

# CHARLES SCHWERTNER, M.D.

T E X A S S E N A T O R

*Dear Friends,*

I'd like to begin by thanking you for the great privilege of representing you and your family in the Texas State Senate. As your voice in Austin, I'm working each and every day to make sure that we're building a Texas government that's both responsive to your needs and responsible with your tax dollars.

Like all legislative sessions, the meeting of the 85th Texas Legislature in 2017 presented its fair share of challenges. With you, the hard-working taxpayer in mind, we started by passing a balanced and appropriate state budget that doesn't raise taxes on citizens or businesses. We cracked down on sanctuary cities that allow dangerous illegal immigrants to commit crimes in our country and roam our streets with impunity. We worked to protect vulnerable foster children by making sweeping changes to our state's foster system and office of Child Protective Services (CPS). We got tough on bad nursing homes that put our parents and grandparents at risk for abuse or neglect. Perhaps most importantly of all, we defended the God-given constitutional rights of our citizens.

As the 10th largest economy in the world, Texas continues to attract new investment and new opportunities from all across the globe. This past year, Texas added a staggering 230,300 new private-sector jobs and saw our state's unemployment rate drop to its lowest point in over 40 years (4%). As businesses and entrepreneurs continue to migrate to the Lone Star State, Forbes magazine has again named Texas one of its top states to do business. This remarkable success has been sustained by following a few fundamental and conservative governing principles: live within your means, balance your budgets, keep taxes low and under control, and promote a legal and regulatory environment which encourages businesses to grow and thrive.

As we head into the 86th Legislative Session in a few short months, I look forward to continuing to fight on behalf of Texas families and our shared conservative values. It's been the honor of my life to serve the people of Senate District 5, and I work every day to live up to the faith and trust you've shown in me as your senator. That's why I'm both proud and humbled to have been named a "Courageous Conservative" by the Texas Conservative Coalition, a "Pro-Life Hero" by Texas Right to Life, and a "Faith and Family Champion" by Texas Values Action. I am also honored to receive the "Legislative Leadership Award" from AARP, the "Big Voices for Little Texans" award from CASA, and the "Legislative Champion" award from the Meadows Mental Health Foundation.

But as much as I enjoy representing the people of Senate District 5, I can't do it alone. I want to hear from you and your family about the issues and challenges that concern you most. Included on the back page of this newsletter is the contact information for my Capitol office in Austin, as well as my local offices in Bryan and Georgetown. Please feel free to call, write, email, or visit to let me know how I can better serve you and how, together, we can make our great state even better than it already is!

Your Friend and Senator,



Charles Schwertner, MD





#### **PASSING A BALANCED AND RESPONSIBLE BUDGET:**

The only responsibility of the Texas Legislature specifically named in the Texas Constitution is to pass a balanced state budget for the next two fiscal years. For the past two legislative sessions I have had the honor of serving as a member of the Senate Finance Committee, where I help identify the most important spending priorities of our state while ensuring that the state budget stays within its constitutional limits. I also chair the workgroup dealing with the portion of the budget focused on the state's healthcare expenditures. I am humbled by the opportunity and immense responsibility of managing essential health services for our most vulnerable Texans while balancing the ever-increasing costs of healthcare. A few budget highlights include:

- **Fully funding school finance formulas and accounting for enrollment growth, as well as investing \$571 million into the Teacher Retirement System healthcare plan;**
- **Increasing funding by \$500 million to Child Protective Services, including nearly 600 new caseworkers;**
- **Appropriating \$300 million to begin renovating our state hospitals to ensure safe, modern mental health services;**
- **\$800 million for border security, including 250 new troopers, and;**
- **\$25 million to provide bullet proof vests to our state's police officers.**

I am proud of our work as a Legislature passing a conservative, balanced budget that meets the needs of our state without raising taxes.



*Discussing legislation on the Senate floor.*

#### **ENDING SANCTUARY CITIES IN TEXAS:**

We are a nation rooted in the rule of law, and when certain cities or municipalities refuse to enforce the law it puts all Texans in danger. I was proud to support SB 4, which will prohibit sanctuary city policies in Texas. This critical piece of legislation will protect Texans by preventing the release of undocumented individuals who were previously charged with violent crimes. By empowering local law enforcement agencies to work with the federal government to honor ICE detainers issued for such criminals, we will prevent the release of dangerous criminals back onto our streets to commit more crimes.

