

**Harris County State and Federal Legislative Agenda
Revised February 12, 2019**

Hurricane Harvey. Disaster Relief, Recovery, and Resilience

- Support state funding, including from the Economic Stabilization Fund, for Hurricane Harvey-specific disaster relief, recovery, and resilience projects, including but not limited to public assistance, mitigation, recovery, and resilience needs.
- Support development of a framework for State appropriations or grants to local governments to assist with local match requirements of approved federal disaster relief, recovery, and resilience programs.
- Support development of a mechanism for State loans to local governments to bridge the gap until federal reimbursement of approved federal disaster relief, recovery, and resilience projects.
- Support establishment of a framework and funding mechanism for a State Flood Plan.
- Support creation of an empowered State inter-agency task force after a declared disaster to expedite required environmental permits related to disaster relief, recovery, and resilience projects.
- Support organizational structure and funding to ensure that TDEM continues to operate at a level of national excellence.
- Support establishing guidelines for State agencies on how to include local governments of large, densely populated areas in the plans and funding allocations related to federal disaster relief, recovery, and resilience programs.
- Support updates to state public information act and open meetings act and regulations to take into account emergency response and recovery issues.
- Support expansion of land use authority for Harris County to address flood control, recovery, and resilience needs.

General Government, Public Safety, Budget and Revenue Issues

- Support state distribution methodologies that fairly allocate funds among local governments based upon population served, demand for services, and taking into account past inequities.
- Support legislation that would improve and protect public safety, health and welfare of Harris County residents.
- Support government efficiency and accountability.
- Protect local governance and appointment authority.
- Support legislation that would provide the county with the ability to manage the unincorporated area of Harris County to protect public health, welfare, and safety, including the legislation authorizing the regulation of sexually oriented businesses, game rooms, overnight parking of commercial vehicles adjacent to subdivisions, fire hazards, metal recycling entities, and salvage yards, and the enforcement of regulatory standards.
- Support legislation that would maximize the county's ability to collect payments and fees and fund county services while seeking to increase county discretion to grant relief based on indigence.

- Support lowering the interest rate that local governments must pay on the deposit of disputed tax payments.
- Support the continuing state support of the public library system.
- Support legislation that maintains critically important telecommunications discounts to insure the continuation of high-speed information access in libraries, schools, and for economically disadvantaged individuals across the state.
- Support initiatives that promote effective and equitable economic development policies.
- Support initiatives aimed at promoting skilled workforce development in public schools.
- Support information sharing initiatives.
- Support adequate, secure, and dedicated funding for state parks.
- Support legislation aimed at enhancing the operations of medical examiners' offices and oppose limitations on medical examiners' ability to determine cause of death.
- Support legislation granting counties the same authority as municipalities to rebate sales and use taxes in enterprise zones.
- Support legislation that would allow inclusion of information technology systems as tangible assets under the Local Government Code, which may be purchased over multiple years in order to take advantage of favorable pricing options.
- Support legislation to expand the ballot mailed to military and overseas voters from only federal races to a full ballot.
- Support legislation to expand options for what constitutes identification acceptable for voting purposes.
- Support legislation to allow online voter registration with appropriate security protections.
- Support increasing state pay for Election Day workers.
- Support efforts to increase participation in the 2020 census.
- Support efforts to encourage voter turnout and oppose efforts to suppress voter turnout.
- Support legislation to encourage compliance with federal voter registration laws.
- Support legislation to clarify procedures related to voter suspension after a disaster.
- Support permissive authority to create a mandatory, enforceable county lobbyist registration system.
- Support legislative efforts to increase investment in the public school finance system that would make that system more equitable and benefit local taxpayers.
- Support legislative initiatives to fund full-day Pre-K in public schools for eligible children.
- Support the inclusion of community benefits factors in economic development incentives or requirements for expedited permitting.
- Oppose the underfunding of mandates and other initiatives having a negative fiscal impact on local units of government.
- Oppose cuts to current state or federal funding streams that benefit Harris County.
- Oppose initiatives that would diminish the authority of Commissioners Court, including legislation affecting oversight of appointees and funding decisions.
- Oppose legislation that would adversely impact the Texas County and District Retirement System.
- Oppose initiatives that would adversely impact the legitimate use of the power of eminent domain for public projects.
- Oppose legislation weakening existing fireworks regulations or extending the periods for the sale and purchase of fireworks.

