

# Lalani's Legislative Letter

## *Volume 2023 Issue 6*

### ***Greetings from your Texas Capitol!***

The 88th Texas Legislature is hard at work debating and voting on legislation that will impact Texans for years to come. Every day, I am working for the interests of HD 76 residents. Everything my office is doing, we are doing for each of you. Legislators are also busy welcoming constituents, from large statewide groups to single individuals, who have come to Austin to talk to us about the issues that are most important to them.

This week, I've seen many Texans give eloquent, inspired testimony before legislative committees on bills that will affect them. This is very important for representatives. Understanding the sentiments of our constituents and how legislation will impact real people helps us be better legislators. I want to remind you that this is an option open to all of you. If there is a piece of legislation about which you are passionate, for or against, make time to come to Austin and testify. My office can help you learn when hearings on a particular bill are being held and walk you through the process of becoming a witness.

Despite being so busy we are trying to be everywhere we can be both in the district and in Austin.

***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.

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### ***Local Elections Matter***

I want to remind every voter that Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup>, is Election Day. A variety of local offices and propositions are on the ballot awaiting your decision. The May 2021 local election turnout in Fort Bend County barely broke 5%. My friends, we must do better. Local elections matter, especially in a rapidly growing and changing county such as ours. In many ways, local elections have an even bigger and more direct impact on residents' lives than state or national elections. Just as importantly, as we have witnessed in recent decades, local elections often set trends which filter up to state and national politics.

If you haven't voted early, I encourage each of you to make a difference by familiarizing yourself with the candidates and issues, then get out there and vote on Saturday. Voting Day information, such as polling locations, hours, and sample ballots can be found at Fort Bend County Elections or calling (281) 341-8670.

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## Legislation Update

Over the last two weeks we have been hearing bills on the House floor at a rapid pace. So, this week, I want to pull back the curtain for all of you on how legislators approach legislation. Bills are often complicated, especially larger ones. Sometimes, they are a mix of good and bad. This requires legislators to weigh a bill's strengths against its weakness and make the best decision we can. Even then, sometimes we later reevaluate our judgments. Let me share an example with you.

**HB 3**, known as the School Safety Bill, is a problematic bill for me. It was catalyzed by the Robb Elementary School Shooting in Uvalde and similar tragedies around our state and nation. Commonsense firearm policies are one of my legislative priorities. Making the presence of armed peace officers at schools the cornerstone of our response to school shootings is not common sense. It places the practical and financial onus on potential victims, creates an unnatural environment for school children, and is of dubious value. After all, 376 officers responded to the Uvalde shooting and it still took them over an hour to deal with the shooter, during which 19 children and two teachers were killed. On the other hand, HB 3 also offered a pathway to get some funding for school safety to our critically underfunded Texas public schools, which is another of my legislative priorities.

I sensed in my heart that this was not the right choice. While Texas schools need more funding, this felt like the wrong way to go about it. I was also increasingly troubled by an amendment to HB 3 which would allow school districts to hire private security guards rather than law enforcement officers. I am skeptical that an armed presence will truly be a deterrent to often irrational or mentally-ill shooters but, if it is to have any chance of working, those protecting our children must be the best of the best, trained and vetted to the highest standards. So, I followed my instincts and I voted "no."

Decisions at this level are sometimes life and death. I take my vote seriously and want to consider all the consequences of my vote, each and every time.

**HB 2127**. This This has been referred to as the preemption bill, because it limits the power that cities have to control local issues at the local level. Of all the legislation under consideration by the 88th Legislature, few would have consequences as far-reaching or negative for Texans who live in cities. This bill critically hinders the ability of Texas cities and counties not just to advocate for state legislation that benefits their residents, but it also restricts their ability to pass ordinances desired by their residents.

This legislation would, in essence, end the federalism we all learned about in civics class as a fundamental feature of American government. It also undermines the ability of communities to safeguard citizens' quality of life and to pursue economic development because it discourages the creation and retention of white-collar, knowledge-economy jobs which require communities to be places where people want to live, work, and raise their children.

