



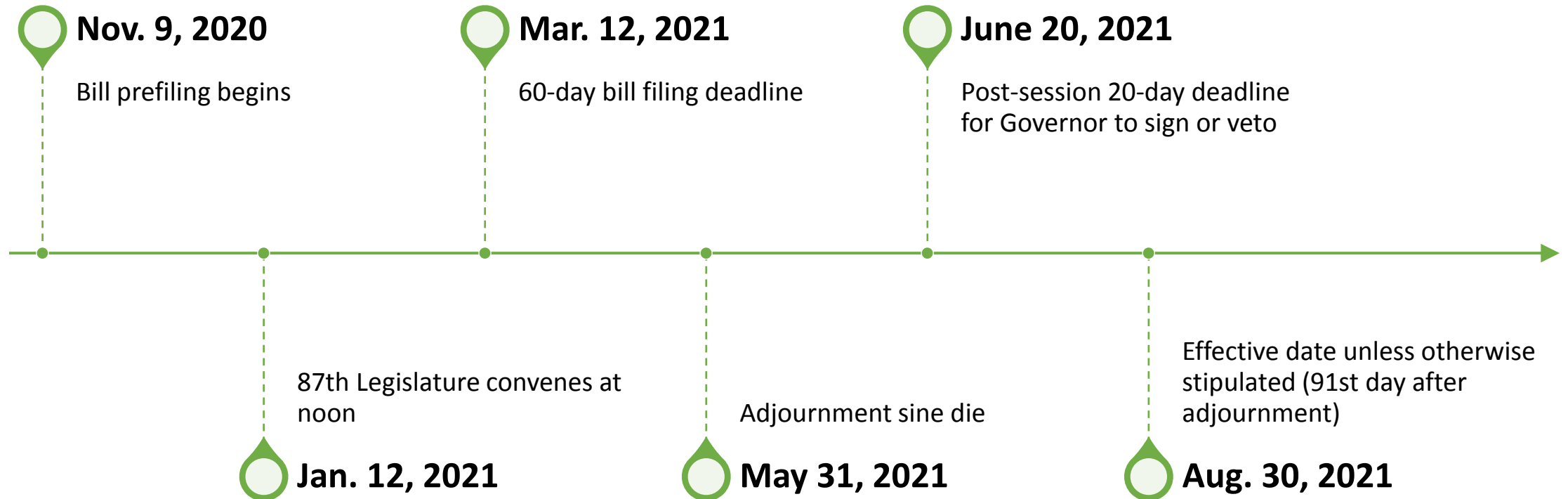
Texas' 87th Legislative Session: Bills of Importance to Counties

By: Kimberly Roach
Brazos County Commissioners Court,
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Texas' 87th Legislative Session Overview:

- Every two years (in odd numbered years), the Texas Legislature meets for legislative session in Austin.
- The maximum duration of a regular session is 140 days. Session runs from the second Tuesday of January through the end of May in odd numbered years.
- This session, 9,999 bills were introduced, with 6,927 of those being House and Senate bills.
- Many of the bills filed this session focus on emergency management, broadband expansion, local government authority, and voter integrity.

Legislative Timeline:



Governor Abbott's Emergency Items:

- Emergency items are items that the Legislature can vote on within the first 60 days of the session
- Expansion of broadband internet access
- Restriction of local government efforts to divert or cut funding from law enforcement
- Bail reform
- Election integrity
- Civil liability protections for individuals, businesses, and healthcare providers that operated safely during the pandemic
- Power System Winterization

BILLS OF INTEREST:

- HB 5: The goal of this legislation is to extend broadband coverage to parts of the State that are lacking coverage. Signed by the Governor, effective immediately.
- HB 525: Defines a religious organization as an essential business at all times, including during a declared state of disaster, and the organization's religious and other related activities are essential activities even if the activities are not listed as essential in an order issued during the disaster. Sovereign immunity is waived. Signed by the Governor, effective immediately.
- SB 186: Relating to the authority of a county to issue bonds to restore or maintain a county courthouse. S.B. 186 amends current law relating to the authority of a county to issue bonds to restore or maintain a county courthouse. This must now be put out to a vote for a voter-approved bond rather than issuing debt to complete restoration and maintenance of courthouses. Signed by the Governor, effective immediately.

BILLS OF INTEREST:

- HB 1071: Relating to allowing for the presence of a qualified facility dog in certain court proceedings. Signed by the Governor, effective September 1, 2021.
- HB 1082: Relating to the availability of personal information of an elected public officer. Extends the protections for State officials to local office holders. Signed by the Governor, effective immediately.
- HB 1698 (RMA bill): The bill would apply to Brazos County. Based on the analysis provided by TxDMV, implementation of the optional fee in Brazos County could begin January 1, 2022, under the assumption that the commissioners court could pass a resolution, hold the required county election and receive approval of a majority of voters, and notify TxDMV by September 1, 2021, to begin charging the fee in calendar year 2022.

BILLS OF INTEREST:

- HB 4293: Relating to the creation of a court reminder program for criminal defendants. The Office of Court Administration of the Texas Judicial System shall develop and make available to each county a court reminder program that allows the county to send a text message to notify criminal defendants of scheduled court appearances. Signed by the Governor, effective September 1, 2021.
- SB 3: Relating to preparing for, preventing, and responding to weather emergencies and power outages; increasing the amount of administrative and civil penalties. Signed by the Governor, effective immediately.
- SB 58: Relating to purchasing of cloud computing services by a political subdivision. Amends the Public Property Finance Act to allow counties to finance intangible products such as cloud computing services. Signed by the Governor, effective immediately.

BILLS OF INTEREST:

- SB 230: Allows Commissioners to complete the requirement of 16 hours of continuing education annually online rather than in a traditional classroom setting. Signed by the Governor, effective immediately.
- SB 598: Relating to auditable voting systems. S.B. 598 amends the Election Code to require the general custodian of election records, not later than 24 hours after all ballots have been counted in an election, to conduct a risk-limiting audit for a selected statewide race or measure. S.B. 598 prohibits a voting system, beginning September 1, 2026, from being capable of connecting to any external or internal communications network, including the Internet, and from having the capability of permitting wireless communication. Requires that the Secretary of State adopt rules prescribing procedures necessary to implement the new voting changes. Signed by the Governor, effective September 1, 2021.

It's Not Over Yet!

- Based on recent interviews with Governor Abbott, there will likely be a special session called soon to focus on policy priorities of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor (i.e., voting & lobbying!).
- Because this is a redistricting year and covid has delayed the redistricting process, the Legislature will be called back for special session this fall. This will likely occur in September or October.

Questions?

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