Mental Health America of Greater Houston

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Annalee Gulley,
Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs
Advocacy 101: Texas Legislature Basics

• Bicameral body with a 31-member Senate & a 150-member House of Representatives

• Meets in regular session on the second Tuesday in January of each odd-numbered year at the Capitol in Austin

• The Texas Constitution limits the regular session to 140 calendar days

• It’s only required action is to pass a budget

Useful Resources
Legislative Advocacy and Public Policy Center, Mental Health America of Greater Houston
mhahouston.org/legislative-advocacy-and-public-policy-center

Who Represents Me?
www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/

Texas Legislature Online
www.capitol.state.tx.us/
- Track bills
- Watch committee meetings
Advocacy 101: Texas Legislature Basics

• The lieutenant governor presides over the Senate (elected statewide) and is known as the President of the Senate.
  • Dan Patrick (R), Since January 20, 2015

• The Speaker of the House presides over the House of Representatives and is elected by its members.
  • Joe Straus (R), Since January 13, 2009

• Both have wide latitude in choosing committee membership in their respective houses and have a large impact on lawmaking in the state

181 voting members:
31 Senators
150 Representatives

Senate
- Republican- 20
- Democratic- 11

House of Representatives
- Republican- 95
- Democratic- 55
Previous Legislative Sessions

83rd Legislative Session: January 8, 2013 - May 27, 2013
84th Legislative Session: January 13, 2015 - June 1, 2015

Source: http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/whatsNew/client/index.cfm/Legislative-process
Texas 85th Regular Session

January 10, 2017 - May 29, 2017

Leadership:
Governor: Greg Abbott (R)
Lieutenant Governor: Dan Patrick (R)
Speaker of the House: Joe Straus (R – San Antonio)

Bill Statistics for the 85th Legislature

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<th>Status</th>
<th>HB</th>
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<th>HJR</th>
<th>HR</th>
<th>SB</th>
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Source: http://www.lrl.texas.gov/sessions/sessionSnapshot.cfm?legSession=85-0
Advocacy 101: How a Bill Becomes Law

The basic steps of passing a bill into law

Idea
• The process for creating a new law starts when a legislator first begins to formulate an idea. An idea for a new law may be suggested by anyone: concerned citizens, special interest groups, state agencies, or the governor.
  • 86th Legislative Session Bill Preliminary Filing Begins: November 12, 2018.
  • 86th Legislative Session Begins: January 8, 2019

Introduction
• During a legislative session, members may introduce new legislation until the filing deadlines.
  • 86th Legislative Session Filing Deadline: March 8, 2019.

Referral to Committee
• Bills are first referred to committee from their originating chamber.
• House Bills go to House Committees
• Senate Bills go to Senate Committees
• Bills are referred to committees based on their topics. The House has 56 committees and the Senate has 12 committees.

Source: http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/resources/FollowABill.aspx
Advocacy 101: How a Bill Becomes Law

Considered in Committee
- When a bill is scheduled to be heard by a house or senate committee, public notice is made to allow public participation in the committee process
- Once a bill has been considered, it can be voted out of committee to be considered by the entire legislative body (House or Senate)
- All bills must be considered by the appropriate House and Senate Committees

Placed on Calendar
- After a bill has been reported favorably by a committee and the committee report has been printed, the bill is available for placement on a calendar. A calendar is a list of bills and resolutions that are scheduled to be considered by the full house or senate.

Considered on Floor
- Considered = voted. Journals are records of activity that occurs on the house or senate floor and include actions that are taken on a bill and any amendments added to the bill.
- Proceedings on the house and senate chamber floor may be viewed over the Internet at house and senate websites.

Signed/Vetoed by Governor
If a bill passes both the house and senate, it may be signed or vetoed by the governor or pass without signature.

Source: http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/resources/FollowABill.aspx
House Bill 2466

- **Author:** Davis, Sarah | Thompson, Senfronia | Price | Zerwas | Coleman
- **Coauthor:** Collier
- **Sponsor:** Huffman
- **Cosponsor:** Bettencourt | Garcia | Rodríguez | Uresti

- Relating to the content of an application for Medicaid and coverage for certain services related to maternal depression under the Medicaid and child health plan programs.

- **Effective on 9/1/17**

- **House Committee: Public Health**

- **Senate Committee: Health and Human Services**
How to kill a bill in 140 days (or less)

• Run out the clock
  “All of the most dramatic bill-killing tactics — the filibuster, “chubbing” and points of order — derive their power from the deadlines imposed by the calendar.”

• Make a powerful friend
  “The obvious choices: the governor (veto pen), or the lieutenant governor and speaker of the house, who control committee referrals and various mechanisms to stop bills from getting floor votes. But the further a bill gets in the process, the harder it is to stop. So why not start with coizing up to the committee chairmen? If they can’t prevent a bill from seeing the light of their committee room, they can schedule it later in the session, steadily increasing the chance it will die of natural causes.”

• Use old-fashioned persuasion — or lack thereof
  “The fast and furious pace of the Legislature means that lawmakers will inevitably be forced to rely on their colleagues to figure out how to vote on the bills they haven’t had the time or the desire to read.”

• Weaponize parliamentary procedure
  “The power of this tactic directly corresponds to the number of days remaining in the session.”

• Inject a poison pill (for advanced levels only)
  “The concept is to attach an amendment to a bill that is so distasteful to so many lawmakers that it prevents it from passing.”

Source: https://www.texastribune.org/2017/05/03/how-kill-bill-140-days/