Our laws only work if public officials themselves work to uphold them. Under SB 4, if a rogue city official or law enforcement officer unilaterally refuses to enforce the immigration laws of this country, they can now face possible fines, jail time, and even removal from office. SB 4 is an important public safety measure and I'm proud of the work the Legislature did to protect our communities and families.

#### **PROTECTING PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS:**

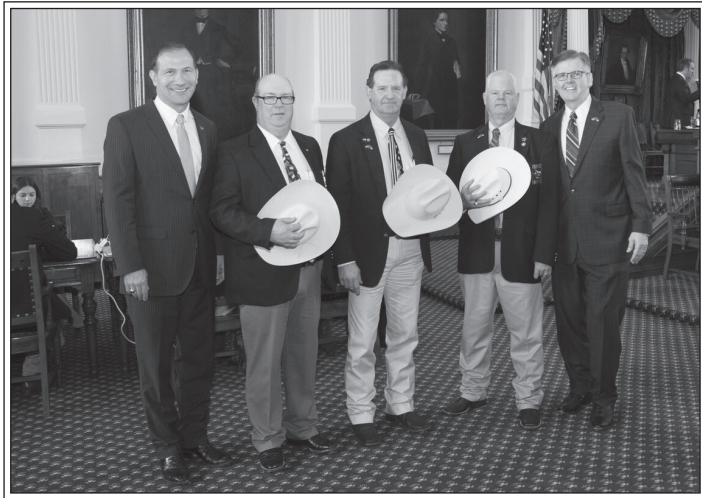
##### *Annexation*

Annexation is consistently on the minds of many constituents who reach out to my office, especially in our most rapidly growing areas like Williamson County and Brazos County. Current law allows cities to involuntarily annex outside their city limits as a means of expanding their own tax base. Many Texans characterize this process as "taxation without representation" and an unacceptable disregard for the democratic process.

As a strong supporter of property rights, I am proud to have worked with Senator Donna Campbell to joint-author legislation to combat this problem during both the regular and special sessions. While I would have preferred to see the bill pass without any restrictions, the Texas House of Representatives felt differently and stripped an important amendment (one that I authored) from the final bill that was passed, which would have allowed Texans in more than 30 counties (more than 75% of all Texans) to vote on whether they wanted to be annexed. Next session, I intend to continue the fight to ensure that all Texans have the opportunity to decide whether or not they wish to be annexed by a neighboring city.

##### *High-speed Rail*

Another issue threatening the private property rights of countless families in Senate District 5 is the proposed construction of a high-speed rail line connecting Houston and Dallas. For several years now, Texas Central Partners



*Honoring members of the Sheriff's Association of Texas on the Senate floor, including Limestone County Sheriff Dennis Wilson.*

has leveraged substantial foreign investment from the Japanese government in order to purchase land in Grimes, Leon, Madison, Freestone, and Limestone counties to build a track capable of servicing this high-speed train. While I recognize the need for more transportation options for our growing state, this train threatens to destroy heritage farmland and rural communities that have been a part of the fabric of our state for a hundred years.

In response to taxpayer concerns about the state government subsidizing or bailing out this potentially disastrous project, as well as concerns about Texas Central Partners seizing private property through eminent domain, several of my colleagues and I filed over twenty pieces of legislation to help ensure that landowners and taxpayers were protected.

I am pleased to report that my bill, SB 977, will prohibit Texas Central Partners or any other private high-speed rail entity from receiving taxpayer dollars for a private high-speed rail project. My fellow legislators and I will continue to monitor the progress of the project and will continue to make sure that Texas landowners and taxpayers are treated fairly.

**KEEPING TEXAS MOVING:**

One of the biggest complaints I hear about toll roads is the billing process. That is why I filed SB 1437 to address many common frustrations associated with the billing and payment practices of toll road authorities. The bill would have improved customer service by ensuring that customers with active accounts and toll tags are not penalized for transponder (toll tag) misreads, requiring all toll entities to determine whether there is an active account connected to a vehicle transponder prior to charging

a fee or mailing a notice of unpaid tolls to a customer, and by guaranteeing that customers are not responsible for administrative fees if they have an active account and transponder. The bill earned vocal bipartisan support in the Senate Transportation Committee and easily passed the Senate with a unanimous vote. Unfortunately, the bill did not get a vote on the House floor and therefore did not pass into law. I will continue to work to pass this legislation in the future to ensure that taxpayers and drivers are not penalized unfairly by tolling entities.

**SCHOOL SAFETY:**

As a father with three boys in public school, I am utterly heartbroken for the families who lost loved ones in the tragic school shooting at Santa Fe High School. Texas children shouldn't be afraid to go to school and Texas parents shouldn't have to worry about whether or not their kids are safe from these acts of senseless violence.



