

WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE & THE 86TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE & HELP FOR TEXAS MOTHERS

The 86th Legislature saw some good news for women's health care. An additional [\\$68 million](#) was added to the general budget for three Texas Health and Human Services programs: family planning, breast and cervical cancer, and Healthy Texas Women. Additionally, pregnant women enrolled in Medicaid will be automatically enrolled in the Healthy Texas Women program after they give birth.

For mothers, HB 541 ensures a woman's right to breastfeed and express breast milk in public spaces. This measure, passed with strong bi-partisan support, clarifies to businesses and employers that women have the right to breastfeed or pump wherever they would otherwise be allowed.

In addition to this bill, other new laws passed that improve maternal health, including:

- [HB 253](#) (Rep. Farrar) — requires the state to develop a 5-year strategic plan to bolster screening, referrals, and treatment for postpartum depression.
- [SB 436](#) (Sen. Nelson) — calls for initiatives to improve maternal and newborn health care for women with opioid use disorder by improving screenings, access to care, treatment, and preventative measures.

Unfortunately, one important bill that sought to improve our state's maternal mortality rate failed to pass. [HB 744](#) by Rep. Toni Rose would have extended Medicaid coverage from two months post-partum to 12 months post-partum, as recommended by the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force. Although it passed through the House with bi-partisan support, it stalled in the Senate and ultimately failed.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE

Reproductive health care remains a much debated issue in the Texas Legislature. This session was no different, with many anti-choice measures having been filed and several becoming law.

[SB 22](#), which I opposed, targeted both Planned Parenthood and local control by prohibiting city and county governments from entering into contracts with organizations that are affiliated with abortion providers. Federal and state law already prohibit using taxpayer funds for abortions, and the services targeted by this measure do not involve abortions. By passing this measure,

the Legislature sent a message that divisive rhetoric is more important than ensuring Texans have access to mammogram screenings, sexual health education, pregnancy prevention initiatives, and community-specific services, such as Zika prevention efforts.

Another new law that I opposed requires physicians to give a person seeking an abortion a hard copy of a controversial state-developed booklet that contains medically inaccurate information, such as linking abortions to an increased likelihood of breast cancer and infertility. The government should not be in the business of forcing doctors to give their patients false information to advance a political agenda.

[HB 16](#), dubbed the “Born Alive Bill” by its proponents, makes it a civil offense if a physician does not preserve the life and health of a child who is alive after an abortion. By making this law, it implies two things. First, that a child can be “born alive” after an abortion, although there has been [no reported instances](#) of this ever happening in Texas. Second, that a medical provider would not perform the lifesaving care already required by law and the Hippocratic Oath. The sole aim of this new law is to intimidate doctors who perform abortions.