

Lalani's Legislative Letter

Volume 2023 Issue 5

Greetings from your Texas Capitol!

Greetings from your Texas Capitol. Here in Austin we are really getting into the nuts and bolts of the 88th legislative session and things are busier than ever. Floor votes began on legislation that has been heard in various committees on March 28th. I presented my first bill in the Higher Education Committee.

The state budget was also debated on the House Floor.

Through all of this, I am keeping the concerns, well-being, and interests of HD 76 residents foremost in my mind. Everything my office is doing, we are doing for each of you.

I've said we're busy here, and we are – between committee hearings and floor activities. But, no matter how hectic things get we are never too busy to welcome constituents.

Remember this is your Capitol. You are the most important part of what happens here. Come and see it, get involved, make your voice heard.

Blessings,

Rep. Suleman Lalani, M.D.

Statement on the Covenant School Shooting in Nashville Tennessee and the Tennessee Three

My heart goes out to those affected by the deadly shooting at Nashville's Covenant School that killed three children and three adults. I stand against gun violence everywhere and doing my part to end it in Texas is one of my legislative priorities. As a physician I understand gun violence is a public health issue as well as a human tragedy. As a father I believe no parent should have to accept this as normal. As a legislator I'm working toward policies supporting common sense expressions of our Second Amendment rights.

This tragedy and the ousting of the Tennessee Three – legislators who were expelled from the Tennessee legislature for protesting the lack of debate on the gun issue in the wake of the Covenant shooting – brings to mind the need for robust discussion on the issue of gun sense legislation. As elected officials it is incumbent upon us to talk about issues that affect our constituents, even if they make us uncomfortable. Leadership should encourage a healthy debate and the body should respond with respectful dialog. Decorum is important for the functioning of a legislative body. But decorum is predicated on an assumption of trust that all those involved with the legislative process will act in good faith. The situation in the Tennessee Legislature created a circumstance where the three representatives responded by putting the issue in front of the legislature the only way, they felt they could which resulted in the expulsion of two of the members.

I hope and pray that all members of the Texas House of Representatives, especially our leadership, will always act with good faith and that none of our members ever feel placed in such an unpleasant position.

Legislation Update

HB 3124. This week I had the opportunity to lay out my first bill in the Higher Education Committee. **HB 3124** would prohibit the use of cigarettes and all other forms of smokable tobacco on Texas higher education campuses. As a physician, this bill is near to my heart. For people of any age, tobacco cessation is one of the most effective single steps they can take for a lifetime of good health. For young people, it is especially beneficial to ensure they never start down that road or get off of it as quickly as possible. Our society has made great strides on this issue in recent decades, but not every Texas higher education campus does as well in this regard. For our young people, and for the public health of Texans generally, this is a bill whose time has come.

Thank you to those who came to testify: The Texas Medical Association, MD Anderson Cancer Center, The Texas Pediatric Society, Texas Chapter of the AAP, The Texas Public Health Coalition, American Heart Association - Texas and the TEXAS Tobacco Control Coalition.



In the meantime, please follow this [link](#) for real-time updates to my bills.

HB1: The Budget. The state legislature does many important things. None is more crucial than passing the biennial budget. The budget defines and puts the weight of \$302.6 billion behind the state house of representative's priorities for Texans over the next two years. The state senate prepares its own appropriations bill, and the two versions are then reconciled.

I was honored to have passed two amendments to the biennial budget. Both amendments draw upon my experience as a physician and promote the health and wellness of all Texans, in both routine and in unexpected circumstances.

My first amendment facilitates Texas creating a robust stockpile of medical supplies, such as PEP and pharmaceuticals as preparation, against future pandemics, health crises, or natural disasters. It does this by creating the necessary administrative and regulatory framework to enable our state to secure federal matching funds for creating and maintaining such a stockpile.

