



ART FIERRO

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ DISTRICT 79

Legislative Update



STATE OF TEXAS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



FALL 2019

Dear Neighbor,

ElPasoStrong is more than a hashtag, it is more than a slogan. **ElPasoStrong** is the embodiment of El Paso's diverse, compassionate and resilient community. Overcoming much adversity in the recent months; losing loved ones, and facing unforeseen challenges, I am proud, beyond words, of the support this community has shown one another, and the tenacity to stand up and act during these trying times.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your Texas State Representative. I do not take the responsibilities of this office lightly, and believe transparency is one of the most important aspects of this job. This 86th Legislative Session Wrap-Up Newsletter may act as a tool for you in learning about, and further understanding some of the laws passed.

This newsletter provides you with an overview of the busy 140 days, or 105 in my case, of this past session. The Texas Legislature was able to pass an expansive budget; providing billions of dollars to our public education system, increase funding for all three of El Paso's higher education institutions, and provide essential additional monies for a multitude of state agencies that ensure El Pasoans, and all Texans, have the resources necessary to prosper in this great state.

Included is, also, a look at the bills filed and passed this session, along with key issues influencing El Paso. This session was overwhelmingly bipartisan and allowed for many impactful pieces of legislation to be passed. As I continue my work during the interim, I am always open to any concerns, thoughts, or legislative suggestions that you may have. Always feel free to reach out to the House District 79 staff with any questions and comments you have regarding the community, or legislation. Contact Information can be found on the back of this newsletter for both offices, and all staff members.

Texas is changing and adapting everyday to new challenges, new threats, new ways of life; and El Paso has the opportunity to be at the forefront of these changes and shape the future of Texas, one step at a time. It is a privilege to continue working for and alongside you strengthening beautiful El Paso.

Sincerely,

Art Fierro
House District 79



Public Education

House Bill 3 invests over 11 billion dollars into our Public Education system. The State Legislature worked tirelessly during session to ensure key policy changes were made to best prepare Texas students for bright futures. Here is a breakdown of the bill:

- The program funds full day Pre-K and summer programs for qualifying students;
- Focused funding to schools with high percentages of at-risk students;
- Increased K-3 reading standards;
- Begins Texas' first Dyslexia Program;
- Unleashes more than 2 billion dollars in pay raises for school employees;
- Property tax rate cuts and Robin Hood reduction.



El Paso's next generation of leaders on the House Floor helping me pass bills.

Student Mental Health Reform

House Bills 18 and 19 multiply student access to mental health resources. The legislation requires mental health professionals to inform educators on the proper response to psychological needs, and increases available training for school staff. With nearly 8 billion dollars allocated to support behavioral and substance abuse intervention programs; students will have, and be more aware and knowledgeable of, additional resources available to them.

Providing for Texas' Retired Teacher

The Legislature passed Senate Bill 12, allocating over a billion dollars to financially stabilize the Teacher Retirement System of Texas. Along with providing the long overdue funding, retirees currently benefitting from TRS will receive a one-time, 13th check this year. Texas' teachers deserve support and compensation for their service!

Higher Education

Community College to University Transfer - SB 25

A key factor in achieving the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's 60x30TX Plan is streamlined and coordinated transfer pathways. This new law reduces the burden of extra, or repeated, course hours, saving students money and keeping them on track to graduation.

Unleashing Dual-Credit Achievement Potential - SB 1324

The benefits of dual credit are often masked when courses ultimately don't count towards their college major. Now a student will be required to file a degree plan once they have completed 15 semester hours of dual credit work. Early advising has been shown to lessen the number of fall-through courses, and saves students money. It has been shown that students with a filed degree plan are more focused in their course sequences, and have fewer wasted hours.

Lowering the Cost of College and Increasing Accessibility - HB 3652

One of the highest costs associated with higher education is textbooks. The College Board estimates an average of over \$1,200 spent on textbooks and materials. Commonly, this cost exceeds tuition costs, more often than not in community colleges. In the modern age, online resources are becoming more and more accessible, and plentiful. This law requires the Higher Education Coordinating Board to create a state repository for open educational resources. OERs range from textbooks to assessment software, full online courses to images and videos.



