



*Tarrant County Judge
B. Glen Whitley*

TARRANT COUNTY CASTS A WATCHFUL EYE ON THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE

Texas counties care about what happens in the Texas Legislature.

They have to.

Like other Texas counties,

Tarrant County keeps important records, builds roads, maintains the courts and jails

and provides many other services we use every day.

The Texas Legislature meets every two years for 140 days. About 6,000 or more bills get filed in a session, but usually about 25 percent or less are passed by the state house and senate and become law.

For counties, the devil can be in the details.

While trying to improve the Lone Star State, even with the best intentions, some legislative actions can impose an economic burden on counties and taxpayers and make it difficult to deliver some of the services that you and I may take for granted.

Sometimes, state lawmakers pass unfunded mandates down to county governments. The elected officials meeting in Austin require that the job gets done, even if they don't always provide the funds.

In the months ahead, we all must pay close attention to the 85th Session of the Texas Legislature to ensure that county budgets are not overloaded by state lawmakers.

There is a great need for counties and state government to work together and put aside differences so that we can jointly identify problems, goals and solutions for Tarrant County, North Texas and the Lone Star State.

Tarrant County, the third largest county in the state with 2 million residents, has the best formula for success of any county in the nation. We have great people, great infrastructure, great education and limited government, a winning recipe for a growing economy and a bright future.

Tarrant County: Our North Texas Home

A Look at Some of the Business Before the 85th Texas Legislature

Ethics Reform in Texas

Two Tarrant County state lawmakers are in the leadership of an ethics reform proposal before the 85th Texas Legislature that could impact all elected officials in the Lone Star state.

Representatives Charlie Geren, R-Fort Worth, and Giovanni Capriglione, R-Southlake, are shepherding the ethics reform package through the Texas House.

The bill, the most comprehensive effort at ethics reform and a priority of Texas Governor Greg Abbott, has passed the Texas Senate on a unanimous vote.

It addresses conflicts of interest, allows for removal of corrupt officials, takes pensions away from legislators found guilty of felonies and shines a light on lobbyist activities by increasing disclosure requirements.

It would slow the revolving door between government and lobbyists by not allowing elected officials to lobby until two years after leaving office. And, it would not allow lobbyists to serve as elected officials.

Ethics reform was a priority for Governor Abbott in the 2015 legislative session, but the Legislature failed to agree on the elements of the bill and the measure was not passed.

Online Tools To Keep Up With The 85th Texas Legislature

Texas Legislature Online

<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/>

Legislative Reference Library

www.lrl.state.tx.us/

<https://legiscan.com/TX>

A few Important Items Before the 85th Texas Legislature

State Should Pay Indigent Defense Costs

The cost of providing lawyers to poor people charged with criminal offenses in Tarrant County is largely borne by the county and its taxpayers.

A state law, the Texas Fair Defense Act of 2001, requires counties to furnish lawyers to people who can't afford to pay for them. When the bill was passed, the state said it would cover the expense of the legal defense, but that hasn't happened.

The state has only covered a small part of the total costs and the law is now one of Tarrant County's largest unfunded mandates.

In 2016, the state paid just over \$1 million of the \$16.2 million that was paid to attorneys, leaving Tarrant County taxpayers to cover the \$15 million difference. To date, Tarrant County has paid \$193.1 million in indigent defense costs, while the state has only reimbursed the county for about \$20.1 million, according to the state agency in charge of the program.

More than half of the 50 states pay the full cost of indigent defense. Tarrant County wants the Legislature to fully fund the cost of the program, as it initially promised it would.

The Tarrant County Legislative Delegation

<u>Senators</u>
Kelly Hancock - R District 9 817-514-3804; 9121 Belshire Dr., #200 N. Richland Hills, 76182; Capitol Office 1E.9; 512-463-0109
Konni Burton - R District 10 817-882-8157; 933 W. Weatherford #203 Fort Worth, 76102; Capitol Office 3E.2; 512-463-0110
Jane Nelson - R District 12 817-424-3446; 1235 Main St. #280 Grapevine, 76051 Capitol Office 1E.5; 512-463-0112
Brian Birdwell - R District 22; 817-573-9622; 1315 Waters Edge Dr. #116-2 Granbury, 76048 817-573-9622; Capitol Office E1.706; 512-463-0122
<u>Representatives</u>
Ramon Romero - D District 90 817-233-5819; 1550 W. Berry St. Fort Worth, 76110; Capitol Office E2.210; 512-463-0740
Stephanie Klick - R District 91 817-281-0079; 6851 NE Loop 820 #230 N. Richland Hills, 76180; Capitol Office E2.904; 512-463-0599
Jonathan Stickland - R District 92 817-283-5300; 1600 Airport Fwy. #334 Bedford, 76022; Capitol Office E1.404; 512-463-0522
Matt Krause - R District 93 817-847-4900; 6624 N. Riverside Dr. #330 Fort Worth, 76137; Capitol Office E2.214; 512-463-0562
Tony Tinderholt - R District 94 817-478-5000; 4381 W. Green Oaks Blvd. Arlington, 76016; Capitol Office E1.422; 512-643-0624
Nicole Collier - D District 95 817-332-1180; 101 S. Jennings #103A Fort Worth, 76104; Capitol Office E2.318; 512-463-0716
Bill Zedler - R District 96 817-483-1885; 5840 West I-20 Suite 110 Arlington, 76017; Capitol Office GS.2; 512-463-0374
Craig Goldman - R District 97 817-920-5912; 4225 Bryant Irvin Rd. #101 Fort Worth 76109; Capitol Office E2.606; 512-463-0608
Giovanni Capriglione - R District 98 817-431-9885 1100 Bear Creek Pkwy Keller, 76248; Capitol Office E2.610; 512-463-0690
Charlie Geren - R District 99 817-738-8333 1011 Robert's Cut Off River Oaks, 76114; Capitol Office GW.15; 512-463-0610
Chris Turner - D District 101 817-469-2800 1600 E. Pioneer Parkway #515 Arlington, 76010; Capitol Office E1.408; 512-463-0574

Some of Tarrant County's Legislative Priorities

- Support for innovative criminal justice initiatives, including alternatives to incarceration that incorporate solutions for mental health issues.
- Continued support for Tarrant County's Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base, the largest military installation in North Texas.
- Full state funding for indigent defense costs.
- Support for improvements to the state's mental health system.
- Support for transportation improvements and funding to enable growth, opportunity for economic development and to improve the quality of life in Tarrant County and North Texas.
- Opposition to unfunded and underfunded mandates. Require the Legislature to provide funding and resources for new programs that Tarrant County is required to implement.



A Health and Lifestyle Expo for Boomers, Seniors & Caregivers

**Thursday, May 4, 2017
8:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**

**Free Admission • Free Health Screenings
Free Workshops • Free Parking • Free Lunch***

Will Rogers– Amon G. Carter Jr.

Exhibits Hall

3400 Burnett-Tandy Drive

Fort Worth, TX 76107

To Attend the Expo, register at

www.seniorsynergyexpo.com

klrotter@tarrantcounty.com

817-884-1234

***Must register by April 24th to guarantee lunch**