

Simply put, **Senate Bill 17** bans diversity awareness!

Continued from page 1

the armed officer, they can either be a peace officer, a school resource officer, a school marshal, or a school district employee.

- One to really watch, as it relates to the safety of our children, is **Senate Bill 763**, which allows public schools to hire or accept volunteer chaplains to provide mental health counseling to public school students.

- In a bill that the Forward Times followed and reported on from inception to it being signed by Gov. Abbott, **House Bill 567** (CROWN Act, which is an acronym for Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair), is now law. This law places a prohibition on natural hair discrimination for race-based hairstyles such as braids, twists, and dreadlocks, in schools, at workplaces, and relative to housing. The bill was authored by State Representative Rhetta Bowers (D-Garland), and a companion Texas Senate bill was filed by State Senator Borris Miles (D-Houston) and came about after two Black students at Barbers Hill High School, near the Greater Houston area—Kaden Bradford and De'Andre Arnold—refused to cut their hair after being threatened with punishment if they didn't comply in 2019. Arnold faced the proposed punishment of not being able to walk on the stage as part of his high school graduation ceremony. Bradford faced the proposed punishment of being indefinitely enrolled in in-school suspension.

- To help deal with massive fraud across the state of Texas, **House Bill 718** was signed into law by Gov. Abbott in June, eliminating the temporary paper license plate system and replacing them with metal ones. Although it has been signed into law, it won't officially go into effect until July 1, 2025, which will allow the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, county tax offices across Texas, and auto dealerships in the state enough time to build a new inventory and management system to handle the major change.

- In every county across Texas, early voting hours must be extended on weekdays and weekends, regardless of their population, according to **House Bill 1217**. So, for this upcoming November 2023 election, the main early-voting locations in every respective county, will be required to open for 12 consecutive hours on the last two days of early voting, which will be Thursday and Friday. For 2024, however, the main early voting locations in each respective county must be open for 12 hours every weekday during the last week of early voting, for 12 hours on the last Saturday, and for six hours on the last Sunday, during the March primary and the November general elections.

- With the signing of **House Bill 898**, the fines paid by drivers who don't move over or slow down when emergency vehicles are stopped will increase, and if drivers violate and cause injury to someone, there could even be jail time.

- In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic response, **Senate Bill 29** now bans the state of Texas from implementing mask mandates, vaccine mandates, business shutdowns, and school closures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, with the exceptions being nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, and assisted living facilities.

- Losing a loved one can be an emotionally taxing experience, but having a hospital make the decision on the date of your loved one's fate is even more difficult to handle. Prior to September 1st, hospitals in Texas had the power to remove patients from life support ten days after they provided notification to the patient's family. Now, thanks to **House Bill 3162**, hospitals must provide a 25-day notice to the families of any patient they are seeking to end care for and remove from life support. This new window of time will provide family members with a chance to locate an alternative health care facility that may be willing to treat the patient, and the doctors at that hospital must perform any procedures necessary for any patient that a family wants to have transferred to that other facility. On top of that, the Texas Department of Health and Human Services Commission is requiring that hospitals track and report all instances where doctors have made the decision to withdraw life-sustaining care.

- With prescription drug costs going through the roof, and negatively impacting our senior citizens, **House Bill 25** will potentially address the skyrocketing medication costs under the 'Wholesale Prescription Drug Importation Program', which will allow distributors to import cheaper drugs from Canada. In short, the Texas Department of Health and Human Services Commission would contract with Canadian drug wholesalers and suppliers to allow for the distribution of safe and eligible prescription drugs to all Texans, at costs that are significantly less expensive than U.S. wholesalers. This could be a game-changer for Texans, especially senior citizens, but there are some hurdles with the full implementation of this new law, however, in that



Images by Gerd Altmann and truthseeker08 from Pixabay. Illustration by Thomas Wyatt

Texas is at the mercy of federal drug regulators and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

- After body camera footage helped vindicate a young 18-year-old African American named Rodney "R.J." Reese—who was arrested by police officers in Plano, TX, and made to spend the night in prison, simply for walking on the road while heading home from work to avoid the icy conditions made by Winter Storm Uri in February 2021—**House Bill 1277** now allows pedestrians to walk on roadways facing oncoming traffic if sidewalks are obstructed or unsafe in any way.