The bill does this in three ways. First, it ends the ability of local governments, large and small, to implement policies on crucial topics favored by their voters unless explicitly authorized by the state legislature. Second, it allows any Texan to bring suit against a community in their county, or a



neighboring country, which they feel violates these restrictions. That means that a resident of Austin County could sue to stop the implementation of a law endorsed by the residents of Sugar Land, Stafford, Richmond, or Meadows Place. Third, it prevents cities and counties from engaging lobbyists to advocate for their interests with the state legislature. I should note, state government can and does use lobbyists to advance Texas' interests in Washington. This restriction in HB 2127 is an attempt to game the system by ensuring Texas municipalities can only fight for the interests of their residents with one hand tied behind their back.

Unlike some proponents of HB 2127, I am a genuine advocate of local control. The communities of HD 76 know our needs and interests better than outsider politicians, many of whom have never even visited our district. I am joining with many representatives from Texas cities, large and small, to stop harmful legislation like this. We must do everything possible to minimize the harm it will inflict upon tens of millions of Texans. Texans have a right to local government that is allowed to serve their residents' interests.

**HB 54.** On Tuesday, the House passed HB 54, which increases the amount of social security



income Medicaid residents of long-term care facilities receive for personal needs. I was honored to jointly author HB 54 with Rep. Senfronia Thompson, Dean of the Texas House of Representatives. This bill matters not only for public health but for the personal dignity of our Texas seniors. While Texas needs to do better at controlling the costs of long term care, bills such as HB 54 are an important part of the equation, too.

**HB 12.** This week we also passed HB 12. This piece of legislation would allow people who have given birth to keep their Medicaid benefits through the first 12 months post-partum. The credit for this victory belongs to Rep. Toni Rose, who worked tirelessly to make sure that this bill passed. I am proud to say that I was a coauthor and that I voted to extend these benefits.

**Lalani Legislation.** This week, I laid out six bills I authored before different legislative committees. This included three bills on Tuesday alone. If I have had a longer, more intense day at the capitol, I don't recall it.

**HB 3631.** On Monday, I laid out my HB 3631 before the Higher Education Committee. As a physician, this is an important bill to me. It requires Texas public higher education institutions to provide vital information about mental health services to incoming students and to show those students the physical location where services are provided. I am committed to creating a campus environment where mental health is valued and prioritized. Texans should work together to eliminate barriers and stigma as we support the mental health of our students. A special thanks to everyone who came to Austin to testify before the committee on behalf of this important legislation.



**HB 3944.** I also laid out HB 3944, which requires transportation network companies and ride-sharing companies to inform their drivers when a pick-up or drop-off is in a designated bicycle lane. This is another special bill for me. The issue with rideshare pick-ups and drop-offs in bicycle lanes, and the safety risks created when drivers are unaware, was brought to my attention by one of our interns. This is a powerful reminder for all of us that you're never too young, or too old, to get involved in the governing process and make a difference!



**HB 3091** would require health insurance companies to clearly print on insurance cards whether the insured individual is on a PPO or HMO plan. That may sound like a simple thing. As a physician, I can tell you the absence of that information results in confusion, unnecessary delays in care, claim denials, and unnecessary financial burden. Those are all things people seeking medical care do not need and that adversely impact the health of Texans and the public health of our state. Texans deserve better, especially when the fix is so simple.

**HB 3633** directs that an interim study be conducted on the advantages of establishing a program to train individuals in artificial intelligence (AI) systems. If the study deems AI to be a viable industry in Texas, then the Texas Workforce Commission would be charged with implementing the program. It is essential that we help prepare young Texans for tomorrow's best jobs, laying the foundation to keep our state a leader in new technology.