Representative Fierro presents Dr. Serrata with HR 1230, recognizing his many successes as President of El Paso Community College.

Showing Austin What El Paso is All About

One of the best parts of being your State Representative, is being able to brag about and showcase the many accomplishments of our community members. I was able to not only pass these Resolutions recognizing and honoring individuals, but also presented certificates to individuals exemplifying what **ElPasoStrong** is all about; like the students selected to the Hugh O' Brian Youth Ambassadors Summer Program.



Representative Fierro and colleagues pass HR 968 on the House floor.

HR 798 commemorates the 50th anniversary of El Paso Community College.

HR 968 congratulates Ron Stallworth on the success of his memoir and movie, *Black Klansman*.

HR 1228 recognizes the many accomplishments, and impact, of the El Paso Community College Student Government Association on campus and in the community.

HR 1229 recognizes Dr. Maria Alvarez of El Paso Community College for her service as an educator.

HR 1230 recognizes Dr. William Serrata for his service as president of El Paso community college.



Your El Paso Delegation, alongside Speaker Bonnen, recognize Dr. Natalicio for her service as UTEP President and congratulate her on her retirement.

HR 1231 congratulates the El Paso Community College Tejano and Tejana Cross-Country and Half-Marathon teams on an outstanding 2018 season.

HR 1238 recognizes Associate Professor Lisa Elliott for her contributions to El Paso Community College.

HR 1548 celebrates the life of fallen El Paso County Sheriff's Deputy Peter John Herrera.

HR 2204 honors the members of Company E of the Texas National Guard for their valiant service during World War II.



El Paso Police Department Motorcycle Officers Jorge Santana, Rick Yañez, Armando Rojas, Steve Jaso, and Sgt. Andy Cintron escorted the Annual Peace Officer Memorial Procession on May 6, 2019 at the State Capitol.

HR 90, by Representative Ortega, congratulates the University of Texas at El Paso for attaining the R1 designation in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

HR 119, by Representative Ortega, congratulates Dr. Diana Natalicio on her retirement as President of The University of Texas at El Paso.

I appreciated everyone's time visiting Austin, stopping by the office and meeting with me during session. Hearing from my constituents is the most important aspect of this position, and I hope to continue hearing from you all on the issues impacting our community and the successes of our fellow El Pasoans. It is an honor to make El Paso's voice heard in Austin and across the great state of Texas.



Representative Fierro presents a bill on the House Floor.

Authored and Joint-Authored Legislation

Modernizing the Agriculture Industry - HB 2900

Texas' Agricultural producers travel across our vast state to hold board meetings, pulling them away from their work and families, often requiring long drives. With this new law, they are able to hold meetings via teleconference; saving time and money for those that provide for Texans.

Saving Texas Taxpayer Dollars - HB 4559

Under previous law, health care costs for the incarcerated fell onto Texas taxpayers. This new law will require insurance companies to cover mental health services provided to those with private health insurance, saving taxpayer dollars.

Growing our Workforce - SB 2038 (HB 4299)

Our great state relies heavily on a strong, abled workforce. High demand jobs are not being filled due to lack of applicants and training programs. This legislation creates a Workforce Commission study to determine high demand jobs, and the necessary training requirements, that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are able to fill. This will open doors to jobs for more Texans, and strengthen our state.

Local Health Care Provider Participation Program SB 1751 (HB 3640)

In previous legislative session, bills have passed allowing for certain private and public hospital partnerships to draw down federal funds. Now local, El Paso hospitals can partner with UMC-El Paso to do so, bettering our medical care.

Crime Victims' Compensation - HB 2079

The CVC program ensures victims of violent crimes receive necessary funding to rebuild in wake of tragic events; this bill extends coverage to surviving children.

Co-Authored Legislation

Disaster Relief - HB 5, HB 6, HB 13 and HB 2335

In response to Hurricane Harvey these bills address debris management, disaster relief, flood planning, and nutrition plans. Keeping Texans safe from future disasters.