- Oppose changes to the Proposition 2 program that would broaden the class of property eligible for determination by TCEQ as pollution control property, and support clarifying that the exemption does not apply to equipment installed in a facility solely for production purposes.
- Oppose legislation that prohibits community benefit requirements as a component of economic development incentives or an expedited permitting process.
- Oppose state control over local salary determinations that impact local officials and employees.
- Oppose initiatives that distribute state funds according to methodologies that fail to adequately consider a community's need and demand for services.
- Oppose legislation diminishing the voting power of non-elected officials serving on Metropolitan Planning Organizations.
- Oppose legislation that would prohibit the county from requiring an employer to provide paid sick leave as part of a county contract.
- Oppose new state revenue cuts or diversions that undermine access to a quality public education, health care, basic services and anti-poverty programs.
- Oppose new state-imposed revenue caps on local governments.

Transportation Issues

- Support increased funding and innovative funding measures for the Texas Department of Transportation and state highways.
- Support increased state funding for the Special County Road Assistance program using the existing allocation formula of: 40% county population, 20% unincorporated population, 20% lineal road miles, and 20% paved and concrete lane miles and increase appropriations to the Lateral Road and Bridge Fund.
- Support new state funding for financing the construction, reconstruction, acquisition, operations and expansion of transportation infrastructure.
- Support a minimum return guarantee for state motor fuel tax for TXDOT districts.
- Support full funding for freight rail improvements.
- Support toll revenue from a region remaining in the region.
- Support efforts to streamline and improve environmental clearance and other project development tasks for proposed projects.
- Support allowing local toll authorities the use of state right-of-way and access to the state highway system in the development of their projects.
- Clarify the allocation of funding responsibility for project development costs, such as main lane (local toll authority) and interchange (TXDOT) costs.
- Support indexing the motor fuels tax to the Highway cost index.
- Support legislation to eliminate the exemption from toll road fines for leasing and rental companies.
- Support efforts to improve toll collection and enforcement remedies, but oppose any enforcement-harmonization efforts that would impose a one-size-fits-all approach to enforcement or weaken the tools currently available to the Harris County Toll Road Authority.
- Support legislation to prohibit obscured license plates and oppose initiatives that would reduce the ability of toll road authorities to read license plates. Support funding for public education campaigns related to this regulation.

- Support legislation necessary to maximize federal funding for mass transit, including additional rail lines in our region and state.
- Support greater levels of community engagement and responsiveness on TXDOT projects.
- Support legislation expanding opportunities for alternative transport including but not limited to mass transit and bicycling.
- Support legislation that allocates state grant funds for low emission vehicle programs based on regional population, need, and anticipated impact.
- Support incentives to encourage consumer adoption, ownership, and related infrastructure for vehicles that reduce emissions.
- Oppose diversions of State Highway Fund 6 from purposes not directly related to transportation.
- Oppose any measure that would weaken the independence or authority of a county over its toll ways or transfer the assets of a county without its express approval. Support and maintain local primacy and the “full tool box” provisions of SB 792 (2007) and SB 19 (2011).
- Oppose expansion of allowable load and size of vehicles traveling on county roads.

Homeland Security Issues

- Support legislation that would improve the operational reliability, accountability, and safety of drinking water and wastewater treatment plants and other critical infrastructure.
- Support legislation to strengthen homeland security and emergency preparedness in the Harris County region.
- Support legislation necessary to maximize federal funding for homeland security and preparedness for manmade and/or natural disasters affecting our region and state.

Clean Air and Environmental Issues

- Support the development and adoption of a statewide Climate Action Plan.
- Support legislation to reduce environmental and public health impacts of electric power generation.
- Support legislation to extend and fully fund the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan (TERP) and the Low Income Repair and Assistance Program (LIRAP).
- Support legislative initiatives to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the State Implementation Plan process.
- Support legislative initiatives to improve air and water quality.
- Support legislation that provides better control of industrial and vehicle emissions that contribute to the development of ground-level ozone; support legislation that contributes to minimizing carbon emissions.
- Support legislation that would require offsite air monitoring when a facility experiences an emissions event that causes offsite impacts.
- Support legislation that would prohibit or otherwise limit outdoor burning of refuse.
- Support legislation that would establish a program that defines and standardizes priority toxins and geographic areas where these toxins are most common to which permit standards could be compared.

