

Weekly Legislative Report

2.25.21



GOVERNOR:

End of Week Winter Weather Update

Friday, February 19th – Governor Greg Abbott provided an update on the state's ongoing response to winter weather events throughout the state. The Governor laid out four immediate priorities for the State of Texas, as well as what the state is doing to restore power and water and ensure that food and fuel demands are met throughout Texas.

The first immediate priority is continuing to restore power to Texas homes. While there are no longer any residential power outages due to lack of power generation, there are still some Texans without power due to downed lines or the need for manual reconnection. The Governor assured Texans without power that local providers are working diligently to restore electricity.

The second priority is supporting local officials as they work to restore water for Texans. Today, the Governor issued waivers to cut red tape to accelerate this process. The Texas Commission of Environmental Quality (TCEQ), as of 5 pm February 19, is standing up a phone bank for local water utilities who are unable to get water testing at their contracted labs. This phone bank will connect local facilities with another lab that can test their water quickly. TCEQ has partnered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to stand up three mobile water testing labs. In addition, the state is partnering with local river authorities to use their water labs to assist locals with bacteria sampling. Texas has also partnered with the state of Arkansas to use their labs. Additionally, TCEQ is coordinating with larger local labs that have testing availability to assist smaller municipalities. The Governor noted that he held a call earlier today with the Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners (TSBPE) to discuss ways to quickly repair burst pipes for Texans across the state. As of noon today, over 320 plumbers have renewed their license, and TSBPE is coordinating with multiple out-of-state plumbing companies to send additional plumbers to Texas. The Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) is continuing to deliver bottled water to communities facing water shortages or water quality issues. Over 1.7 million bottles of water have been delivered to communities across the state.

The third priority is ensuring Texans have the food and supplies they need. The Governor noted that he has already suspended some regulations relating to commercial vehicles, which will speed the delivery of food and other resources to communities across the state. The State is taking steps to open new fuel supply lines to ensure truckers, agriculture producers, emergency responders, and anyone else that runs on diesel will be able to get food to stores and supplies to Texans in need. The Governor announced that he is allowing the use of off-road road diesel on Texas roads. Governor Abbott and Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar are requesting fuel waivers from the EPA and the IRS to allow for the use of all forms of diesel on Texas roads to keep our truckers moving. As roads conditions continue to improve, more food and supplies will be delivered to grocery stores across the state.

The fourth priority is helping refineries get back up and running to provide Texans with the fuel they need. In addition to fuel regulation suspensions previously mentioned, the Governor spoke

with oil and gas refineries earlier to work on strategies to get their operations up and running again.

“Thanks to the efforts of linemen, plumbers, first responders, truckers, farmers, ranchers, grocery store workers, refinery workers, and more, we continue to make tremendous strides to overcome the challenges of the past week,” said Governor Abbott. “We know that this past week has been challenging for far too many Texans. Our state agencies are working around the clock to restore power and water, and to ensure Texans have food and supplies. I want to reassure the people of Texas that we are using every tool at our disposal to help those in need. We have overcome challenges in the past, and we will overcome this challenge together.”

SENATE:

The Texas Senate was not in session last week. They were expected to meet on Tuesday, but due to inclement weather, they gaveled in long enough to announce adjournment until Friday, February 19. On Friday, there was an adjournment until this week because weather conditions continue to be hazardous.

This Week: The Senate convened this week.

HOUSE:

The House was not in session last week. They were also expected to meet on Tuesday, but were adjourned until Friday when they adjourned until this week.

This Week: The House convened this week.

Senate Finance Committee

The Senate Finance Committee posted meetings for Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of last week, but all of the meetings were canceled due to the weather.

House Appropriations Committee

The House Appropriations Committee posted meetings for Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday last week, but all of the meetings were cancelled.

House Appropriations Committee’s Budget Subcommittees

On February 18th, House Appropriations Committee Chair Greg Bonnen (R-Friendswood) released a letter naming budget subcommittees. It said, “Due to inclement weather, the House Appropriations Committee will not convene for the previously posted hearing on Thursday, February 18, 2021. Pursuant to Rule 4, Sections 43 and 44, each committee may conduct its business through the use of subcommittees as determined by the chair, who shall appoint the membership of each subcommittee. Therefore, contingent upon entry of subcommittee appointments into the committee record, I create the following subcommittees and name the following chairs and members of each subcommittee:

Subcommittee on Articles I, IV, and V (General Government, Judiciary, and Public Safety & Criminal Justice)

Representative Mary González (D-Clint), Chair
Representative Matt Schaefer (R-Tyler), Vice Chair
Representative Trent Ashby (R-Lufkin)
Representative Justin Holland (R-Rockwall)