Justice for Victims - HB 8 and HB 616

These bills help attain justice for victims by funding reimbursements for certain forensic medical exams and evidence collection kits as well as creating a database for appropriate information to be stored. The Rape-kit backlog in Texas has prevented fair trials, these bills work to reverse that.

Removing Obstacles for At-Risk Youth - HB 123

Youth in foster care and those facing homelessness conquer enough barriers in their day-to-day lives; this bill allows them access to their personal identification records without needing parental consent so they are able to obtain a driver's license or other form of ID to better themselves.

Election Accessibility - HB 933 and HB 1241

Increasing voter turnout is a high priority nationwide. These bills increase awareness by requiring online postings of elections and complete polling place information.

Hemp Production- HB 1325

Within regulations, farmers can now produce hemp if they obtain a hemp grower's license. This is a high demand commodity, with a variety of proven benefits to Texans.

Medical Cannabis - HB 3703

Qualified physicians are now, legally, allowed to prescribe low-THC cannabis for medical conditions with proven, positive, results.

Fair Wages for All Texans - SB 753

Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities legally received below minimum wage pay, this legislation reverses the law allowing that practice, and ensures Texans all receive fair pay.



Representative Fierro meets with a colleague on the House Floor.



Team Fierro - (left to right) Lauren Jones, Representative Fierro, Cassidy Riza, Ralph Noriega

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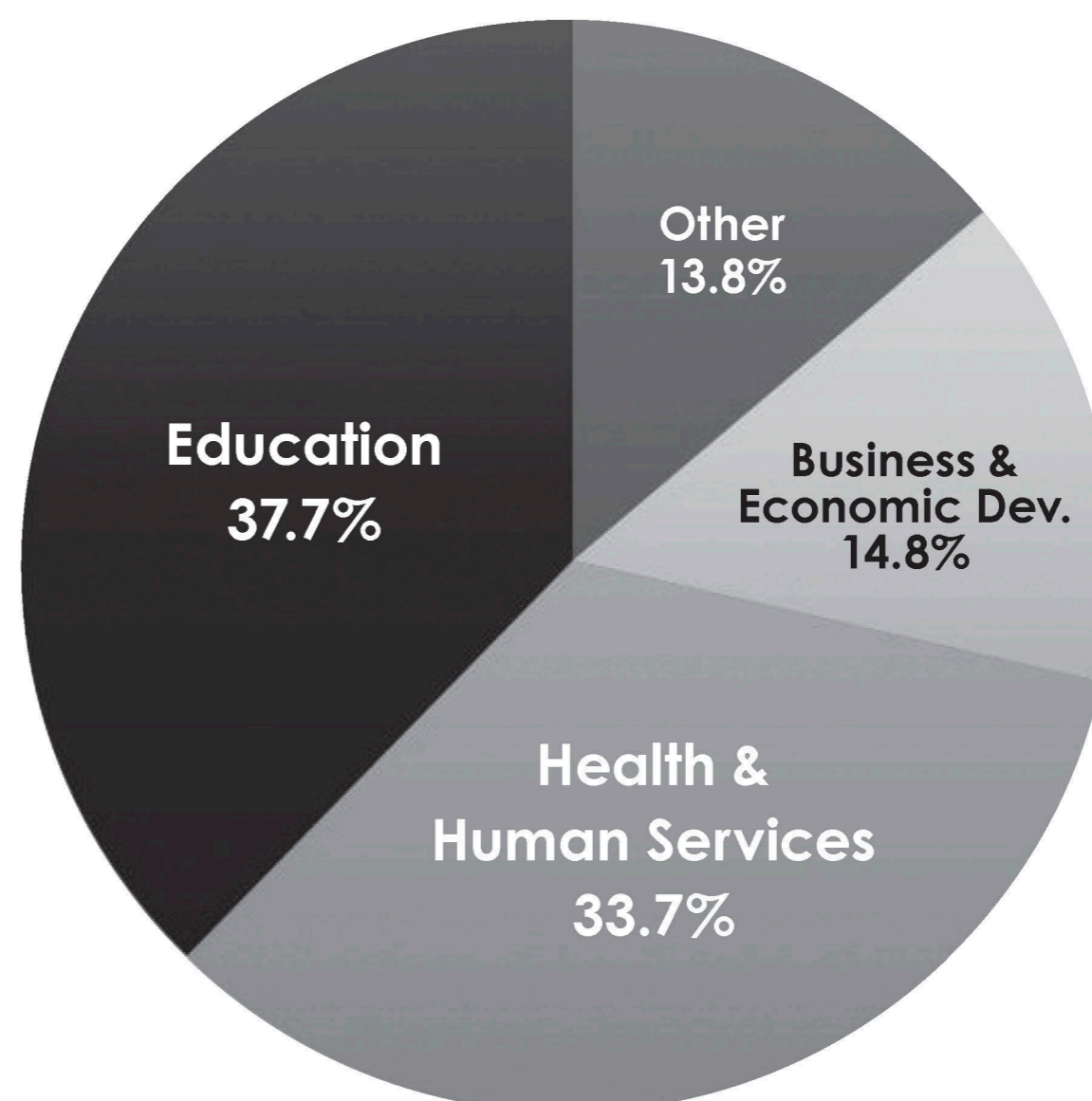
★ IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS ★

