



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Texas Disaster Declaration and Actions – Here is a list of all the actions taken at the state level in Texas in response to the COVID-19 virus in April (although it begins with the Governor Greg Abbott’s stay-at-home order issued on March 31st, but took effect on April 2, 2020).

Essential Services and Activities Protocols – On March 31st, Governor Greg Abbott issued an Executive Order implementing Essential Services and Activities Protocols for the entire state of Texas. The protocols direct all Texans to minimize non-essential gatherings and in-person contact with people who are not in the same household. The Governor’s Executive Order renews and amends his [previous order](#) enforcing federal social distancing guidelines for COVID-19, including closing schools and instructing Texans to avoid eating or drinking at bars and restaurants. The protocols allow exceptions for essential activities and services based on the [Department of Homeland Security’s guidelines on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce](#). Examples of these essential services include healthcare, grocery stores, banking and financial services, utilities, childcare for essential service employees, and government services. The Executive Order follows the decision by President Trump and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to enhance social distancing guidelines and extend the deadline for these guidelines to April 30th. Governor Abbott said, “Social distancing is our best tool in the fight against COVID-19, and the actions we

have taken thus far have proven to be effective in limiting the spread of this virus. Now it is time to redouble our efforts to reduce further exposure as much as possible and flatten the curve. As with all the actions the state is taking, the Essential Services and Activities Protocols is informed by the expertise and guidance of the CDC as well as state and local health officials. I urge my fellow Texans to heed these heightened social distancing directives to protect their health and the health of those around them. By following these guidelines, we will limit the spread of COVID-19 and overcome this challenge together.” Here are some specifics:

- The Executive Order renews and expands the Governor's previous directive to minimize social gatherings and minimize contact with people who are not in the same household.
- It also renews the Governor's directive to avoid eating or drinking at bars, restaurants, and food courts, and visiting gyms or massage establishments, and it expands the order to include tattoo studios, piercing studios, and cosmetology salons.
- In accordance with federal guidelines, people are still prohibited from visiting nursing homes, state supported living centers, assisted living facilities, or long-term care facilities unless to provide critical assistance.
- Schools will remain temporarily closed to in-person classroom attendance through May 4, 2020.
- The order does not prohibit people from accessing essential services or engaging in essential daily activities, such as going to the grocery store or gas station, providing or obtaining other essential services, hunting or fishing, or engaging in physical activity like jogging or bicycling, so long as the necessary precautions are maintained to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and to minimize in-person contact with people who are not in the same household.
- The order also includes an exemption for religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship.
- All critical infrastructure will remain operational, and government entities and businesses will continue providing essential services.
- Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) will maintain an online list of essential services specified in the Governor's Executive Order at

www.tdem.texas.gov/essentialservices/. Other essential services may be added to this list with the approval of TDEM.

The orders will be effective on a statewide basis starting at 12:01 AM on April 2, 2020 and will end on April 30, 2020, subject to extension.

Specifics from the Executive Order states:

Effective Date – On a statewide basis effective 12:01 a.m. on April 2, 2020, and continuing through April 30, 2020, subject to extension based on the status of COVID-19 in Texas and the recommendations of the CDC and the White House Coronavirus Task Force:

Minimize In-Person Contact – In accordance with guidance from DSHS Commissioner Dr. Hellerstedt, and to achieve the goals established by the President to reduce the spread of COVID-19, every person in Texas shall, except where necessary to provide or obtain essential services, minimize social gatherings and minimize in-person contact with people who are not in the same household. “Essential services” shall consist of everything listed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in its Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce, Version 2.0, plus religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship.

Essential Services List – Other essential services may be added to the list with the approval of the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM). TDEM shall maintain an online list of essential services, as specified in this executive order and in any approved additions. Requests for additions should be directed to TDEM at EssentialServices@tdem.texas.gov or by visiting the TDEM website. In providing or obtaining essential services, people and businesses should follow the Guidelines from the President and the CDC by practicing good hygiene, environmental cleanliness, and sanitation, implementing social distancing, and working from home if possible.

- **Telework** – In particular, all services should be provided through remote telework from home unless they are essential services that cannot be provided through remote telework.
- **Religious Services** – If religious services cannot be conducted from home or through remote services, they should be conducted consistent with the Guidelines from the President and

the CDC by practicing good hygiene, environmental cleanliness, and sanitation, and by implementing social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- **Restaurants and Services Establishments** – In accordance with the Guidelines from the President and the CDC, people shall avoid eating or drinking at bars, restaurants, and food courts, or visiting gyms, massage establishments, tattoo studios, piercing studios, or cosmetology salons; provided, however, that the use of drive-thru, pickup, or delivery options for food and drinks is allowed and highly encouraged throughout the limited duration of this executive order.
- **Essential Daily Activities** – This executive order does not prohibit people from accessing essential services or engaging in essential daily activities, such as going to the grocery store or gas station, providing or obtaining other essential services, visiting parks, hunting or fishing, or engaging in physical activity like jogging or bicycling, so long as the necessary precautions are maintained to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and to minimize in-person contact with people who are not in the same household.
- **Senior Living Facilities** – In accordance with the Guidelines from the President and the CDC, people shall not visit nursing homes, state supported living centers, assisted living facilities, or long-term care facilities unless to provide critical assistance as determined through guidance from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.
- **Closure of Schools** – In accordance with the Guidelines from the President and the CDC, schools shall remain temporarily closed to in-person classroom attendance and shall not recommence before May 4, 2020.

Local Orders – This executive order shall supersede any conflicting order issued by local officials in response to the COVID-19 disaster, but only to the extent that such a local order restricts essential services allowed by this executive order or allows gatherings prohibited by this executive order. I hereby suspend Sections 418.1015(b) and 418.108 of the Texas Government Code, Chapter 81, Subchapter E of the Texas Health and Safety Code, and any other relevant statutes, to the extent necessary to ensure that local officials do not impose restrictions inconsistent with this executive order, provided that local officials may enforce this executive order as well as local restrictions that are consistent with this executive order.

Here is a link to the executive order:

https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA-14_Statewide_Essential_Service_and_Activity_COVID-19_IMAGE_03-31-2020.pdf

Texas Division of Emergency Management's (TDEM) List of Essential Services – Includes CISA essential critical infrastructure sectors plus religious services and others added by TDEM.

CISA Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure Sectors:

- Healthcare/Public Health
- Law Enforcement, Public Safety, and other First Responders
- Food and Agriculture
- Energy
- Water and Wastewater
- Transportation and Logistics
- Public Works and Infrastructure Support Services
- Communications and Information Technology
- Other Community- or Government-Based operations and Essential Functions
- Critical Manufacturing
- Hazardous Materials
- Financial Services
- Chemical
- Defense Industrial Base
- Commercial Facilities
- Residential/Shelter Facilities and Services
- Hygiene Products and Services

Other Essential Sectors added by TDEM:

- Religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship.

- Other services as approved by the Texas Division of Emergency Management.

Requests for Additional Essential Services – There is a form to submit a request for additional essential services on this website:

<http://tdem.texas.gov/essentialservices/>

Stay at Home Video – On April 1st, Governor Greg Abbott released a video with a statewide message to all Texans as his Executive Order goes into effect requiring all Texans to stay home unless they are participating in an essential service or activity. Because he used the words “minimize non-essential gatherings and in-person contact with people who are not in the same household” in his March 31st order, he clarified in the video that his order meant “stay at home” unless doing essential things. Here is a transcript of the video: “Hi, this is Governor Greg Abbott. With COVID-19 spreading across Texas I issued this Executive Order that requires all Texans to stay at home except to provide essential services or do essential things like going to the grocery store. Now I know this is a great sacrifice, and we must respond to this challenge with strength and with resolve. By following social distancing practices, we will slow the spread of COVID-19. We will save lives. And we will make it through this challenge together. Thank you, and God bless you all.”

