option to a judge who has a case with an affidavit to mandate the use of an alternative ethyl alcohol monitoring device that would require the offender to have the monitoring device on their person, and increasing the effectiveness at keeping these dangerous folks off of our roads and keeping our communities safe.

House Bill 553 creates a task force to identify opportunities for academic credit and industry recognition for inmates of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Studies have consistently shown that one of the highest reasons people recidivate is a lack of economic opportunity. These incarcerated men and women enter the job market with little to no training, and often times with very little work experience, on top of having a criminal record which can make one ineligible for certain types of work. With little to no economic opportunity, turning back to crime is the reality for many of these people. I believe that their incarceration serves as their debt to society, and we should do our best to rehabilitate these offenders and give them the best chance to succeed as citizens who have served their time. Providing educational opportunities to carried out while they are serving their time gives these men and women a positive goal to focus on while incarcerated, as well as a greater chance of achieving gainful employment and becoming a productive, law abiding member of society.

I was also extremely excited to welcome the 2017 4A UIL Boys Basketball Champions, the Silsbee Tigers, to their Texas Capitol. This team did a tremendous job bringing home the gold.



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Calvin Tyler, Willie Jones, Bruce Newton, Trajan Harris, Michal McCain, and Chris Thomas, the seniors of the team, joined me on the House dais during their recognition.

The Capitol of Texas belongs to you and visiting the Capitol during the biennial legislative session is a great experience. To assist in arranging your visit please call Saul Mendoza, my Chief of Staff, at (512) 463-0490 or at saul.mendoza@house.texas.gov.

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