Attorney General's Office 1(800) 282-8014
 Child Support Payment 800-252-8014
 Consumer Protection 800-621-0508
 Crime Victim's Compensation 800-983-9933
 Child Abuse Reporting Hotline (800)-252-5400
 CHIP Benefits (877) 543-7669
 TX Council on Family Violence (800)-799-7233
 TX Department of Motor Vehicles 1(888) 368-4689
 TX Department of Transportation 1(800) 558-9368
 Domestic Violence/Rape Crisis Hotline . . . (512) 267-SAFE
 Governor's Assistance Hotline (800)-843-5789
 Medicaid 1 (800) 252-8263

Missing Persons Clearinghouse (800) 346-3243
 National Domestic Violence (800) 799-7233
 Nursing Home Complaints (800) 458-9858
 Runaway Hotline (888) 580-HELP
 Social Security Information (800) 772-1213
 Suicide Prevention Center (512) 472-4357
 Texas Youth Hotline (800) 210-2278
 TX Veterans Commission (800)-252-8387
 Veteran's Land Board (800) 252-VETS
 Women's Legal Hotline (512)476-1866
 TX Workforce Commission (Unemployment) (800)-558-8321

House Bill 1 - The State Budget

The Texas Legislature passed an expansive \$250.6 billion budget during the 86th Session. The Budget provides billions of additional monies to public education reforms, shoring up the Teacher Retirement System, relief for Texans affected by Hurricane Harvey, mental health and substance abuse services, as well as funding for the multitude of state agencies providing services to Texans. I was proud to see such necessary, and in many cases, long overdue funds allocated for the upcoming biennium



Public Education:

- Over \$11 billion total monies to Texas public schools;
- Increased the minimum Basic Allotment to \$6,160;
- Increased the minimum salary schedule between \$5,500 - \$9,000;
- Allocated additional funds to high poverty and rural district for teacher incentives;
- Over \$3 million dedicated to increasing teacher mentorship programs.

Higher Education:

- **El Paso Community College**
 - More than \$64 million in funding.
- **The University of Texas at El Paso**
 - \$254.9 million in total revenues;
 - \$1.8 million additional monies for UTEP School of Pharmacy;
 - \$15.5 million as a designated Emerging Research University.
- **Texas Tech Health Sciences Center El Paso**
 - Over \$152 million in appropriations;
 - \$20 million dedicated to the Woody L Hunt School of Dental Medicine;
 - \$5.2 million for Border Health Resident Support; a collaboration with UTEP and the El Paso Center for Border Health Research

Texas Department of Transportation:

- Up to \$32 million for intelligent transportation systems at international crossings. These systems expedite crossing times at the points of entry.