Here is a link to the video: <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-releases-video-message-to-texans-as-latest-executive-order-goes-into-effect>

Comfort Food Care Package Program – On March 31st, Governor Greg Abbott announced the Comfort Food Care Package (CFCP) program to provide meals for at-risk youth and families in communities across Texas. As part of the program, participating restaurants offer CFCPs for patrons to purchase on behalf of families and youth in need. Each care package contains enough food to feed a family of 5 to 6 and will be delivered to recipients’ homes. The program is a partnership between the Governor's Public Safety Office, the Texas Network of Family and Youth Success Programs (formerly called Services to At-Risk Youth), Favor Delivery, and the Texas Restaurant Association. Governor Abbott said, “Thank you to the generous Texans and restaurants across the state for stepping up to provide meals to families in need. The Comfort Food Care

Package program will provide at-risk youth and families with an additional food source, while giving Texans another way to support local restaurants and their fellow Texans experiencing hardships due to COVID-19." The Comfort Food Care Package program utilizes the following steps:

- Participating restaurants list CFCPs on their online ordering system for customers to purchase on behalf of at-risk families and youth in the community.
- Customers add CFCPs to their orders and purchase.
- Family and Youth Success Programs identify families and shelters who have the most need and work with participating restaurants and Favor to get the meals delivered.
- Families interested in utilizing the CFCP program should contact their local Family and Youth Success Program for more information.
- Restaurants interested in participating in the program can sign up on the [Texas Restaurant Association website](#).

Here is a link to the website: <https://www.txrestaurant.org/news/comfort-food-care-packages-feed-youth-and-families-need-and-stay-open>

Guidance for Houses of Worship – On April 1st, Attorney General Ken Paxton issued “Guidance for Houses of Worship During the COVID-19 Crisis.” General Paxton said, “During these challenging times, government and faith communities throughout Texas need to work together to stop the spread of Coronavirus. To facilitate this collaboration, State and local governments must clearly articulate their directives aimed at mitigating spread of the virus. This joint guidance from the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Governor responds to frequently asked questions by members of the faith community and is the official guidance regarding the effect of Executive Order GA 14 on religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship.”

Provisions of the guidance include:

- The government must give special consideration to houses of worship when issuing orders related to the COVID-19 crisis.

- The First Amendment to the United States Constitution and Article I of the Texas Constitution protect the right of Texans to freely exercise their religion.
- In addition, the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act (“RFRA”) provides even stronger protections to faith communities, and government must ensure that it complies with RFRA when it acts. Thus, when state or local governments issue orders prohibiting people from providing or obtaining certain services, they must ensure that these orders do not violate these constitutional and statutory rights.
- Houses of worship provide “essential services.”
- On March 31, 2020, Governor Abbott issued Executive Order GA 14, which defines essential services to include “religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship.”
- Institutions providing these essential services can provide them under certain conditions described in Executive Order GA 14 and local orders by counties or municipalities that are consistent with GA 14.
- To the extent there is conflict between the Governor’s Executive Order GA 14 and local orders, GA 14 controls.
- Houses of worship must, whenever possible, conduct their activities from home or through remote audio or video services.
- Houses of worship often gather as large groups of people in one building during a religious service or activity. But during this public health crisis, in accordance with guidance from the White House, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”), and Texas Department of State Health Services (“Texas DSHS”), providers of essential services must follow certain mitigation strategies to slow the spread of the virus.
- Thus, under the Governor’s Executive Order GA 14, houses of worship should conduct remote audio, video, or teleconference activities whenever possible.
- If a house of worship cannot conduct its activities remotely, then the White House and CDC guidelines still control in order to stop the spread of Coronavirus.
- If a house of worship cannot conduct its service remotely due to a lack of capability (technological or financial), then it should follow the Governor’s Executive Order GA 14, that

houses of worship are to conduct their activities in accordance with the White House Guidelines. For example:

1. Instruct sick employees, volunteers, and guests to stay home;
 2. Practice social distancing by maintaining appropriate distance between people;
 3. Maintain good hygiene by washing your hands frequently, using hand sanitizer, using your elbow to cover coughs, and not touching your face; and clean and disinfect work areas frequently.
- Houses of worship, like providers of other essential services, are to follow additional guidance from the White House and CDC whenever possible.
 - Some houses of worship must avoid large gatherings. Texas is a big state and the transmission rate of COVID-19 varies in different communities.
 - Given this, houses of worship should work with counties and municipalities to evaluate the rate of local community spread and determine the appropriate level of mitigation strategies to implement. For example, more detailed guidance from the CDC currently recommends that:
 1. If a community is experiencing substantial community spread of COVID-19, then the houses of worship in that community should cancel all in-person gatherings of any size.
 2. But if a community is experiencing moderate to substantial spread, then the CDC recommends a reduction of activities in coordination with local health officials, possible smaller gatherings incorporating social-distancing measures, cancelation of activities with 10 or more people when high-risk populations attend in person (including those over 65 and those with underlying medical conditions), and use of creative means to deliver other faith-based services.
 - For example, a church may hold Easter services in its parking lot, with attendees remaining in their cars (windows down), parked in every other parking spot, with the minister using amplification to preach.

- Or because Executive Order GA 14 permits drive-thru's to operate, then a house of worship may, according to their faith practices, provide communion or a blessing through a similar drive-up service.
- Or pastors with smaller congregations may consider conducting multiple services of 10 people or fewer in their sanctuaries, so long as they maintain appropriate social distancing, properly sanitize the building between each service, and provide hand sanitizer.

General Paxton concluded, "These restrictions do not violate the religious liberty of houses of worship. Under the extraordinary circumstances in which we temporarily live, these restrictions do not violate the religious liberty of houses of worship because the government has a compelling interest for implementing the rules (stopping contagion) and the rules are the least restrictive means of burdening religious practice (they allow houses of worship to stay open for ministry, but suggest ways that help stop the spread of COVID-19)."

Tenant-Based Rental Assistance – On April 1st, Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) took initial action to provide tenant-based rental assistance for Texans experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19. The Governor waived statutes relating to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) HOME Investments Partnership program to allow Texas greater flexibility to use program funds to help certain Texans pay their rent. In addition, TDHCA has sent a letter to HUD requesting federal waivers to allow greater flexibility to Texas to reprogram these funds for that purpose. If these waivers are granted, Texas will reprogram the funds to provide financial housing assistance to certain Texans enduring economic hardships related to COVID-19. Governor Abbott said, "The State of Texas is committed to supporting Texans who are enduring significant economic hardship due to the spread of COVID-19. Suspending these state statutes is a crucial first step to help many Texans receive the financial assistance they need to pay their rent, and I urge HUD to grant the federal waiver requests."