My second amendment adds \$5 million to the Family Practice Residency Program (FPRP). This important program provides incentives for physicians graduating from Texas medical schools to practice in rural and underserved areas of our state and select family medicine as their specialty. Funding for this program had decreased sharply over the past decade, at a time when Texas was facing growing healthcare challenges. By giving FPRP the funding it deserves we prevent the emergence of healthcare deserts in rural areas and other areas while also ensuring a supply of ob-gyns at a time when Texas is having difficulty retaining that specialization in the state.





Fighting for Our Schools, Our Children, and Our Teachers. Last Thursday I joined with other House Democrats and rural Republicans to vote against the use of state money from Texas taxpayers like you for private school vouchers. I believe in parental school choice, but I oppose taking money away from our public schools. Legislators have not only a moral but also a constitutional duty to provide a quality, well-funded public school system which benefits all Texas children. On a practical level families in many parts of our state do not have private school options, and using public money for private schools is sacrificing the education of their children for the benefit of more populous and affluent areas.

While I am open to the idea of using public money to fund charter schools, my support is conditional on charter schools being subject to the same accountability, oversight, and standards as our public schools. That is not currently the case in Texas.

Education is essential for giving our children the tools to become good citizens and ensure that our state's prosperity continues into the future. The fight for quality public education continues on many fronts. The Texas Senate and some state leaders are still looking for ways to spend your tax dollars on private school vouchers. I will continue working on behalf of HD 76 parents and children, ensuring you have the public education system you deserve.

HB 680: Celebrating Texas Diversity. Of importance to many HD 76 residents, I had the opportunity to support HB 608 which allows county commissioners to allow the sale of fireworks in the five days leading up to and during the festival of Diwali. Thank you to Rep. Matt Shaheen of Plano for authoring this bill which embraces the diversity of our state and acknowledges the importance of Diwali to so many Texans.



Committee Corner

Spotlight on Natural Resources Committee. One of the three committees I serve on is the Natural Resources Committee. This committee has jurisdiction over the conservation, control, and management of Texas natural resources, including land and water resources. The committee's mandate also includes legislation relating to state and local agencies responsible for environmental control as well as land and water management.

Over the interim between this legislative session and the previous one, Natural Resources studied the Gulf Coast Protection District, groundwater issues, and water infrastructure in the state. As that list suggests, water resources are an important issue for Texas. While the rapid growth of our state's population and economy is a good thing, it creates challenges for managing finite water resources. Working together, the committee is helping ensure our state's municipal, commercial, and agricultural water needs will be met both today and, in the future, while also sustaining our great Texas ecosystems.

Higher Education Committee. As a member of the House Higher Education Committee, I was excited to participate in the University of Texas Board of Regents' reception for Speaker Phelan, hosted at Darrell K Royal stadium. Interactions with our state's top higher educational administrators, such as the regents, ensures the committee is well-informed about the challenges and opportunities that Texas colleges and universities are experiencing in 2023.



Resolution Calendars Committee. This committee is responsible for congratulatory or memorial resolutions and proclamations, and it is such a wonderful fit for someone representing HD 76. Through this committee, I can help the communities of our diverse district secure the recognition we deserve. In recent weeks, I have had the honor of celebrating our diversity by introducing proclamations recognizing Nowruz, Pakistan Day, and Ramadan.

Capitol Happenings

First Iftar in the Capitol. We are now in the month of Ramadan. For nearly half a million Texans, this is a special time of daytime fasting, prayer, and service to others. In addition to authoring the resolution recognizing Ramadan I had the immense blessing to host the first *iftar*, the ritual meal breaking the Ramadan fast, ever held at the Texas Capitol. It was a great honor to welcome our guests, including Speaker Dade Phelan, Rep. Christian Manuel, and Rep. Gene Wu our neighbor from HD 137. I was very moved that they fasted in solidarity with Texas Muslims. Special thanks to Imam Sheikh Attiya and Salim Jaffer for their intriguing and engaging talks. I am grateful to Rep. Terry Meza and Rep. Jon Rosenthal for making the time to talk with us about Lent and Yom Kippur, which occupy similar places for Christians and Jews that Ramadan does for Muslims. This is an incredibly busy time at the Capitol, and I am grateful for everyone who made the time to attend this important event recognizing the diversity of Texas.



