

## Executive Summary

The 86th Legislative Session faced many competing priorities and the results were inevitably unpredictable, as legislation tends to be. By analyzing the governor's emergency items and comparing the action to previous sessions, this paper aims to serve as a sort of performance measure for the session from the standpoint of staffers. To begin, each of the Capstone Scholars described their experiences within their placements during session and what the literature explains is the role of legislative staff. Collectively, Scholars saw the roles interest groups and lobbyists have on the legislative process and how Texas' professionalized legislative bodies are able to use their education and knowledge during session.

In order to explain Governor Abbott's emergency items in the 86th Legislature, this paper offers a brief history of the emergency items from Governor George W. Bush and Governor Rick Perry in an attempt to explain how emergency items do not always successfully go through the legislative process. There is also the high possibility that an emergency item will be amended in later sessions in order to correct unintended consequences and to make better policy for Texans.

Our paper begins with a quantitative analysis of the history of legislative sessions. We find that by examining the number of bills filed, passed, and the number of legislators over time that the Texas State Legislature has reached maturity as an institution. We also compared the Texas State Legislature to the other 49 state legislatures. We found that the Texas State Legislature is quite professional in relation to its peers and that its members are quite diverse and educated in comparison to other state legislatures.

In examining the legislative history of governors that have declared school finance as an emergency item, a foundation for analysis of House Bill 3 emerges. The previous emergency declarations include the use of a dedicated interim group of legislators, educators, and state

agencies/authorities to form recommendations supported by the Governor, but the determinants of success appear to be dependent on the Governor's willingness to work with legislators and the non-originating chamber's willingness to avoid partisan theater. Lessons are gleaned from the comparison of these legislative efforts across time to form conclusions that a Governor's authority in declaring an emergency item is not responsible for successful legislation, but rather the governor's willingness to work with legislators and allow them to lead the way to reform.

Throughout the history of the State of Texas, property taxes have almost always been at the forefront of Texans' and Legislators' minds. As property taxes have continued to rapidly increase, many Texans are being forced out of their homes due to their property tax levies. Noticing this, Governor Abbott declared that property tax reform and relief would be an emergency item for the 86<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session. Ultimately, through hours of work and bipartisan compromise, the Texas Legislature produced property tax and appraisal review reform in Senate Bill 2 and some property tax relief through House Bill 3.

Teacher pay became a major topic in Texas in 2019 after Governor Abbott addressed the need for better education for children, stating it starts in the classroom, with teachers. The Senate and the House of Representatives had very different approaches to the emergency. Governor Abbott played a role by voicing his support for merit-based pay, as seen in Dallas Independent School District. The emergency item of teacher pay raises will be determined in the Conference Committee of House Bill 3, with many voices sharing their opinions on the controversial matter.

Following the devastation in Santa Fe on May 18, 2018, at the hands of a 17-year-old gunman, Texas leaders demanded action on the issue of school safety. On May 30, 2018, Governor Abbott released the School and Firearm Safety Action Plan that provided 24 recommendations for school safety. Senator Larry Taylor worked with Governor Abbott,

Lieutenant Governor Patrick, and House Representatives to craft Senate Bill 11, addressing the policies, procedures, and measures for school safety and mental health promotion in public schools during this session.

For the first time, Texas has declared mental health an emergency item. Senator Jane Nelson and Representative Senfronia Thompson proposed Senate Bill 10 and House Bill 10 respectively, each tackling the emergency item in their own way. Both authors seek to bolster state research and service delivery for individuals experiencing mental health issues, placing an emphasis on children as to investigate how the issues emerge and address them at the source. This has proven to be a substantial and difficult task, requiring a significant amount of work to allow the two bills to work together without duplicating efforts.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, many Texas communities suffered devastating consequences and provoked the largest response to a natural disaster in Texas history. Governor Abbott recognized that although the response to Harvey was immediate and strong, there are ways that Texas can improve its emergency preparedness and response. This prompted the declaration of disaster relief as an emergency item, aiming to provide more disaster relief for communities still suffering and better the communication and coordination between entities so that Texas is more effectively prepared to combat any future natural disasters.