Waiver of Accountability Requirements – On April 2nd, Education Commissioner Mike Morath announced that Texas Education Agency received approval of a waiver from the U.S. Department of

Education waiving statewide assessment and accountability requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), for the 2019–2020 school year. In a letter to school district superintendents, Commissioner Morath said, “As announced on March 18th, Governor Greg Abbott used his statutory authority under Texas Government Code, §418.016 to suspend annual academic assessment requirements for the remainder of the 2019–2020 school year. As a result, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) are not being administered for the 2019–2020 school year in response to the COVID–19 pandemic. TEA submitted a federal assessment and accountability waiver on March 24th, and will issue labels indicating Not Rated: Declared State of Disaster for 2020 to recognize that the closure of schools during the state’s testing window inhibited the ability of the state to accurately measure district and campus performance. While no ratings will be issued in 2020, an overall rating or domain rating of D or F in 2019 and an overall rating or domain rating of D or F in 2021 will be considered to be consecutive for the determination of multiple–year unacceptable status. Furthermore, as with other Not Rated labels, when a district or campus receives a Not Rated: Declared State of Disaster label, the district or campus shall continue to implement the previously ordered sanctions and interventions. If a campus has been ordered to prepare a turnaround plan and then receives a rating of Not Rated: Declared State of Disaster, that campus is strongly encouraged, but not required, to implement the approved turnaround plan. Campuses identified for comprehensive support and improvement, targeted support and improvement, and additional targeted support in 2019 will maintain that label and interventions for 2020–2021.”

EMS Workers and First Responders – On April 2nd, Governor Greg Abbott suspended regulations to increase the amount of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) workers and first responders in Texas during the state’s response to COVID–19. Under the Governor’s direction, local medical directors for licensed EMS providers can permit individuals who are qualified, though not formally certified, to provide critical emergency response services for patients treated and transported by the EMS provider. The Governor also suspended certain skills testing requirements for EMS personnel in Texas and for out–of–state Advanced Emergency Medical Technicians seeking reciprocity in Texas so that these individuals who are qualified, but currently unable to take the skills test, are able to provide essential EMS services. Additionally, Governor Abbott suspended regulations to allow first

responder organizations to delay submission on their renewal application and completion requirements for licensure. Governor Abbott said, "Our EMS providers and first responders play a critical role in the front-line fight against COVID-19, and these waivers remove barriers that could otherwise prevent a much-needed availability of essential EMS workers and first responders in our communities. The State of Texas is committed to supporting the EMS and first responder workforce and maximizing the number of available response services for Texans."

Extended Due Date on Franchise Tax Reports – On April 2nd, Comptroller Glenn Hegar announced that his agency is automatically extending the due date for 2020 franchise tax reports to July 15th to be consistent with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The due date extension applies to all franchise taxpayers. It is automatic, and taxpayers do not need to file any additional forms. Comptroller Hegar said, "We recognize that the information aggregated from taxpayers' federal tax returns comprises the building blocks for their Texas franchise tax returns. In addition to coping with the unprecedented impacts of the growing pandemic, we understand the difficulty Texas businesses will face in filing franchise tax returns now that the federal deadline has moved, and so we thought it appropriate to align the state's franchise tax deadline with the IRS deadline."

- Non-electronic funds transfer (non-EFT) taxpayers who cannot file by July 15 may file an extension request on or before July 15 and must pay 90 percent of the tax due for the current year, or 100 percent of the tax reported as due for the prior year with the extension request.
- Non-EFT taxpayers who request an extension have until Jan. 15 to file their report and pay the remainder of the tax due.
- On or before July 15th, taxpayers who are mandatory EFT payers can request an extension of time to file to August 15th and must pay 90 percent of the tax due for the current year or 100 percent of the tax reported as due for the prior year with the extension request.
- On or before August 15th, EFT taxpayers can request a second extension of time to file their report and must pay the remainder of any tax due with their extension request.

Expansion of Health Care Workforce – On April 5th, Governor Greg Abbott temporarily waived certain regulations to expand the health care workforce to assist with Texas' COVID-19 response. Under the waiver, Physician Assistants (PA), Medical Physicists, Perfusionists, and Respiratory Care candidates for licensure who have completed all other requirements may enter the workforce under an emergency license working under supervision prior to taking the final licensure examination. The governor's waiver also provides for emergency licensees to undergo name-based background checks in place of fingerprint checks while fingerprint checks are unavailable due to the crisis. Additionally, the governor's waiver allows more flexibility between physicians and the PAs and Advance Practice Registered Nurses they supervise including allowing for oral prescriptive delegation agreements to enable rapid deployment of those practitioners during the emergency. Governor Abbott said, "The State of Texas is bolstering our response to COVID-19 by expanding our health care workforce and removing barriers that might prevent professionals from serving their fellow Texans. Our front line health care professionals play a vital role in our ongoing response to protect public health, and we are committed to supporting them and ensuring they have the ability to perform their important duties."

Child Care for Frontline Workers – On April 6th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that [Care.com](https://www.care.com) is increasing in-home child care access for frontline workers responding to the COVID-19 emergency. As part of this initiative, Care.com is offering 90 days of free, premium access to their services, along with specific portals for frontline workers and caregivers in Texas. Frontline workers looking for child care as well as prospective caregivers can both enroll on the website. Potential caregivers are subject to Care.com's extensive background and safety checks. While child care services are not typically free of charge, the Texas portal gives residents the ability to waive their fees and volunteer as caregivers, providing additional support to frontline workers. Governor Abbott said, "This Care.com initiative will provide an additional avenue of support for our frontline workers throughout the COVID-19 response. I am grateful for Care.com's commitment to ensuring accessible child care is available to Texans fulfilling essential services during this time."

Personal Protective Equipment – On April 6th, Governor Greg Abbott held a press conference to provide an update on personal protective equipment (PPE) distribution throughout the state of Texas. The governor also announced that Texas received 2.5 million masks in the past 24 hours, and will receive an additional 3 million masks by April 11th. Governor Abbott provided a region-by-region breakdown of supplies that have been distributed over the past week – including masks, face shields, gloves, gowns, and coveralls. Governor Abbott also discussed the distribution process for PPE in Texas. Governor Abbott said, “It is vital that our health care workers and first responders on the front lines have the personal protective equipment they need to stay safe as they respond to COVID-19. The Supply Chain Strike Force is working closely with the Texas Division of Emergency Management to exhaust all avenues for the purchasing and delivery of these critical supplies. We continue to make tremendous progress to distribute these resources throughout the state, and with more supplies on the way, we are strengthening our state’s ability to protect our health care workers and the patients they serve. I thank all of our health care workers and first responders as well as the supply chain workers who are working tirelessly to deliver this essential equipment to Texas.”

Here is a link to the presentation on PPE distribution:

https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/FINAL_SUPPLY_CHAIN_UPDATE_4.6..20.pdf

Closure of State Parks and Historic Sites – On April 7th, Governor Greg Abbott directed the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the Texas Historical Commission (THC) to close all state parks and historic sites as part of the state’s efforts to strengthen social distancing practices and prevent gatherings of large groups of people. Historic sites and state parks will close to the public starting at 5:00 p.m. on April 7th, and will reopen at the direction of the Governor. Governor Abbott said, “Social distancing is our best tool to curb the spread of COVID-19 and save lives. The temporary closure of our state parks and historic sites will help us achieve this goal by preventing the gathering of large groups of people. I urge all Texans to continue to stay at home except for essential services as we respond to COVID-19. By following these social distance practices, we will overcome this challenge together.”