Representative Carl Sherman, Sr. (D-DeSoto)

Subcommittee on Article II (Health & Human Services)

Representative Giovanni Capriglione (R-Keller), Chair
Representative Toni Rose (D-Dallas), Vice Chair
Representative Donna Howard (D-Austin)
Representative John Raney (R-Bryan)
Representative Jay Dean (R-Longview)
Representative Julie Johnson (D-Carrollton)
Representative Gary Gates (R-Richmond)
Representative Ann Johnson (D-Houston)

Subcommittee on Article III (Education)

Representative Terry Wilson (R-Granite Shoals), Chair
Representative Erin Zwiener (D-Driftwood), Vice Chair
Representative Geanie Morrison (R-Victoria)
Representative Gene Wu (D-Houston)
Representative Gary VanDeaver (R-New Boston)
Representative Jarvis Johnson (D-Houston)
Representative Ina Minjarez (D-San Antonio)
Representative Lynn Stucky (R-Sanger)

Subcommittee on Articles VI, VII, and VIII (Natural Resources, Business & Economic Development, and Regulatory)

Representative Armando Walle (D-Houston), Chair
Representative Cecil Bell (R-Magnolia), Vice Chair
Representative Ed Thompson (R-Pearland)
Representative Steve Toth (R-The Woodlands)
Representative Alex Dominguez (D-Brownsville)

Subcommittee on Strategic Fiscal Review and Federal Relief Funds

Representative Cecil Bell (R-Magnolia), Chair
Representative Ina Minjarez (D-San Antonio), Vice Chair
Representative Matt Schaefer (R-Tyler)
Representative Ed Thompson (R-Pearland)
Representative Steve Toth (R-The Woodlands)
Representative Alex Dominguez (D-Brownsville)
Representative Ann Johnson (D-Houston)

“Thank you all for your service and I am looking forward to working with you.”

Note: *The Subcommittee on Infrastructure, Resiliency & Investments was eliminated and the Subcommittee on Strategic Fiscal Review and Federal Relief Funds was established.*

DSHS Weekly Vaccine Distribution Update

On February 12th, the Department of State Health Services issued its weekly update on vaccine distribution in Texas for the week of February 15th. It said, “The state of Texas will receive 407,650 first doses (compared to 401,750 the week of February 8th) of COVID-19 vaccine from the federal government for the week of February 15th. The Texas Department of State Health Services has instructed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ship those doses to 302 providers (358 providers last week) in 158 counties (135 counties last week) across Texas.

That includes 85 hub providers that will focus on broader community vaccination efforts including the hardest hit populations and areas in exchange for a steady supply of vaccine from week to week. An additional 217 providers (compared to 273 last week) will receive doses with a focus on those that serve older adults, such as health departments, pharmacies, federally qualified health centers, community and rural clinics, and some medical practices that specialize in care for older adults.

“On top of the state allocation, the federal government has shipped 80,000 doses of vaccine to 376 pharmacy locations across the state as part of the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program. Pharmacies participating in Texas include CVS, HEB, Walmart, and a consortium of independent pharmacies (Good Neighbor Pharmacy and Americource Bergen Drug Corporation’s Pharmacy Services Administrative Organization – PSAO, Elevate Provider).

“DSHS encourages providers to make accommodations for people 75 and older, who remain at the highest risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19. For example, providers could set aside a certain number of doses for older adults, serve them during special hours, help them move through vaccine clinics more quickly, or work with local partners to facilitate in-home vaccination. This does not change the groups eligible for vaccination. In addition to the first doses mentioned above, the state is ordering 333,650 doses (*compared to 330,925 last week*) intended as the second dose for people first vaccinated a few weeks ago. DSHS is working with providers to make sure that they order the number of second doses they need at the appropriate time. People should be able to return to the same provider to receive their second dose within six weeks of getting the first.”

Here is some additional information provided:

- Texas providers have administered more than 3.8 million doses of vaccine (*up from 2.98 million last week*).
- Nearly 2.8 million people have received at least one dose, and over 1 million have been fully vaccinated (*last week the “fully vaccinated” count was 670,000*).
- While 72 percent of Texans have been vaccinated in their home county, it is not a requirement, and vaccine has been administered to residents of all 254 counties.
- Texas continues to vaccinate health care workers, residents of long-term care facilities, people 65 and older, and those with medical conditions that put them at greater risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19.
- Vaccine remains limited based on the capacity of the manufacturers to produce it, so it will take time for Texas to receive enough vaccine for all the people in the priority populations who want to be vaccinated. Currently, there is not enough vaccine to supply every provider with vaccine every week.