

New State Laws Now In Effect For 2022

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polls and on which absentee ballots cast by eligible voters can be accepted by election officials are unlawful and indefensible.”

“Our democracy depends on the right of eligible voters to cast a ballot and to have that ballot counted,” said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. “The Justice Department will continue to use all the authorities at its disposal to protect this fundamental pillar of our society.”

Texas House Democrats left Austin mid-legislative session and stayed in the nation’s capital for 38 days, seeking to block the bill into becoming law.

Several people, including **Sharon Watkins Jones**, director of Children at Risk’s Texas Racial Equity Collaborative, content the Texas law goes out of its way to make initiatives put in place by former Harris County Clerk Chris Hollins to make voting easier and more accessible to citizens during the Nov. 2020 presidential election, illegal.

Jones pointed out that the law bans 24-hour polling places and drive-thru voting; opens any election official who tries sending an application to someone who doesn’t request one to criminal charges; and gives carte blanche to partisan “poll watchers,” a move Democrats argue could lead to early 1960s-style voter intimidation and poll place violence.

Not only will this law negatively impact Texas’ Black vote, it will do the same to the state’s Latinx vote, according to Maria Teresa Kumar, CEO of Voto Latino.

Kumar told the Texas Tribune last September, “SB 1 is an arduous law designed to limit Tejanos’ ability to exercise their full citizenship. Not only are we filing suit to protect the right to vote for all people of color, and the additional 250,000 young Latino Tejanos who will reach voting age in 2022, but to protect every Texan’s right to vote.”

Kumar is a plaintiff in the federal lawsuit filed in Sept. 2021 to deal with SB 1 that went into effect in the fall of 2021. But what of the 23 Texas laws that went into effect on Jan. 1, 2022? Which ones will impact Black and Latinx communities the most?



María Teresa Kumar



Dr. Kim Baker



Sharon Watkins Jones



State Rep. Ron Reynolds - District 27

The Defender was able to obtain insight on these laws via State Rep. Ron Reynolds.

State Rep. Ron Reynolds on New State Laws

The 23 new laws that took effect on January 1, 2022 cover topics such as property taxes, renter rights, veteran benefits, bail reform and police budgeting. Here are some of the new laws that could impact our communities of color.

HB 531 will require landlords to disclose to potential renters if a property is in a floodplain or if it has been damaged by flooding in the past. This will make Texas the second state, after Georgia, to require flood disclosure to tenants.

HB 3971 will provide for tax breaks for homes in Historic Districts. This new law could help homeowners of historic properties afford to keep them. Under the law, an appraiser who is determining the market value of a home located in a historic district has to consider any restriction on the homeowner’s ability to alter, improve or repair the property. Typically, they’re not allowed to do so under preservation guidelines.

SB 5 states that dog owners can’t leave their dog restrained outside unless they have adequate shelter and water. They also can’t use a chain or weighted restraint. The restraint can’t be one that is shorter than 10 feet or one that is not properly fitted or causes pain or injury. An offense would be a class C misdemeanor with a maximum fine of \$500.

SB 6 is a new bail reform law that will prohibit a person who is charged with a violent crime from being released on personal bond. Those released by a judge on personal bond do not have to pay, but they do have to sign a contract agreeing to appear at all required court dates and promise to abstain from breaking the law. Under the new law, they will instead have to give the court cash to get out of jail before their cases are resolved.

SB 8 will provide homeowners with a homestead exemption in the same year they buy their home, instead of having to wait until the following year for the exemption to take effect. This could allow you to save more on property taxes.

SB 23 will require voter approval for police budget cuts. Municipalities in Texas counties with more than one million residents, namely Travis, Dallas, Harris, Bexar and Collin counties, will have to hold elections to reduce law enforcement funding.

SB 794 will provide that any veteran who has been awarded full disability compensation will be entitled to a total property tax exemption, regardless of whether they are actually receiving that compensation. Prior to this change, only veterans receiving the compensation were eligible. This will increase the number of disabled veterans eligible for a total homestead property tax exemption.

Fauci: Omicron will infect 'just about everybody'

BY LEXI LONAS | THE HILL

(THE HILL) - Infectious disease expert and White House chief medical adviser Anthony Fauci said Tuesday that “just about everybody” will eventually be infected with the omicron variant of the coronavirus.

“Omicron, with its extraordinary, unprecedented degree of efficiency of transmissibility, will, ultimately, find just about everybody,” Fauci told the Center for Strategic and International Studies during a “fireside chat.”

“Those who have been vaccinated and vaccinated and boosted would get exposed. Some, maybe a lot of them, will get infected but will very likely, with some exceptions, do reasonably well in the sense of not having hospitalization and death,” he added.

The omicron variant was discovered in November and has since caused a surge in cases around the world, prompting some countries, states and

cities to put restrictions back in place.

Omicron is the most transmissible variant to appear so far, but seems to cause fewer hospitalizations and deaths than previous mutations of the virus.

Fauci’s comment follows a similar remark Janet Woodcock, acting commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, made at a Senate hearing Tuesday, when she said “it’s hard to process what’s actually happening right now, which is most people are going to get COVID.”

Fauci defended Woodcock’s remarks in a COVID-19 briefing Wednesday saying Woodcock did not mean to imply “most of us were ultimately going to get sick with omicron.”

“Remember, she was talking about the data that we all showed about the extraordinary effect and dichotomy between people who get Omicron who get vaccinated and boosted how well they are protected against hospitalization, and death,” Fauci

said.

“What she was referring to is that virtually everybody is going to wind up getting exposed and likely get infected but if you’re vaccinated and if you’re boosting, the chances of getting sick have very, very low,” he added.

Although individuals who are vaccinated or have been previously infected with COVID-19 can contract omicron, hospitalizations and deaths are significantly higher among those who are unvaccinated.

Hospitals around the country are becoming overwhelmed with cases as some states, including New Jersey, Maryland and Virginia, have declared emergencies to deal with the surge caused by omicron.

In light of the new variant, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is reportedly considering recommending Americans wear higher-quality N95 or KN95 masks.

Austin-Travis County is currently in Stage 5

(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin Public Health (APH) has published a color-coded chart to help residents of Austin-Travis County understand the stages of risk and provide recommendations on what people should do to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community Precautions Urged

Cases and hospitalizations are surging in Travis County. During Stage 5, vaccinated people should take precautions and wear masks during all activities. Get your booster once eligible.

Partially vaccinated and unvaccinated people should wear masks, avoid gatherings with people outside of their household, only travel and shop if essential, and choose takeaway/curbside options for dining. Get fully vaccinated as soon as possible.



For Vaccinated Individuals the recommendations for **Stage 5** are as follows: For high-risk individuals, indoor and outdoor private gatherings are not recommended at all, with or without precautions, travel is discouraged unless essential, dining

should be outdoors with precautions, and shopping should be outdoors or takeaway or curbside.

For low-risk individuals, indoor and outdoor private gatherings, travel, shopping, and dining should be with precautions. Note that places that require vaccines and masks may pose a lower risk.

Additional protective measures are recommended for people who are partially or not vaccinated

For example, partially or not vaccinated individuals should take precautions for all activities in Stages 1 through 5. In Stages 4 and 5, all partially or not vaccinated individuals, regardless of risk should avoid most activities unless essential. It is recommended that shopping and dining be takeaway and/or curbside.