Dialysis Patients – On April 7th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) has adopted an emergency rule to allow end stage renal disease (ESRD) facilities to treat patients more effectively during the COVID-19 response. The emergency rule will be helpful in providing appropriate social distancing and/or provide locations for patients that have tested positive for COVID-19 at a location separate from other dialysis patients to reduce the chance of spreading the virus. And, the emergency rule will allow currently licensed ESRD facilities to operate off-site outpatient facilities without obtaining a new license at the following:

- An ESRD that is no longer licensed that closed within the past 36 months;
- A mobile, transportable, or relocatable medical unit;
- A physician's office; or
- An ambulatory surgical center or freestanding emergency medical care facility that is no longer licensed that closed within the past 36 months.

Governor Abbott said, "This emergency rule will bolster our response to COVID-19 by reducing potential spread among patients at ESRD facilities. As we continue to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in Texas, we are committed to maximizing flexibility and efficiency available to our medical providers to protect public health and keep Texans safe."

Pharmacy Technicians and Interns – On April 7th, Governor Greg Abbott temporarily waived certain regulatory requirements to increase the job capacities of pharmacy technicians and pharmacy interns. Under the governor's waiver, pharmacy technicians can now accept prescription drug orders over the phone – a responsibility typically reserved for pharmacists. The Governor's waiver also allows pharmacy technicians to transfer or receive a transfer of original prescription information on behalf of patients. These two waivers can be utilized at the discretion of pharmacists. Additionally, the governor waived regulations allowing pharmacy interns to assist pharmacists without the designation of preceptor. Governor Abbott said, "By expanding the duties of pharmacy technicians and the additional availability of interns to all pharmacists, we are ensuring members of the pharmacy workforce can efficiently serve their fellow Texans throughout the COVID-19 response. These waivers provide flexibility to our pharmacists and those that assist them to ensure they can

continue to perform their important duties."

Lt. Governor's Business Advisory Council on Re-Starting the Economy – Shortly after Lt. Governor Dan Patrick was first elected in 2014, he established a Business Advisory Council comprised of business leaders from a broad range of businesses around the state to provide him with input on a variety of issues. On April 7th, Lt. Governor Patrick announced that he is establishing a Task Force from his Business Advisory Council to begin to work on a set of recommendations for re-starting the economy, once President Trump and Governor Abbott announce that businesses can begin the re-opening process and Texans can go back to work. The Lt. Governor appointed Dallas businessman Brint Ryan, founder and CEO of Ryan International, to chair the Task Force. Ryan currently chairs Lt. Gov. Patrick's Advisory Board on Tax Policy. Lt. Governor Patrick said, "We know it will take us much longer to start the economy back up than it did to shut it down for the coronavirus pandemic emergency. I have spoken to hundreds of business leaders across the state since the pandemic began, and I know they are already thinking about steps that will need to be taken to put the economy back together when the time comes. I am confident Texas can lead a strong economic recovery both in our state and nationwide and I want to make sure we are ready to go as soon as possible."

Legislative Staffers Assisting the Workforce Commission – Also on April 7th, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick announced that members of the Texas Senate, both Democrat and Republican, are volunteering staffers to assist the Texas Workforce Commission in answering calls from Texans who are seeking unemployment help. Lt. Governor Patrick said, "Senators that I spoke with this past weekend wanted to make sure the Texas Workforce Commission responds to as many calls as possible from Texans regarding unemployment benefits. My office contacted the TWC first thing Monday morning, who welcomed our help. Senators agreed to allow their staff members to volunteer at the TWC. As of noon today, almost 200 senate staffers as well as staffers in my office have volunteered. They will begin training Thursday. The President and Congress have allocated substantial additional resources for those who are unemployed as a result of the coronavirus, and we must do all we can to make sure Texans get those resources as soon as possible." House Speaker Dennis Bonnen urged House

staffers to also participate, and over 120 of them are also assisting the Workforce Commission with unemployment inquiries.

Emergency Benefits for SNAP Recipients – On April 8th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that Texas Health and Human Services (HHS) will provide more than \$168 million in emergency Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food benefits to help Texans during the COVID-19 response. HHS received federal approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide the maximum, allowable amount of SNAP benefits to recipients based on family size. The emergency allotments are currently authorized for the months of April and May and will affect all SNAP recipients in the state of Texas. Governor Abbott said, "As the state continues to respond to COVID-19, we are working closely with our agency partners to ensure families have access to nutritious meals. I thank the U.S. Department of Agriculture for quickly granting this approval. These emergency benefits will give hundreds of thousands of Texans the additional support they need to provide for their families during this challenging time." SNAP recipients will see the additional amount on their Lone Star Card by April 15 for April benefits, and by May 15 for May benefits. Disbursements will be staggered and will begin on April 9. SNAP recipients do not need to take any further action to receive the additional benefits.

Notary Public Services Via Videoconference – On April 8th, Governor Greg Abbott suspended certain statutes concerning appearance before a notary public to execute a self-proved will, a durable power of attorney, a medical power of attorney, a directive to physician, or an oath of an executor, administrator, or guardian. These suspensions temporarily allow for appearance before a notary public via videoconference when executing such documents, avoiding the need for in-person contact during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following conditions will apply whenever this suspension is invoked:

- A notary public must verify the identity of a person signing a document at the time the signature is taken by using two-way video and audio conference technology.
- A notary public may verify identity by personal knowledge of the signing person, or by analysis based on the signing person's remote presentation of a government-issued

identification credential, including a passport or driver's license, that contains the signature and a photograph of the person.

- The signing person shall transmit by fax or electronic means a legible copy of the signed document to the notary public, who may notarize the transmitted copy and then transmit the notarized copy back to the signing person by fax or electronic means, at which point the notarization is valid.

This suspension will remain in effect until terminated by the Office of the Governor or until the March 13, 2020 disaster declaration is lifted or expires. Documents executed while this suspension is in effect, and in accordance with its terms, will remain valid after the termination of this suspension.

Expanded Telehealth Options – On April 9th, Governor Greg Abbott temporarily waived a series of regulations to lift certain telehealth restrictions and expand telehealth options as Texas responds to COVID-19. The waivers will allow a smart phone or any audio-visual, real-time, or two-way interactive communication system to qualify as a telecommunications technology that can be used to provide certain telehealth services. These waivers apply to speech-language pathologists and audiologists, behavior analysts, hearing instrument fitters and dispensers, and dyslexia therapists and practitioners. Governor Abbott said, "As the State of Texas works to limit the spread of COVID-19, we also want to make sure that Texans have access to the health services they rely on. By temporarily waiving these regulations and expanding telehealth options, more Texans will be able to access the care they need while still following social distancing practices."

Nurse Aides in Long-Term Care Facilities – On April 9th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) has adopted an emergency rule to temporarily allow more nurse aides to serve residents in long-term care facilities during the COVID-19 response. The emergency rule temporarily allows nursing facilities to hire people to provide nurse aide services without having to complete a full certification program in their first four months of employment. This action will expand the eligible pool of direct care workers and help long-term care providers who may face critical staffing shortages. Governor Abbott said, "As Texas continues

to respond to COVID-19, we are working to make sure our long-term care facilities have adequate staff to care for Texans residing in these facilities. This emergency rule will increase the availability of nurse aides in the workforce and ensure residents of long-term care facilities have the care and support they need."