- For all those who own or are seeking to own an electric vehicle (EV), **Senate Bill 505** is significant, in that it now requires electric vehicle owners to pay two years of registration, or \$400, up front, when they purchase an EV. They must also pay an additional \$200 when they register a vehicle or renew their registration. According to lawmakers, this new fee is being levied because Texas agencies estimated in a 2020 report that the state of Texas lost out on roughly \$200 per year in federal and state gasoline tax dollars when a person acquired an EV versus a standard, gas-fueled vehicle.

- For those who use toll roads, **House Bill 2170** now requires that drivers must be notified whenever their electronic tag automatic payments are rejected, which will help avoid excessive fees and fines as a result. Each toll entity in the state of Texas must notify drivers of the rejected automatic payment immediately, either by email, mail, or text message, and it also requires that each toll entity send the outstanding invoice by mail with a clear

and visible message outside the envelope stating that the bill is inside and that it must be paid.

- Thanks to anti-trafficking leader Jacquelyn Aluotto, founder of NTZ Inc, and State Representative Shawn Thierry (District 146) who sponsored the bills, along with other anti-trafficking supporters, **House Bill 3553** ('No Trafficking Zone' to colleges and universities) and **House Bill 3554** ('No Trafficking Zone' to foster-care facilities, child-care facilities, residential treatment centers, and detention centers) are now signed into law. Under these laws, any offense is deemed a felony in the first degree, punishable from 25 years to 99 years in the Texas prison system. These laws increase the criminal penalties to a level that makes committing them a threat to predators, pimps, groomers, and traffickers. More importantly, parents, educators, shelter operators, and college students should all be informed about these two new anti-trafficking laws.

- Senate Bill 17** bans the existence and creation of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offices, programs, and training at any publicly funded colleges and universities in Texas.

- As a result of **Senate Bill 1442** being signed into law, the penalties for anyone taking part in illegal street racing has been significantly enhanced, while **House Bill 2899** (which went into effect in June of this year) allows vehicles used in illegal street racing to be impounded for any reason.

As stated, there were many other new bills signed into law that have gone into effect as of September 1st, and others that are slated to go into effect at a later date.

SAVE THE DATE!

Texas Science & Natural History Museum Grand Opening Sept. 23

What: Texas Science & Natural History Museum, the Austin area's only science and natural history museum, will open its doors to the public for a community celebration. The free event will feature new exhibits, live music, hands-on science activities, a performance by Texas Cheer and light bites and beverages from event sponsor H-E-B.

When: Saturday, Sept. 23, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Where: Texas Science & Natural History Museum, 2400 Trinity St. Paid parking is available in the San Jacinto Garage, 2401 San Jacinto Blvd.

Who: The event is free and open to the public. There will be an opportunity to interview Carolyn Connerat, museum managing director, as well as other members of the museum staff. Media members may photograph and record video and audio inside the museum. There will be an official ribbon cutting by Dean of the College of Natural Sciences David Vanden Bout at noon.



PROSPERITY BANK

ProsperityBankUSA.com/HOPP97
or call 1-844-YOU-HOPP

The HOPP/97 program is specifically designed to help families get the affordable home they want or refinance the home they love.

HOPP Loan Program Features:

- 97% Financing up to \$726,200*
*Lesser of purchase price or appraised value
- Long Term Fixed Rate
- Refinance Available
No private mortgage insurance required

Home Ownership Possibilities Program

Loans subject to income and/or other eligibility requirements which may vary depending on property location. Available in Bank's designated assessment areas in Texas and Oklahoma. 97% financing based on lesser of purchase price or appraised value. Maximum loan amount is based on the conforming limit as set by the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) and is subject to change. Subject to credit approval. Escrow required. Other restrictions apply. Subject to change. This ad is not a commitment to lend. Prosperity Bank NMLS ID# 466414