*Visiting with Senate Pages from Freestone County.*

In the aftermath of Santa Fe, Governor Greg Abbott asked me to serve on the Governor's Mental Health Roundtable on School Safety – a panel of lawmakers, parents, educators, and mental health professionals from across Texas. Since that time, I've also been asked to serve on the Senate Select Committee on Violence in Schools and School Security to discuss what additional policy changes we can implement to ensure the protection of Texas schoolchildren. In both groups we've explored a number of practical strategies for making our schools safer, including expanding access to preventative mental health resources for our students.

In 2013, I authored legislation giving teachers and other school employees free access to a program known as Mental Health First Aid – an evidence-based curriculum that provides Texas educators with strategies to identify and respond to a variety of serious mental illnesses such as



depression, trauma, bipolar disorder, psychosis, and severe anxiety. Training participants also learn how to assess risk, listen to and support the child in crisis, and identify professional resources and supports. Since its passage, more than 25,000 Texas educators have graduated from the voluntary program.

As we approach the upcoming legislative session, I plan to continue working on ways we can expand and improve programs like Mental Health First Aid, increase the mental health resources of our state, and ensure every student in Texas has timely and appropriate access to the mental health services they need. Like most Texans, I feel that we need to take every reasonable and appropriate measure to make these kinds of tragedies less common and ensure the safety of our students and teachers.

**SPECIAL SESSION SCHOOL FINANCE:**

During last summer’s special legislative session, I was proud to support public education by sending an additional \$351 million to our public schools.

The Teacher Retirement System also received an additional \$221 million to help reduce health care premiums and deductibles for our state’s retired teachers and their dependents. As health care costs continue to rise across the state, it is important that we maintain our commitment to the retired public school teachers of Texas and ensure that they receive the care and support they deserve after a career of service to the people of Texas.

We also worked to create a Texas Commission on Public School Finance tasked with studying our school finance system and making recommendations regarding what steps the legislature can take to make school finance more equitable and efficient. The Commission is composed of high-profile leaders in education, business, and civic engagement, as well as members of the House and Senate, and a member of the State Board of Education.



*Visiting with constituent members of the Texas Retired Teachers Association.*



*The Senate Committee on Health and Human Services hearing public testimony in the Senate chamber.*

In a growing state like Texas, we must always be looking for ways to improve our public schools and give our children the best possible foundation for future success.

**PROTECTING THE UNBORN:**

After the release of high-profile videos showing senior Planned Parenthood executives casually discussing the sale of fetal tissue to benefit the organization’s bottom line, I convened an emergency hearing of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services, which I chair in the Texas Senate. The Committee investigated the business practices of Planned Parenthood and examined the regulatory framework governing the sale or donation of aborted fetal tissue.

Based on the outcome of this investigation, I authored the “Pre-Born Protection and Dignity Act” (SB 8) to stop the sale of fetal tissue and ban two particularly barbaric abortion procedures which involve dismembering an unborn child in the womb or partially delivering an unborn child in order to terminate its life. The bill also enhances reporting requirements for abortions conducted in the state and makes several key clarifications about the definition of an elective abortion. I am extremely proud to have authored this strong, pro-life legislation, which Governor Abbott has since signed into law.

**INCREASING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES:**

An estimated one in five Texans will experience a mental health issue during their lifetime...a sobering statistic that translates to over five million Texans. That is why, as the head budget writer for health care services, I fought hard to increase resources for mental health services and decrease waiting lists for those who need help.



*Discussing healthcare with medical professionals from Senate District 5.*

Last January, Governor Abbott named Child Protective Services an “emergency item” for the Legislature, allowing bills affecting the CPS system to be “fast-tracked” through the legislative process. I authored Senate Bill 11, a bill that strengthens investigations of abuse and neglect for children and families, revamps the foster care system to ensure active and ongoing community engagement and support, and ensures children in the care of CPS receive timely and appropriate services.

In addition the Legislature secured \$88 million for new CPS caseworkers to ensure children are seen often and in a timely manner and that families and children receive the services they need to heal. This is in addition to the \$292.8 million the Legislature provided in December 2016 to hire an additional 828 CPS staff and provide a \$1,000 a month salary increase for front line caseworkers. The Legislature also significantly increased rates paid to foster care families and facilities to address the capacity crisis which has resulted in children sleeping in CPS offices. In total, the 85th Legislature increased appropriations to CPS by \$508.5 million over the previous two-year budget.