AG Opinion On Property Damaged In a Disaster Area – On April 9th, Senator Bettencourt requested an expedited opinion from Attorney General Paxton regarding the application of §11.35 of the Tax Code, which creates a temporary property tax exemption for property damaged within an officially declared disaster area. Specifically, the request asked if the exemption can “apply to property that has suffered an economic loss not associated with physical damage to the property as a result of the disaster.” On April 13th, Attorney General Ken Paxton issued his opinion, AGO KP-0299, which said, “A court would likely conclude that the Legislature intended to limit the temporary tax exemption to apply to property physically harmed as a result of a declared disaster. Thus, purely economic, non-physical damage to property caused by the COVID-19 disaster is not eligible for the temporary tax exemption provided by Section 11.35 of the Tax Code.” Although the AG’s opinion is advisory only, the likely result will be that central appraisal districts will reject all applications for a disaster exemption for property that has suffered economic damage from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Frontline Child Care Website for Essential Workers – On April 10th, Governor Greg Abbott announced a new online [Frontline Child Care Website](#) to help essential workers in Texas locate child care and support child care centers who are caring for these children during the outbreak. The new online website, which integrates a mapping portal, was built by the Texas Frontline Child Care Task Force of the Supply Chain Strike Force, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The Frontline Child Care Portal allows essential workers to search for child care facilities near them, as well as facility operating hours and the number of seats available. It also includes links to HHSC’s inspection and compliance records for each operation. The website also helps parents find other basic information about child care including health and safety

information and step-by-step instructions for applying for child care financial assistance. Additionally, the website gives frontline employers guidance to assist their employees in need and provides child care centers and school districts resources to support their child care programs. Governor Abbott said, "We have a duty to support Texas health care workers and other essential employees as they work on the front lines of the COVID-19 response. For essential workers with young children who don't have other options, that means providing safe, regulated, and accessible child care. The Frontline Child Care Website will strengthen our child care capacity across the state, allowing our essential workers to continue their work to keep us safe and provide the critical services that Texans depend on. There is nothing more powerful than Texans helping Texans, and I want to thank child care workers across the state for stepping up to support our essential workers during these challenging times."

Physicians-In-Training Permits - On April 11th, Governor Greg Abbott waived certain regulations related to restrictions on physicians-in-training (PIT) permit holders in order to increase health care capacity through the state's response to COVID-19. With the waivers, Texas hospitals and facilities associated with Graduate Medical Education (GME) training programs will be able to utilize PIT permit holders, with proper physician oversight, in areas outside of their GME training program. For example, under the temporary waivers, residents in a surgery residency program can assist in an Emergency Department if a surge of patients is experienced. These waivers will increase the availability of medically trained individuals to help assist the COVID-19 response. Governor Abbott said, "These temporary waivers will expand the staffing capacity of our hospitals and medical facilities, ensuring Texans will have access to the care needed during the response to COVID-19. I am grateful for all the frontline health care workers across the state serving their fellow Texans during this challenging time."

Disaster Declaration Extended For an Additional 30-Days - On April 12th, Governor Greg Abbott issued a proclamation extending his Disaster Declaration for all Texas counties in response to COVID-19. Originally issued on March 13th, the Disaster Declaration provides the state a number of resources to effectively serve Texans as the Lone Star State continues to mitigate the spread of

COVID-19. Governor Abbott said, "By extending my Disaster Declaration, we are ensuring the state of Texas continues to have adequate resources and capabilities to support our communities and protect public health. I urge all Texans to continue practicing social distancing and abide by the guidelines laid out by the CDC and my Executive Orders to slow the spread of COVID-19."

Here is a link to the proclamation:

<https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-extends-disaster-declaration-for-covid-192>

Loans to Small Businesses – On April 13th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that Goldman Sachs and the LiftFund, along with other community development financial institutions (CDFIs), are partnering to provide \$50 million in loans to small businesses in Texas that have been affected by COVID-19 as part of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program. The loans, made through the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), will primarily be used for payroll so that employees can continue to receive paychecks and small businesses can retain their employees and will be partially or wholly forgiven. Goldman Sachs will provide the capital as part of its \$550 million commitment to COVID-19 relief, and LiftFund, alongside other CDFIs, will administer the funding to qualified small businesses. If all stipulations are met, small business can have their loans forgiven in full by the SBA. LiftFund partners with SBA lenders and other lending institutions to provide startup loans. Governor Abbott said, "Small Businesses and their employees are at the heart of the Texas economy, and they need support during these difficult times. These loans will help us revitalize our economy and restore Texans' livelihoods as we respond to COVID-19. I thank Goldman Sachs and the LiftFund for providing this lifeline to Texas small businesses and their employees by providing them with the support they need to overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19. This partnership is an important first step in our journey to economic recovery in the state of Texas."

Business owners can apply for a PPP loan on the LiftFund website: <https://www.liftfund.com>

Local Public Safety Assistance – On April 15th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that his [Public](#)

[Safety Office](#) (PSO) will provide \$38 million in federal funds to local units of government in Texas. The funds come from the Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program authorized by the federal Emergency Appropriations for Coronavirus Health Response and Agency Operations Act. Jurisdictions can use the funding to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus. Allowable projects and purchases include, but are not limited to, overtime, equipment, supplies, training, travel expenses, and addressing the medical needs of inmates in local and tribal jails and detention centers. Examples of allowable costs include:

- Personnel Overtime (Peace Officer, Jailer, Correctional Officer, Medical, and other Essential Staff)
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Supplies (i.e. gloves, masks, sanitizer, disinfectant)
- Temporary Staff
- Medical care for inmates that have tested positive for COVID-19
- Any other costs associated with the implementation of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [COVID-19 Guidance documents](#).

Governor Abbott said, "These funds will help our local governments respond to COVID-19 and provide the resources that our communities need. I am grateful to our federal partners for making this crucial financial support available to the state of Texas."

The eGrants management website is: <https://egrants.gov.texas.gov/Default.aspx>

Drive-Through Testing Sites in Harris County – On April 15th, Governor Greg Abbott and Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo announced two new COVID-19 drive-through testing sites for Harris County in partnership with Walgreens. The sites are set to come online Friday, April 17th, and will have the capacity to conduct 200 tests per day at each location. Testing in these locations will be available by appointment and individuals will first need to complete a digital health assessment to determine eligibility using criteria established by CDC.

Governor Abbott and Judge Hidalgo issued the following joint statement regarding this

announcement: "Collection and testing is one of the most powerful tools we have in the fight against COVID-19, and we are working every day to increase testing capacity for the people of Harris County. We are grateful to Walgreens for their partnership to get these new sites online so we can continue to ramp up testing, identify Texans who have contracted COVID-19, and slow the spread of this virus."

Governor's Small Business Webinar Series – On April 16th, Governor Greg Abbott's Office of Economic Development and Tourism (EDT) launched the Governor's Small Business Webinar Series to provide Texas small business owners and entrepreneurs with timely, relevant, and actionable information on COVID-19 recovery resources. The first webinar, specifically tailored to Central Texas, was attended by over 3,000 Texans. The Webinar Series takes the place of the Governor's Small Business Series events that were postponed due to COVID-19. The Governor's Small Business Webinar Series covers a variety of resources available including information on programs offered by the U.S. Small Business Administration that may be of assistance to Texas businesses impacted by COVID-19. Businesses can also connect with local experts and support systems. Featured speakers include area Small Business Development Centers and other resource providers based on the needs of the communities covered in each webinar. The Governor's Small Business Webinar Series is held in collaboration with local economic development organizations and supported through a partnership with the Texas Workforce Commission.