**HB 4762** will protect hospital personnel by waiving liability injuries caused while engaging in self-defense on duty. As a physician, this was another important bill for me. It gives our healthcare professionals a clear affirmation that their safety is important to us and we value the work they do. This helps them give their entire attention to providing care to Texans.

**HB 4897** will protect Texans, especially young Texans, by creating civil penalties for impersonating another person online, a practice sometimes known as "catfishing."

**HB 5395** creates the Ft. Bend County Water Control Improvement District No. 11. The district, located in the fast-growing city of Richmond, is necessary in order for improvements to be made to the land. State government has a responsibility to ensure local governments have the tools they need to best serve their residents. It also has the responsibility to then step out of the way and let local governments determine how those tools can best meet peoples' needs.

**HCR 80** celebrates our state's diversity and recognizes one of the fastest growing groups of Texans by designating each May as Muslim Heritage Month for a 10-year period beginning in 2024.

Thanks to everyone who came to Austin and testified on behalf of these bills. As a reminder, if there is a piece of legislation you are passionate about, for or against, you can offer testimony about it before a committee. This feedback is really helpful for legislators. My office can help you learn when hearings on a particular bill are being held and walk you through the process of becoming a witness.

If you want to follow any of my legislation, please go to my House [website](#).

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## Committee Corner

***Spotlight on Higher Education Committee.*** The Higher Education Committee has jurisdiction over all Texas colleges and universities as well as post-secondary education generally. It is also responsible for matters pertaining to higher education finance and tuition as well as supervising a number of specialized research organizations and think tanks connected with state universities. High Education is tremendously important, it offers Texas residents a pathway to a good quality of life, ensures our state's overall economic health, and supports a robust society and democracy by sharpening critical thinking skills while helping students build an understanding of themselves and the world.

***Spotlight on Resolutions Calendars Committee.*** Resolutions Calendars is a unique committee responsible for resolutions and proclamations which are congratulatory or memorial. In partnership with two other committees, it determines priorities for consideration legislation by the full House of Representatives. This is important. Through our resolutions and proclamations,

we are ensuring that the state government gives due recognition to the vast diversity of Texas. In the process, we are also creating a record for posterity about what and who is important to Texas in 2023. This is a powerful vehicle for putting the weight of official recognition behind various faith, cultural, and community groups. As representative for HD 76, service on this committee is something I take very seriously. Fort Bend is one of the most diverse counties in America and that diversity is one of the sources of our strength. My service on the Resolutions Calendars Committee helps me ensure that our diversity is acknowledged and celebrated.

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## Capitol Happenings

***Celebration of Diverse Leadership.*** I recently joined with other officials at Scholz Garten to celebrate the achievements of the Texas Black Legislative Caucus and the Mexican American Legislative Caucus (MALC). Supporting diversity is very important to me. When the Texas legislature mirrors the Texans we represent, everyone wins. It was also interesting to have the opportunity to visit the Historic Scholz Garten. Opened in 1866, it is the oldest restaurant in Texas!



***Service Leadership Society Mock Government Conference.*** I had the opportunity to speak to about 300 young people from Harmony Schools' Service Leadership Society. These students really are the leaders of tomorrow, studying how government works at a deep level and participating in a mock government program which includes authoring, debating, and voting on mock legislation. We discussed the nuts and bolts of what it means to be a state legislator as well as the many ways, beyond the importance of voting, they can get involved with the governmental process.



***Dedication of the Barbara Jordan State Office Building.*** I joined the Ribbon Cutting ceremony for the new Barbara Jordan State Office Building. This is an important recognition of someone who was a titan of Texas Politics. An eloquent crusader for justice for all people, in 1967, Jordan became the first African-American elected to the Texas Senate since Reconstruction and later became part of the Texas congressional delegation in Washington. As both a bridge-builder and barrier-buster, she is an inspiration to all of us. The state office building will be a permanent tribute to her accomplishments and reminder of her legacy.