Colonia Set Aside Program:

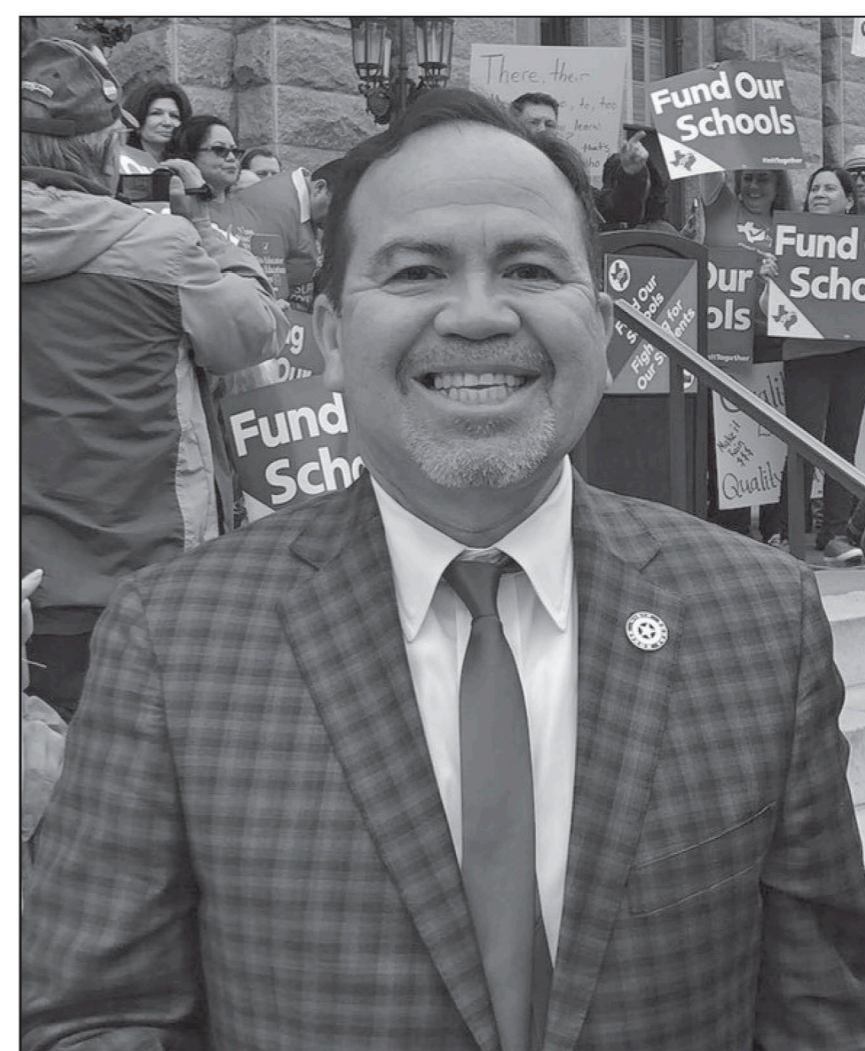
- 2.5% of the Community Development Block Grant yearly allotment under TDA (Texas Dept. of Agriculture) is to be used to provide technology and computer access to residents of targeted Colonia Self-Help Centers in El Paso County.

Mental Health:

- \$7.7 billion dedicated to mental health and substance abuse intervention;
- Texas Mental Health Consortium:
 - \$100 million for a series of mental health initiatives to increase access to mental health services;
 - Texas Tech HSC at El Paso included;
- \$2.3 million in grants for a non-physician mental health professional to be placed at local mental health authorities, one at per education service center region.

Office of the Attorney General:

- **Crime Victims' Compensation** (FY 18 data)
 - \$1,996,154 for victim compensation;
 - \$202,005 paid for sexual assault exam reimbursements.
- **Grants**
 - \$1.47 million to El Paso Area Organizations in previous biennium;
 - \$365,000 in response to the mass shooting, August 3.



Representative Fierro joins education advocates outside the Capitol rallying for funding for Texas' schools.