Information on the webinars can be found: <https://gov.texas.gov/business/events>

Governor's Orders Related to Re-Opening the State – On April 17th, Governor Greg Abbott held a press conference where he issued three new Executive Orders to begin the process of reopening the state of Texas while revising hospital capacity and certain social distancing guidelines. Within the orders, select activities and services that pose minimal to no threat of spreading COVID-19 are allowed to reopen using a "Retail-To-Go" model, certain restrictions on surgeries have been loosened, and schools will remain closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year.

Strike Force to Open Texas – Within the orders, the Governor established the [Strike Force to Open](#)

[Texas](#) – a team of nationally recognized medical experts and private and public leaders who will advise the Governor on safely and strategically reopening the state of Texas. Governor Abbott said, "Texans are battling a colossal challenge – an invisible enemy that has tested our lives and our livelihoods – but overcoming challenges is part of who we are as Texans. We have shown that Texas can continue our efforts to contain COVID-19 while also adopting safe standards that will allow us to begin the process of reopening Texas. The Strike Force to Open Texas brings together nationally recognized medical experts with public and private sector leaders to achieve this mission. By coming together, we can get Texans back to work, practice safe standards that will prevent the spread of COVID-19, and we can overcome this pandemic." James Huffines will lead the advisory strike force and Mike Toomey will serve as Chief Operating Officer. Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, House Speaker Dennis Bonnen, Attorney General Ken Paxton, and Comptroller Glenn Hegar will serve as consulting members.

Medical Team – Governor Abbott appointed Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Commissioner John Hellerstedt, MD, as Chief Medical Officer of the strike force. Dr. Hellerstedt will be supported by three Chief Medical Advisors:

- John Zerwas, MD, Executive Vice-Chancellor for Health Affairs at the University of Texas System
- Mark McClellan, MD, PhD, Former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner and U.S. Medicaid and Medicare Administrator
- Parker Hudson, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases at Dell Medical School and program director for the Internal Medicine Residency

The health experts have been asked to develop a medical architecture to comprehensively test and trace COVID-19 that will enable Texans to gradually and safely begin the process of returning to work and other activities.

Special Advisory Council – The medical team will work alongside a Special Advisory Council who will share innovative ideas to help businesses strategically reopen while containing the spread of COVID-19. The council consists of 39 business leaders representing the state's regions and industries. The advisory council will collaborate with working groups to devise strategies, statewide

standards, and appropriate time frames to reopen the Lone Star State while prioritizing the health and safety of all Texans. The strike force will immediately begin providing input on potential additional openings of activities and services in Texas consistent with guidelines provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Governor will announce a revised plan for the state based on these initial recommendations on April 27. Special Advisory Council members include:

- Arcilia Acosta: President and CEO, CARCON Industries & Construction
- Paul Andrews, Jr.: Founder and CEO, TTI Inc.
- Mark Bivins: Rancher, partner in Corsino Cattle Company
- Kathy Britton: CEO and Owner, Perry Homes
- Brad Brookshire: Chairman and CEO, Brookshire Grocery Co.
- J. Bruce Bugg, Jr.: Chairman, Texas Transportation Commission
- Alonzo Cantu: President & CEO of Cantu Construction
- Bobby Cox: Owner and operator, Bobby Cox Companies, Inc.
- Adriana Cruz: Executive Director, Economic Development & Tourism Division, Office of the Governor
- Michael Dell: Chairman and CEO, Dell Technologies
- Scott Dueser: Chairman, President & CEO, First Financial Bank
- Don Evans: Chairman of the President George W. Bush Foundation, Chairman of Permian Strategic Partnership
- Tilman Fertitta: Chairman, CEO, and sole owner, Landry's, Inc.
- Richard Fisher: Senior Advisor, Barclays and Former President & CEO, the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas
- Rick Francis: Chairman of the Board, WestStar Bank Holding Company, Inc.
- Printice Gary: Founding Partner/Principal and CEO, Carleton Companies
- Brad Heffington: Owner of Heffington Farms, Inc. and Triple T Irrigation, Inc.
- Jeffery D. Hildebrand: Executive Chairman and Founder, Hilcorp Energy Company
- Nancy Kinder: President & CEO, Kinder Foundation
- Tom Luce: Founder and Chairman, Texas 2036

- Marc McDougal: CEO, McDougal Companies
- Jim "Mattress Mack" McIngvale: Owner, Gallery Furniture
- Drayton McLane: Chairman, McLane Group
- Elaine Mendoza: Founder, President & CEO of Conceptual MindWorks, Inc
- Balous Miller: Owner, Bill Miller Bar-B-Q Restaurants
- Carla Moran: Ramar Communications
- Dennis Nixon: CEO and Chairman of International Bank of Commerce
- David Oliveira: Partner at Roerig, Oliveira & Fisher, L.L.P.
- Ross Perot, Jr.: Chairman, The Perot Group
- Kevin D. Roberts, Ph.D.: Executive Director, Texas Public Policy Foundation
- Robert B. Rowling: Owner and Chairman, TRT Holdings, Inc.
- Kendra Scott: Founder and CEO, Kendra Scott
- Robert F. Smith: Founder, Chairman & CEO, Vista Equity Partners
- Sam L. Susser: Chairman of BancAffiliated, Inc.
- Massey Villarreal: CEO and President, Precision Task Group, Inc.
- Kirk Watson: Founding Dean of the University of Houston Hobby School of Public Affairs
- Marc Watts: President, The Friedkin Group
- Graham Weston: Former Chairman of Rackspace Hosting Inc.
- Sanjiv Yajnik: President of the Financial Services Division, Capital One

Retail-To-Go – [The Governor's Executive Order \(GA-16\)](#) relates to the safe, strategic reopening of select services and activities in Texas. It establishes a temporary "Retail-To-Go" model that will allow retail outlets in Texas to reopen beginning Friday, April 24. Under this model, reopened establishments are required to deliver items to customer's cars, homes, or other locations to minimize contact.

Closing of Schools for Remainder of the School Year – Under the Executive Order, schools – including public, private, and higher education institutions – will remain closed for the 2019–2020 school year. Teachers may go into the classroom for video instruction, to perform administrative duties, and to clean out their classrooms.

Hospital Capacity and Personal Protective Equipment – The governor's order (GA-16) relates to

hospital capacity and personal protective equipment (PPE) needed for the COVID-19 response. The order loosens restrictions on surgeries [put in place by Governor Abbott in March](#). Beginning at 11:59 pm on April 21 through 11:59 pm on May 8, all licensed health care professionals and all licensed health care facilities must continue to postpone all surgeries and procedures that are not medically necessary to diagnose or correct a serious medical condition of, or to preserve the life of, a patient who without timely performance of the surgery or procedure would be at risk for serious adverse medical consequences or death as determined by a patient's physician. Exceptions now include:

- Any procedure that, if performed in accordance with the commonly accepted standard of clinical practice, would not deplete the hospital capacity or the PPE needed to cope with COVID-19, or
- Any surgery or procedure performed in a licensed health care facility that has certified in writing to Texas HHSC both
 1. that it will reserve at least 25% of its hospital capacity for treatment of COVID-19 patients, accounting for the range of clinical severity of COVID-19 patients, and
 2. that it will not request any PPE from any public source — whether federal, state, or local — for the duration of the COVID-19 disaster.

State Parks to Re-Open – The Governor today also directed state parks to reopen on Monday, April 20 with strict guidelines to reduce transmission of COVID-19 – including requiring visitors to wear face coverings, maintain a six-foot distance from individuals outside of their party, and prohibiting the gathering of groups larger than five.