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## Advocacy at the Capitol

***Baisakhi Resolution.*** I was privileged to join Representative Terry Meza in authoring **HR 1068**, recognizing the Sikh observation of Baisakhi. This is a major religious holiday for the Sikh faith. The Sikhs community has been part of Texas since the 19th century and, today, they make many great contributions to our state. We are fortunate to have such a publicly-minded community as part of HD 76 and Texas.





## In Our District

As we enter the furiously-paced final month of the legislative session, I am not able to spend as much time back home as I would like. But I want you all know that I am in Austin fighting for you. You put an immense amount of trust in me when you elected me and I intend to keep it!

**Community Member Recognition: Sasidharan Nair.** On April 16th, I had the pleasure of authoring a resolution from the Texas House of Representatives recognizing the 80th birthday of community leader Sasidharan Nair and the 50th wedding anniversary of Mr. Nair and his Ponnamma Nair. For many decades, Mr. Nair has been a pillar of the commercial and philanthropic community in HD 76 and greater Houston. It was wonderful to help honor his life and accomplishments in this way.



**Hope for Three's Autism Family Festival.** Last Sunday, I had the pleasure of spending time with some very extraordinary Texans at [Hope for Three's Autism Family Festival](#) and the honor of recognizing their efforts in creating awareness and providing resources for families with autistic individuals. People with autism have strengths and weaknesses, they make important contributions to Texas. Our state should support and empower them. Organizations like Hope for Three are leading the way.



***Marching for All of Us at the Statewide Civil Rights Protest.*** Last Saturday, I joined with other members of the House Democratic Caucus, local elected officials, community leaders, and concerned, compassionate citizens in Houston for a march protesting legislative attacks that seek to turn back the clock on civil rights and tolerance in Texas. There are so many bills this session which target the rights, opportunities, and dignity of Texans who are Asian, Black, immigrant, Latino, LGBTQIA+, Muslim, women, or young.

It wasn't just Houston. On the same day, elected officials, members of those demographic communities, and allies marched in cities large and small across Texas to say that we refuse to gently go back on decades of building a strong, inclusive, and free Texas. It was a privilege to join so many state and local leaders, impacted Texans, and allies at this event and across Texas in spirit.



House District 76 is such a diverse district that it would be difficult to find a resident not impacted by at least one of these regressive bills. It would be almost impossible to find a resident who doesn't have a friend or family member who would be harmed. That's why, whether it's in Greater Houston or the House Chamber in Austin, it is so important to me that I stand for civil rights, dignity, and empowerment. I'm standing for you and for your family.

My promise to you is I will never stop fighting for you. I will continue to march in your honor and on your behalf for as long as I have a voice left.

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# How to Reach Us

 <p>TEXAS HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES</p> <p><b>Dr. Suleman Lalani</b> State Representative, District 76</p> <h3>Office Contacts</h3> <p><b>Jennifer Strobel</b> Chief of Staff jennifer.strobel@house.texas.gov</p> <p><b>Elliot Ross</b> Legislative Director elliott.ross@house.texas.gov</p> <p><b>Capitol Office Room Number</b> EL.512</p> <p><b>Capitol Office Phone</b> (512) 463-0596</p> <p><b>Capitol Office Email</b> district76.lalani@house.texas.gov</p> <p><small>Capitol Office: P.O. Box 2910 • Austin, Texas 78768-2910 • phone (512) 463-0596 SULEMAN.LALANI@HOUSE.TEXAS.GOV</small></p>	<h3>This week at the Capitol</h3> <p>Monday, 05/01/2023 Higher Education Committee at 8:00am Bill Hearing on HB 4250 in Ways &amp; Means House in Session at 11:00am</p> <p>Tuesday, 05/02/2023 Natural Resources Committee at 8:00am House in Session at 10:00am</p> <p>Wednesday, 05/03/2023 House in Session at 10:00am</p> <p>Thursday, 05/04/2023 House in Session at 10:00am</p> <p>Friday, 05/05/2023 House in Session at 9:00am</p>
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