- Support strengthening compliance history provisions, including requiring that local government enforcement actions be a part of a regulated entity's compliance history, and prohibiting poor performers from expanding their operations.
- Support initiatives to increase federal funding for accelerating the utilization of cleaner engines.
- Support legislation to control community impacts from junk yards and salvage yards.
- Support the Texas Clean Air Working Group.
- Support legislation encouraging recycling.
- Support initiatives that increase resources for and improve service delivery of on-site wastewater facilities and research.
- Support legislation to allow counties to deny approval of new concrete batch or crushing plants proposed within a specified distance of residential property.
- Support funding or financial incentives for public offices that conduct zero waste studies and commit to zero waste goals.
- Support legislation to require notification to local regulatory agencies within 24 hours of discovery of the spill.
- Support legislation to require regulated entities to notify local jurisdictional agencies of spills and discharges within regulatory timeframes despite presidential or gubernatorial disaster proclamations.
- Oppose any legislative efforts to weaken state environmental laws, local enforcement authority, or public participation in environmental decision-making.

Health and Human Service Issues

Health

- Support legislation that would increase the number of insured in Harris County, including innovative Medicaid waiver programs that maximize federal funds through the matching of local and state expenditures and other innovative measures.
- Support legislative initiatives that would maximize federal funding to non-state operated hospitals.
- Support legislative initiatives that would fund and enhance delivery of_uncompensated emergency/trauma care.
- Support alternative funding mechanisms for the provision of indigent care.
- Support renewal of the 1115 Medicaid Healthcare and Quality Improvement Transformation Waiver.
- Support legislation that would expand the Medicaid program.
- Support appropriate regionalization strategies so that urban, suburban, and rural areas maintain a shared responsibility for funding healthcare for the indigent and uninsured who live and work within the region.

- Support initiatives to develop the electronic health technology infrastructure of local governments.
- Support expansion of prevention and early intervention services and evidenced-based practice as a cost-savings strategy.
- Support legislative initiatives that address the workforce shortages of health professionals in Texas.
- Support continued funding and development of the Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) and school-based health centers.
- Support legislation to increase funding for services for victims of human trafficking.
- Support legislation that increases access to women's preventative healthcare services.
- Support continued funding of the Healthy Texas Women and Family Planning programs.
- Support including mental health services to all Medicaid benefits.
- Oppose cuts to state or federal funding for health programs.
- Oppose initiatives that would reduce federal disproportionate share payments to public hospitals.
- Oppose initiatives that would reduce federal funding of the Community Services Block Grant program, the Women, Infants and Children program, and family services.
- Oppose any mandate of intergovernmental transfers.
- Oppose any initiative that ties participation in the 1115 Medicaid Healthcare and Quality Improvement Transformation Waiver program with the funding of the Medicaid Disproportionate Share Program, or that ties funding levels of the 1115 Waiver to those of the Medicaid Disproportionate Share Program.
- Oppose decreases in state funding of women's health services.
- Oppose initiatives that would weaken the Affordable Care Act without providing alternatives that accomplish the same or better outcomes.

Public Health

- Strengthen the laws governing response and management of communicable diseases.
- Support legislation that enhances the control and elimination of notifiable conditions and other infectious diseases.
- Support legislation that strengthens disease tracking.
- Support legislation that would help control the spread of Zika Virus, West Nile Virus and other mosquito-borne illnesses.
- Support legislation that enhances food safety.
- Support legislation that would increase childhood and adult immunization rates.
- Support legislation that would reduce child injuries and fatalities.
- Support legislation that would contribute to the prevention of chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes and asthma among children and other high-risk populations.
- Protect authorization of and funding for the federal Prevention and Public Health Fund.
- Support reauthorization of the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act, and ensure adequate funding levels.
- Support legislation that would contribute to the prevention of tobacco use among children and youth.