Specifics from the Executive Order Establishing the Strike Force to Open Texas:

Creation and Duties – The Governor's Strike Force to Open Texas is created to advise the governor on safely and strategically restarting and revitalizing all aspects of the Lone Star State – work, school, entertainment, and culture. The Strike Force will represent a collaboration among medical

professionals and public and private leaders, and is charged with the following advisory duties, as well as any other advisory tasks assigned by the governor:

1. Study and make recommendations, in consultation with state health officials, for revitalizing the Texas economy during our recovery from the COVID-19 disaster, including without limitation on the following topics:
 - A. Safely reopening Texas businesses across a variety of sectors in a strategic, healthy, and productive manner that protects workers and consumers, especially our most vulnerable populations, while also spurring economic recovery and growth;
 - B. Providing the necessary training and resources, based on White House and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention best practices, to position Texas workers and businesses to recover from and thrive after the COVID-19 disaster;
 - C. Re-stabilizing individuals and families who have been economically affected by the COVID-19 disaster;
 - D. Safely and responsibly revitalizing key Texas institutions, including without limitation those focused on workforce and economic development, education, health care, energy, infrastructure, and arts, culture, and entertainment;
 - E. Maximizing the use of federal funding and other available resources to recharge the Texas economy;
 - F. Restoring health care services for Texans as soon as reasonably practicable for each type of service in light of the health and safety concerns and in consultation with each applicable state regulatory agency;
 - G. Spurring the recovery and growth of small businesses in Texas;
 - H. Advancing economic growth in rural communities in Texas;
 - I. Ensuring fiscal responsibility and accountability in the coming phases of economic revitalization, including the expeditious and efficient deployment of resources provided by the federal government through stimulus programs; and
 - J. Keeping Texas the top destination for businesses looking to move or reopen.

2. Study and make recommendations, in consultation with state health officials, to safely ease restrictions on Texas businesses in the aftermath of the spread of COVID-19, including without limitation the restrictions imposed by my executive orders and those imposed by local officials; and
3. in coordination with the Office of the Governor, collaborate with key partners, including state leaders, state regulatory agencies, local governments and entities, and private-sector professionals, in studying and making recommendations of strategies and best practices for economic revitalization.

Deadlines for Recommendations – The Strike Force must provide immediate and ongoing recommendations consistent with the advisory duties, including advice regarding the safe reopening of Texas businesses in a strategic, healthy, and productive manner. This shall include recommendations about any prudent reopening measures that can be implemented between now and May 1, 2020. This advice should include the types of businesses and services to reopen, the extent to which the providers of those services may function, and any restrictions that should be placed upon those services and service providers.

Chief Operating Officer – The chief operating officer of the Strike Force will be employed by the Office of the Governor and perform all Strike Force duties as a state employee. The chief operating officer will coordinate Strike Force duties consistent with the provisions of this executive order, and act solely in an advisory capacity as it relates to Strike Force duties.

Chief Medical Advisors Working Group – The Strike Force shall include a working group consisting of chief medical advisors to advise the chief operating officer and other parts of the Strike Force concerning the health and medical evidence relevant to the Strike Force's duties. The chief medical advisors will be invited to serve by the governor. The working group and its members will assist in fulfilling the Strike Force duties, and act solely in an advisory capacity.

Working Groups – The chief operating officer may create additional working groups, consisting of state, local, and other officials providing their advice and assistance, as the chief operating officer deems appropriate. The additional working groups should address at least the following topics:

- Workforce,

- Economic Development, and International Trade;
- Education;
- Fiscal Accountability;
- Energy;
- Arts,
- Culture, and Entertainment;
- Health Care Systems;
- Infrastructure; and
- Emergency Management and Supply Chain.

The working group members will be invited to serve by the chief operating officer, and each working group will be led by one or more leaders. The working groups and their members will assist in fulfilling the Strike Force duties, and act solely in an advisory capacity.

State Officials – The Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Attorney General, and the Comptroller have agreed to serve as consulting members of the Strike Force. The governor will consult with the elected state officials as necessary and appropriate concerning advice and recommendations. The elected state officials will act solely in an advisory capacity as it relates to all Strike Force duties.

Meetings – The Strike Force may meet, by telephone or videoconference, at the call of the governor or the chief operating officer. No quorum requirements or meeting formalities shall be required for this advisory body or any of its subparts.

Vacancies and Additions – The governor may invite people to fill any vacancies that occur, may invite additional members, and may create and fill additional Strike Force positions as needed.

Administrative Support – The Office of the Governor shall provide administrative support for the Strike Force. All state agencies are directed to cooperate with and assist the Strike Force in the performance of its duties.

Other Provisions – Any state or local government employees serving on the Strike Force do so in addition to the regular duties of their respective positions. Members of the Strike Force, other than the chief operating officer and any other employees within the Office of the Governor assigned to support the chief operating officer or the Strike Force, shall serve without salary or compensatory

per diem. All Strike Force members who are providing their advice and assistance on a volunteer basis are doing so at the request and invitation of the governor and the Office of the Governor. All Strike Force members shall act solely in an advisory capacity. The criminal penalty provisions set forth in any emergency management plan under Section 418.173 of the Texas Government Code do not apply to this executive order.

Effective Date – The executive order takes effect on April 27, 2020 and remains in effect and in full force until modified, amended, rescinded, or superseded by the governor.

The Strike Force's website: <https://gov.texas.gov/organization/opentexas>

The executive order establishing the Strike Force (GA-17):

https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA-17_Open_Texas_Strike_Force_COVID-19_IMAGE_04-17-2020.pdf

Specifics From the Executive Order on Reopened Services, Senior Living Facilities and Schools:

Minimize In-Person Contact – In accordance with guidance from DSHS Commissioner Dr. Hellerstedt, and to achieve the goals established by the President to reduce the spread of COVID-19, every person in Texas shall, except where necessary to provide or obtain essential services or reopened services, minimize social gatherings and minimize in-person contact with people who are not in the same household.

Essential Services – “Essential services” shall consist of everything listed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in its Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce, Version 2.0 or any subsequent version, plus religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship. Other essential services may be added to the list with the approval of the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM). TDEM shall maintain an online list of essential services, as specified in this executive order and any approved additions. Requests for additions should be directed to TDEM at EssentialServices@tdem.texas.gov or by visiting the EDEM website (link below).

Reopened Services – “Reopened services” shall consist of: Starting at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, April 24, 2020, retail services that are not “essential services,” but that may be provided through pickup,

delivery by mail, or delivery to the customer's doorstep in strict compliance with the terms required by DSHS.

Such additional services as may be enumerated by future executive orders or proclamations by the governor. In providing or obtaining essential services or reopened services, people and businesses should follow the Guidelines from the President and the CDC by:

- practicing good hygiene, environmental cleanliness, and sanitation,
- implementing social distancing, and working from home if possible.
- In particular, all such services should be provided through remote telework from home unless they cannot be provided through remote telework.
- Religious services should be conducted in accordance with the Guidelines for Houses of Worship During the COVID-19 Crisis, as promulgated by the attorney general and governor.
- In accordance with the Guidelines from the President and the CDC, people shall avoid eating or drinking at bars, restaurants, and food courts, or visiting gyms, massage establishments, tattoo studios, piercing studios, or cosmetology salons; provided, however, that the use of drive-thru, pickup, or delivery options for food and drinks is allowed and highly encouraged throughout the limited duration of this executive order.

