



My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols
by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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As we all settle into a new normal for the time being, it can often be unsettling. I know that Texas and Texans are strong, and we will continue on and come back as strong as we were before. I encourage everyone to do your part in helping to slow the spread of this virus and help those around you who may be struggling. Together, we will overcome this challenge as we have many times before.

If you need assistance please don't hesitate to contact my office at (512) 463-0103, or by emailing Robert.Nichols@senate.texas.gov.

Here are five resources to help you during this time:

1. Where to Find Accurate COVID-19 Information

During this time, you may be hearing or seeing different reports on the number of cases in your area or in the state. To get up to date, accurate information you can visit the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) website which includes daily updated numbers they have received from local public health authorities. Their dashboard provides specific information from around the state. Please visit <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/news/updates.shtm#coronavirus>.

The 2-1-1 Texas Hotline, which is available 24/7, is also a good place to access information on COVID-19, and local community resources on health care, testing, utilities, food, housing and more.

2. Small Business Assistance

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting small businesses, even where there are no local cases of the virus. These businesses are the lifeblood of local economies as they provide essential goods and services, and employment. It is important that we continue to support them during these hard times.

The Small Business Administration has announced the availability of the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program. This program provides small businesses with working capital loans up to \$2 million, to help overcome the temporary loss of revenue they may be experiencing.

Businesses interested in pursuing the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program should visit www.disasterloan.sba.gov/ela for more information.

3. DPS and DMV Office Closures

Governor Abbott has directed all Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) offices to close to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. DPS has extended the expiration of Texas identification cards, drivers licenses, commercial drivers licenses, and election identification certificates. This suspension will be in effect until 60 days after DPS provides public notice that normal Drivers License operations have resumed.

The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) have also closed their offices. A temporary waiver has been put in place for initial vehicle registration, renewal of registration, vehicle titling, and renewal of a permanent disabled parking placard. This also applies for those with an expired 30 day temporary permit. This waiver, which is for all Texas vehicle owners, will stay in effect until 60 days after TxDMV notifies the public that normal vehicle registration, vehicle titling and related services have resumed.

4. Texas Education Agency Meal Finder App

Many Texas children rely on their school district meal programs to ensure they receive a meal everyday. Due to the closures of school districts, this has created a challenge for many families. To assist families and students while school districts are closed, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) have launched the "Texas Students MealFinder Map", which is available on TEA's website. This map, which will be updated continuously, will include the address of each facility, and the days and times when meals will be served. To be included on this map, school districts must file with the Texas Department of Agriculture and that information will then be sent to TEA.

5. Texas Workforce Commission

Many businesses have been forced to lay off their employees due to the spread of this virus, which has lead to an increase of Texans filing for unemployment. The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) has created pages on their website <https://twc.texas.gov> to provide up to date information for employers, job seekers, as well as information on child care.

Due to the high volume of claims that are coming into TWC, they are working to be able to expand their capacity to accept claims through both their website and vie tele-centers. Governor Abbott has waived the waiting week period for unemployment insurance claims which will allow claimants to get paid for their first week of unemployment benefits. Previously applicants had to wait to receive their first week payment till after the first week. In addition to this, TWC has waived work search requirements for claimants.

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