HR 871: World Autism Day Resolution. April 2nd was World Autism Awareness Day, a day dedicated to raising awareness about autism and advocating for the rights of people on the autism spectrum. To honor the day in the Texas Legislature, I offered House Resolution 871 on the House floor. It is our duty to use our voices to ensure that everyone, regardless of their abilities, is treated with dignity and respect. It is my challenge to each of you that you commit to building a society that is inclusive, welcoming, and supportive for individuals with autism, and work to create a brighter future for everyone on the spectrum.

 <p>H.R. No. 871</p> <p>RESOLUTION</p> <p>WHEREAS, The observance of World Autism Awareness Day on April 2, 2023, provides a fitting opportunity to promote better understanding of autism and the issues faced by individuals living with the disorder; and</p> <p>WHEREAS, In 2007, WAAD was established by the United Nations as a platform to raise public awareness about the neurological condition and to highlight the need to improve quality of life for those with autism spectrum disorder; and</p> <p>WHEREAS, ASD encompasses a range of health conditions that can cause social, communication, and behavioral challenges; people experience the disorder to varying degrees, and symptoms can include being nonverbal, engaging in atypical speech patterns and repetitive behaviors, and having significantly high or low levels of sensitivity to various sensory stimuli; and</p> <p>WHEREAS, In recent years, many medical professionals and researchers have embraced the neurodiversity paradigm, moving away from the idea of "curing" autism and instead focusing on supporting those affected by it; in addition to helping restore dignity and self-esteem, this shift has allowed individuals with autism and their families to concentrate on securing access to the services they need; and</p> <p>WHEREAS, World Autism Awareness Day serves to foster an environment of compassion and acceptance for those impacted by this complex disorder, and all Texans are encouraged to affirm their commitment to this worthwhile goal; now, therefore, be it</p> <p>RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 88th Texas Legislature hereby recognize April 2, 2023, as World Autism Awareness Day.</p> <p>Lalani Cain Allen Cole Orr</p>	<p>H.R. No. 871</p>  <p>Speaker of the House</p> <p>I certify that H.R. No. 871 was adopted by the House on March 30, 2023, by a non-record vote.</p>  <p>Chief Clerk of the House</p>   <p>Suleman Lalani State Representative District 76</p>
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Advocacy at the Capitol

Meet the ARC Day at the Capitol. The Arc of Texas does important work for Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities, promoting their agency, dignity, and quality of life. It

was wonderful to see so many Arc groups here in Austin, especially my friends from The Arc of Fort Bend County.



Alzheimer's Association State Advocacy Day. I was pleased to welcome representatives of the Alzheimer's Association to the Capitol and join them for their annual awareness breakfast. Introducing the resolution declaring April 5th as Alzheimer's Association State Advocacy Day was something very personal for me. As a doctor, I see the pain this condition creates for Texas families and, as more of us live longer, Alzheimer's will become an increasingly significant public health issue in coming years. Groups like the Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's Society do vital work in research, advocacy, and providing dignity for Alzheimer's patients and their families.





H.R. No. 870

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, Members of the Alzheimer's Association are gathering at the Texas Capitol on April 5, 2023, as part of Alzheimer's Association State Advocacy Day; and

WHEREAS, A progressive neurodegenerative brain disorder, Alzheimer's disease robs individuals of their memories and leads to progressive mental and physical impairments; it is the seventh-leading cause of death in the United States, and unlike the other principal causes, there is currently no cure or treatment for it and no way to slow its progression; in addition, Alzheimer's is the most expensive disease in the U.S., costing more than cancer and heart disease combined; and

WHEREAS, Today, more than 6.7 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's, including 400,000 in Texas; these individuals require considerable assistance, and over 1 million Texans provide home care to family and friends with Alzheimer's, for a total of more than \$23.5 billion in unpaid labor; according to the National Institute on Aging, Alzheimer's disease also indirectly costs businesses more than \$37 billion a year in lost productivity as a result of employees missing work or leaving their job to care for a relative; and