- Support legislation designed to eliminate animal cruelty that includes proportional and effective measures for enforcement.
- Support legislation designed to protect the public from dangerous dogs that includes proportional and effective measures for enforcement.
- Support improving the SNAP program and oppose decreases in access to the program.
- Support legislation to enact public health measures to reduce gun violence.
- Support legislation to enact public health measures to increase access to healthy food for low-income residents and residents who live in “food deserts.”
- Support legislation to shift efforts to find housing for the homeless from the criminal justice system to the social services system without cuts in current service provision.
- Support legislation to shift crime victim services to public health departments around the state and encourage those services to be trauma-focused without cuts in current service provision.
- Oppose legislation that limits counties’ ability to protect or that harms the welfare of immigrant residents.
- Oppose legislation that is harmful to public health.
- Oppose legislation that would weaken a local public health department’s regulatory authority.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment

- Support initiatives that would increase funding and enhance the delivery of mental health services.
- Support initiatives that increase community-based options for persons with mental illness and intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).
- Support initiatives that would increase the continuity of care for persons with mental illness and fund appropriate aftercare services and supports such as housing, and employment-related services.
- Support increased state and federal funding of substance abuse prevention and treatment services.
- Support increased funding for prevention and early intervention services for at-risk youth such as Services to At-Risk Youth (STAR) and Community Youth Development programs.
- Support initiatives that would encourage the transfer of care and management of substance abuse treatment programs from the criminal justice system to health or human services systems.
- Support initiatives that would encourage the transfer of care and management of mental health from the criminal justice system to public health or human services systems.
- Support legislation allowing or expanding entities that can create and conduct needle exchange programs.
- Support legislation expanding access by first responders and the general public to injectable or aerosolized opioid receptor antagonists.
- Oppose initiatives that diminish local control over mental health services.

Civil Justice, Criminal Justice and Juvenile Justice Issues

- Support initiatives making the pretrial release system more fair and just for the poor.

- Support initiatives that provide resources and flexibility for local governments to divert individuals from the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems.
- Support increased state funding of the Harris County juvenile programs and initiatives providing alternatives to detention programs, including community-based diversion programs.
- Support distribution of juvenile probation funding based on a county's pro rata share of local funding adjusted for tax base and juvenile age population.
- Support continued state funding of residential substance abuse and treatment services.
- Support legislation requiring the state to be responsible for state prisoners.
- Support legislation authorizing the recovery of attorneys' fees in enforcement actions.
- Support initiatives that increase the availability of continuing support services to youth aging out of foster care up to age 26 and juveniles who are involved in multiple systems.
- Support the dedication and oppose the diversion of auto theft grant funds.
- Support legislation increasing flexibility in court collections, including legislation that expands the ability of courts to forgive fines and fees levied against indigent defendants.
- Support initiatives that would provide for continuous eligibility for public assistance benefits for inmates.
- Support increased state funding for the Crime Victims Compensation (CVC) Fund.
- Support initiatives to increase efficiency for clerks of the courts.
- Support increased state or federal funding for efforts directed at human trafficking.
- Support legislation clarifying that alcohol testing and electronic monitoring costs may be assessed against defendants while seeking to reduce those costs.
- Support the interagency sharing of information related to an at-risk juvenile to provide prevention and early intervention services but not to facilitate prosecution.
- Support legislation criminalizing the unauthorized use of credit card skimmers.
- Support legislation to prevent or penalize identity theft.
- Support expanding the offenses that trigger DNA sample collection.
- Support initiatives that reduce recidivism and promote successful reentry from the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems, including jails.
- Support initiatives that preserve or increase funding for the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP).
- Support legislation that would conform dropout statistics reporting and educational time measures of JJAEPs to that of other entities.
- Support legislation that creates a defense to prosecution for certain offenses involving controlled substances and other prohibited drugs, substances, or paraphernalia for defendants seeking assistance for a suspected overdose.
- Support legislation requiring Texas Indigent Defense Commission to adopt caseload standards for court-appointed counsel and for administrative judges of local criminal courts to adopt and enforce those standards for court-appointed counsel.
- Support legislation that would allow diversion of misdemeanor and felony cases involving property damage to mediation for resolution outside the criminal justice system.
- Oppose cuts to state or federal funding for effective, fair, and socially just criminal and juvenile justice programs.
- Oppose cuts to the federal State Criminal Alien Assistance Program and Community Oriented Policing Program.

Housing and Community Development

- Support legislation and initiatives conducive to increased availability of affordable housing.
- Support increased regulatory autonomy for counties by removing city council oversight of affordable housing development in the ETJ.
- Support the prioritization of disaster affected areas by TDHCA.
- Support increased regulatory powers for counties to adopt and enforce residential building codes to prevent unsafe housing conditions.
- Support legislation and initiatives consistent with Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing.
- Support the repeal of laws protecting source of income discrimination in housing.
- Oppose legislation placing further regulatory burdens on the development of affordable housing generally and the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program specifically.