



# AUSTIN NEWSLETTER

Texas Farm Bureau's Weekly Newsletter for the 87th Legislature

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Every Friday, this newsletter will keep you up to speed on some of the legislation important to Texas Farm Bureau members that Austin staff are following.

Please do not hesitate to contact the appropriate staff with any questions.

## **President Boening Testifies on Winter Storm Damage**

On Thursday, Texas Farm Bureau President Russell Boening reported the impact of Winter Storm Uri on Texas agriculture to the House Committee on Agriculture and Livestock.

President Boening detailed damages and presented solutions for the committee members' consideration. He finished the testimony with hopes of framing further progress on the matter.

"Texas farmers and ranchers are among some of the most resilient people in the state. They don't have the option of staying inside when the weather turns bad. Their products are also highly susceptible to extreme weather conditions, like Winter Storm Uri. We need to be willing to provide assistance to these people who suffered catastrophic losses for reasons well beyond their control," he said.

Read more about his testimony [here](#).

## **Legislative Update**

### **Rural Connectivity**

**HB 5:** Relating to the expansion of broadband services to certain areas.

[Rep. Ashby, Trent \(R\)](#)

#### **Summary**

HB 5 proposes creating the Broadband Development Office—within the Comptroller's office—to promote, research, and develop the expansion of access to broadband service in Texas. "Broadband" is defined in a way that would require the office to meet minimum internet speeds as they change with developing technology.

The governor's Broadband Development Council provides accountability and follow up research to ensure that rural connectivity goals are being met by the broadband development program.

The Broadband Development Office's duties are to:

- Serve as a resource for information regarding broadband service in this state,
- Engage in outreach to communities regarding the expansion and adoption of broadband service and related programs, and
- Serve as a liaison between federal, state, and local programs.

The bill does not grant the comptroller's office the authority to regulate all broadband service. Only those broadband providers who apply for the Broadband Development Program are subject to the office's requirements.

The *Broadband Development Program* would award grants, low-interest loans, and other financial incentives to applicants for broadband projects in under-served areas designated on the Broadband Development Map. The map would identify *eligible areas*—where less than 80% of the addresses in the block have access to broadband service. The map must be published and regularly updated by an agent of the comptroller's office to integrate with the Federal Communications Commission's current mapping methodology.

To regularly communicate updates with the public, the *State Broadband Plan* would be prepared, updated, and published by the comptroller's office. The plan would communicate the long-term goals for greater access to broadband service in Texas. It would consist of the goals set by private and public organizations, such as the governor's Broadband Development Council.

Program funding, placed into the *Broadband Development Account*, would come from a variety of sources: legislature appropriations, gifts, donations, federal grants, and interest earned on the investment of the account.

TFB **supports** HB 5. (TFB 2021 Policy: Rural Living Section 183, Pages 116-117, Lines 47-54.)

## Utility Regulation

**HB 10:** Relating to the governing body of the independent organization certified to manage the ERCOT power region.

[Rep. Paddie, Chris \(R\)](#)

Referred to House Committee on State Affairs.

### Summary

Paddie's HB 10 pertains to the governing members of the organization that manages ERCOT. The bill would remove "professional search firms" from the selection of eligible management candidates. The president of the managing organization would

be appointed by the governor. In addition to the other 10 management positions, new officials would include:

- Three governor appointed members. One must represent residential consumer interests.
- One member appointed by the Lieutenant Governor of the Senate.
- One member appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The bill would require the CEO and managing members to be Texas residents. It would also add that board members are not entitled to compensation.

TFB **supports** HB 10. (TFB 2021 Policy: Utilities 146, Page 50, lines 48-51.)

**HB 11:** Relating to the extreme weather emergency preparedness of facilities for providing electric service.

[Rep. Paddie, Chris \(R\)](#)

Referred to House Committee on State Affairs.

### **Summary**

HB 11 proposes creating “Weather Emergency Preparedness” requirements for power generation and transmission in the ERCOT region. The power providers would be required to prepare, prevent, and manage power interruptions during extreme weather emergencies. The bill also mentions that the measures should not neglect rural or low-income communities.

TFB **supports** HB 11. (TFB 2021 Policy: Utilities 146, Page 50, lines 48-51.)

## **Tort Reform**

### **Texas Farm Bureau testifies at FALA hearing**

Rep. Murr’s HB 365 was heard in the House Committee on Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence on Tuesday, March 9. The committee heard public testimony and discussed the many implications of extending livestock liability protection to working farms and ranches.

Among those testifying was District 8 State Director Mickey Edwards on behalf of Texas Farm Bureau, whose personal experience helped committee members understand that livestock risks exist both inside the show barn and out in the pasture.

Click [here](#) to read TFB’s summary of HB 365 in Austin Newsletter Issue 2. Sen. Drew Springer (R) filed the senate companion to HB 365 a few days before the House committee hearing.

TFB **supports** HB 365 and SB 1078. (TFB 2021 Policy: Livestock Section 120, Page 15, Lines 43-44, Property Rights Section 150, Page 58, Lines 97-99.)

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