In total, 97 bills passed that will affect the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). DFPS is working to implement these bills and I look forward to seeing how these changes positively impact children and families. While there is still more work to be done, I am proud of the accomplishments made by the Legislature this session to address our CPS system.

**PROVIDING SAFE LONG-TERM CARE FOR THE ELDERLY AND DISABLED:**

In 2014, a study found that the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) takes few enforcement actions on violations of long-term care facilities in Texas such as nursing homes, even on serious and repeat offenses. For example, current practice allows a facility to simply correct a violation and avoid fines if DADS finds there is a widespread violation across the facility that results in harm to a resident, instead of requiring the facility to also pay a financial penalty for that violation.

To address this, I amended House Bill 2025, adding language to eliminate so-called “right to correct” plans for long-term care facilities (such as nursing homes, assisted living centers, and intermediate care facilities) found to exhibit chronic, substandard quality of care violation. My amendment also increased financial penalties for the most serious violations. This passage of this legislation sent a clear and unambiguous message that Texas is serious about protecting our most vulnerable citizens from abuse and neglect.

This session, we were able to increase funding for mental health services by \$92.5 million with the hope of improving access to mental health services throughout the state and funding new programs created by the Legislature.

Often, individuals suffering a mental health crisis are served in a jail setting, where they’re unable to receive the proper care or treatment they need. While our goal is to divert individuals with a mental illness from ever entering the criminal justice system, there are still those individuals in need of mental health services that are arrested and incarcerated. That is why I fought for an additional \$365 million to help renovate and expand our state’s critical network of state mental health hospitals. In many cases, these hospitals are horribly aged and dilapidated with some initial construction dating as far back as 1857.

These new funds are intended to build more capacity into the state’s mental health system and help ensure that all Texans are able to receive the mental health care they need in an appropriate setting and in a timely manner.

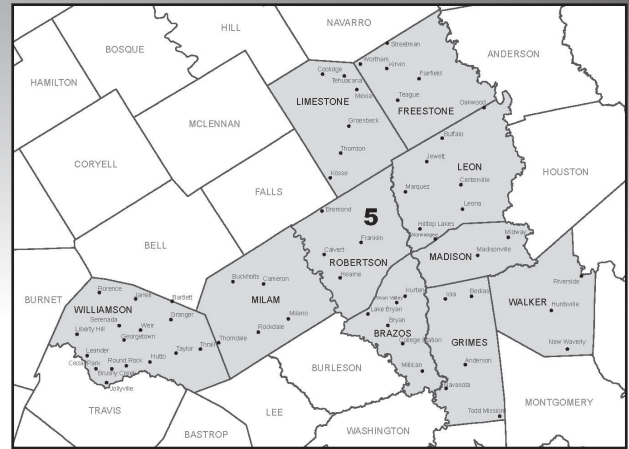
**PROTECTING OUR MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN:**

I personally believe that ensuring the safety and protection of our state’s most vulnerable children is one of the Texas Legislature’s most important responsibilities. That is why when the Legislature received reports of foster children sleeping in hotels and CPS offices, children going weeks or even months without being seen by a caseworker, and children languishing in psychiatric hospitals or Residential Treatment Centers rather than residing in safe, loving homes, it was clear that something dramatic needed to change.

## Visit Your Capitol!

You can learn more about your state Capitol by attending a free guided tour, offered every Monday through Friday 8:30am-4:30pm, and Saturday through Sunday from 9:30 am-4:30 pm.

For large groups of ten or more, please call Capitol Information and Guide Services at (512) 463-0063 to make a reservation...and please stop by my office while you're visiting!



**SENATE DISTRICT 5**



## CHARLES SCHWERTNER

STATE SENATOR  
DISTRICT 5

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U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit No.  
2468  
Austin, Texas

## CONTACT SENATOR SCHWERTNER

### CAPITOL OFFICE

Room E1.806

P.O. Box 12068

Austin, Texas 78711

[charles.schwertner@senate.texas.gov](mailto:charles.schwertner@senate.texas.gov)

Phone: (512) 463-0105

Fax: (512) 463-5713

### BRAZOS COUNTY DISTRICT OFFICE

3000 Briarcrest Drive, Suite 202

Bryan, Texas 77802

Phone: (979) 776-0222

Fax: (979) 776-0220 (fax)

### WILLIAMSON COUNTY DISTRICT OFFICE

501 S. Austin Avenue, Suite 1250

Georgetown, Texas 78626

Phone: (512) 863-8456

Fax: (512) 863-8436