WHEREAS, With early detection and diagnosis, individuals with Alzheimer's and their families can better plan for the future while gaining access to medications, critical research trials, and support from the Alzheimer's Association; and

WHEREAS, Alzheimer's Association State Advocacy Day provides an important opportunity to raise awareness about Alzheimer's disease, to honor caregivers who support and care for loved ones with the disease, and to acknowledge the work of researchers who are searching for a cause and a cure; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 88th Texas Legislature hereby recognize April 5, 2023, as Alzheimer's Association State Advocacy Day at the State Capitol and commend the Alzheimer's Association for its efforts to fight this terrible disease and to advocate for those suffering from it.

Lalani
Shaheen
Bowers
Lopez of Bexar
Capriglione

H.R. No. 870

Speaker of the House

I certify that H.R. No. 870 was adopted by the House on April 5, 2023, by a non-record vote.

Chief Clerk of the House



Suleman Lalani
State Representative
District 76

In Our District

First Annual HD 76 Community Iftar. After the success of the first iftar to be held in the Texas Capitol, my office held the first Annual HD 76 Community Iftar on April 14th. People from all of HD 76 gathered together to celebrate iftar, but also the great diversity and sense of community that makes me proud to call this area home.



The Blue Ribbon Project. I have been involved with the Exchange Club service organization for many years. On April 2nd, my office joined the other members of the Exchange Club of Fort Bend for our annual Blue Ribbon Project for Child Advocacy Awareness on the historic courthouse lawn in Richmond. April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and the Exchange Club's Ribbon Project does great work in raising awareness of this problem that deserves everyone's attentions. Sadly, not every child has someone who will advocate for them, and we all need to step up. As a longtime Exchange Club member, it was also a pleasure to welcome clubs from around Texas, including Fort Bend, to Austin for Exchange Club Recognition & Exchange Day Celebration at the Capitol.



Emgage Texas Gala. We are in the midst of Ramadan, the month of fasting and spiritual contemplation observed by nearly half-a-million Texas Muslims. On April 9th, I joined Emgage Texas for iftar, the ritual breaking of the daily fast. A special delight of the Emgage iftar was the opportunity to interact with guest of honor US Congressperson Rashida Tlaib. It was exciting to hear about the representative's passion for clean water, something that resonates with my current service of the Natural Resources committee, where ensuring Texas has an adequate supply of clean water now and for the future is a top priority.



Emgage invited me to share my thoughts on the meaning of Ramadan as well as the importance of the Texas Muslim community. Emgage is doing great work in voter mobilization and training the next generation of Texas leaders and was wonderful to be able to support their efforts.



How to Reach Us

TEXAS HOUSE *of* REPRESENTATIVES



Dr. Suleman Lalani

State Representative, District 76

Office Contacts

Jennifer Strobel
Chief of Staff
jennifer.strobel@house.texas.gov

Elliot Ross
Legislative Director
elliot.ross@house.texas.gov

Capitol Office Room Number
E1.512

Capitol Office Phone
(512) 463-0596

Capitol Office Email
district76.lalani@house.texas.gov

Capitol Office: P.O. Box 2910 • Austin, Texas 78768-2910 • phone (512) 463-0596
SULEMAN.LALANI@HOUSE.TEXAS.GOV

This week at the Capitol

Monday, 04/17/2023

Higher Education Committee at 8:00am
Bill Hearing on HB 3631 in Higher Education
House in Session at 11:00am

Tuesday, 4/18/2023

Natural Resources Committee at 8:00am
House in Session at 10:00am

Wednesday, 4/19/2023

Bill Hearing on HB 3944 in Licensing and Administrative Procedures at 8:00am
House in Session at 10:00am

Thursday, 4/20/2023

House in Session at 10:00am

Friday, 4/21/2023

House in Session at 9:00am

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@DoctorLalani

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House Floor live this week.

<https://house.texas.gov/video-audio/>

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