This executive order does not prohibit people from accessing essential or reopened services or engaging in essential daily activities, such as going to the grocery store or gas station, providing or obtaining other essential or reopened services, visiting parks, hunting or fishing, or engaging in physical activity like jogging or bicycling, so long as the necessary precautions are maintained to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and to minimize in-person contact with people who are not in the same household.

Nursing Homes and Senior Living Facilities – In accordance with the Guidelines from the President and the CDC, people shall not visit nursing homes, state supported living centers, assisted living facilities, or long-term care facilities unless to provide critical assistance as determined through guidance from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). Nursing homes, state supported living centers, assisted living facilities, and long-term care facilities should follow infection control policies and practices set forth by the HHSC, including minimizing the movement

of staff between facilities whenever possible.

Closing of Schools for Remainder of the Semester – In accordance with the Guidelines from the President and the CDC, schools shall remain temporarily closed to in-person classroom attendance by students and shall not recommence before the end of the 2019–2020 school year. Public education teachers and staff are encouraged to continue to work remotely from home if possible, but may return to schools to conduct remote video instruction, as well as perform administrative duties, under the strict terms required by the Texas Education Agency. Private schools and institutions of higher education should establish similar terms to allow teachers and staff to return to schools to conduct remote video instruction and perform administrative duties when it is not possible to do so remotely from home.

Pre-Emption of Local Orders – This executive order shall supersede any conflicting order issued by local officials in response to the COVID-19 disaster, but only to the extent that such a local order restricts essential services or reopened services allowed by this executive order or allows gatherings prohibited by this executive order.

Effective Date – It takes effect on a statewide basis effective April 17, 2020 and continuing through April 30, 2020, subject to extension based on the status of COVID-19 in Texas and the recommendations of the CDC and the White House Coronavirus Task Force.

Essential Services at TDEM can be found:

www.tdem.texas.gov/essentialservices

Here is a link to the Executive Order on Reopened Services, Senior Living Facilities and Schools (GA-16):

https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA-16_Opening_Texas_COVID-19_FINAL_04-17-2020.pdf

Specifics from the Executive Order on Health Care:

Surgeries and Medical Procedures – All licensed health care professionals and all licensed health care facilities shall postpone all surgeries and procedures that are not medically necessary to

diagnose or correct a serious medical condition of, or to preserve the life of, a patient who without timely performance of the surgery or procedure would be at risk for serious adverse medical consequences or death, as determined by the patient's physician; provided, however, that this prohibition shall not apply to either of the following:

- any procedure that, if performed in accordance with the commonly accepted standard of clinical practice, would not deplete the hospital capacity or the personal protective equipment needed to cope with the COVID-19 disaster; or
- any surgery or procedure performed in a licensed health care facility that has certified in writing to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission both:
 1. that it will reserve at least 25% of its hospital capacity for treatment of COVID-19 patients, accounting for the range of clinical severity of COVID-19 patients; and
 2. that it will not request any personal protective equipment from any public source, whether federal, state, or local, for the duration of the COVID-19 disaster.

Effective Dates – Beginning at 11:59 p.m. on April 21, 2020, and continuing until 11:59 p.m. on May 8, 2020, unless it is modified, amended, rescinded, or superseded by the governor.

Here is a link to the Executive Order on Health Care (GA-15):

https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA-15_hospital_capacity_COVID-19_TRANS_04-17-2020.pdf

TEA Statement on Governor Abbott's Newest Executive Order on Schools – "With Governor Greg Abbott's issuance of a new Executive Order today closing schools statewide for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year. Texas continues to prioritize the health and safety of our state's millions of public school and private school students, teachers, staff, and administrators. While a difficult decision to make, it is the right one for our families and communities – and the only one that makes sense for Texas at this time. TEA fully supports the governor's actions and continues to work closely with districts across the state to ensure students are getting what they need: meals, dedicated

efforts to keep kids feeling safe and connected during these times, and support so students can continue to learn and grow academically. We remain firmly committed to the health and safety of our students, families, and communities. Together we will get through this. And when the time is right, we will be able to return to our daily routines on school campuses across Texas.”

TEA Orders At-Home Instruction for Remainder of Semester – On April 17th, following Governor Abbott’s Executive Order on schools, TEA issued a statement saying, “It is important to note that while the governor’s decision continues the closure of school buildings for in-person classroom attendance for the duration of the 2019–20 school year, it in no way ends at-home instructional support for Texas’ millions of students.” Commissioner Morath said, “School districts across Texas have worked diligently to make the transition to virtual learning. Students must continue to receive daily academic support from their teachers and schools for the remainder of the 2019–20 school year. Thank you to our superintendents, principals, and teachers for their leadership in ensuring that academic progress continues during this unprecedented public health crisis. We fully support your efforts.”

TEA Guidance on Entering Schools During Closure – On April 17th, Texas Education Agency issued the following parameters for schools to apply when allowing staff into school facilities. These parameters will remain in effect for the duration of the governor’s order closing schools for the remainder of the semester.

- School classrooms are closed for the remainder of the 2019–2020 school year.
- Teachers may go into the classroom for video instruction, to perform administrative duties, and/or to clean out their classrooms.
- Where possible, teachers and staff should continue to work remotely, and if they can’t do so, they should follow the parameters outlined in this guidance.
- Teacher and staff time at schools should be staggered at each individual campus to enable social distancing to be implemented effectively.
- Teachers and staff must be in the classrooms or offices by themselves and must maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet from one another.

- Teachers and staff should wear masks if available, or face coverings if masks are not available.
- Teachers and staff must screen themselves before coming into school for: new or worsening cough; shortness of breath; sore throat; loss of taste or smell; feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit; or known close contact with a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19.
- Schools must clean and sanitize bathrooms, doorknobs, and other commonly touched surfaces.

DSHS Guidance for Employers, Employees and Customers of Reopened Retail Services – On April 17th, Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) issued COVID-19: Guidance for Employers, Employees, and Customers of Reopened Retail Services. The guidance is based on the best information currently available and will be updated when appropriate. This guidance is intended for employers, employees, and customers of retail businesses reopening under the Governor’s Executive Order issued on April 17, 2020. The guidance does not apply to businesses considered essential. It is based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

I am an Employee of a retail business re-opening. What should I do to keep myself and our customers safe?

- All employees must be trained on environmental cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.
- All employees must be screened before coming into the business for new or worsening cough; shortness of breath; sore throat; loss of taste or smell; feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit; or known close contact with a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19. Any employee who meets any of these criteria should be sent home.
- Upon entering the business, employees must wash or sanitize hands.
- All employees must wear face coverings.

- Employees must maintain at least 6 feet separation from one another.

I am a Customer. How do I purchase and obtain goods from a retail store that has just re-opened?

- Customers may purchase items from a retail location for pickup, delivery by mail, or delivery to the customer's doorstep, but may not enter the premises.

Updates are on the DSHS website: www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus

COVID-19 Utility Relief Fund – On April 17th, the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) approved a number of refinements to the agency's efforts to mitigate the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income Texans. In a unanimous vote, the commissioners approved changes to their orders from March 26th, including:

- A May 15, 2020 end date on suspensions for disconnections for customers of vertically-integrated utilities outside of areas of the state open to competition (namely Entergy, El Paso Electric, SPS and SWEPCO) and water and sewer utilities regulated by the PUC.
- A May 15, 2020 end date on waivers of late fees for residential customers of retail electric providers in areas of the state open to competition.
- A July 17, 2020 end date for enrollment in the COVID-19 Electricity Relief Program.

The commission pledged to revisit these decisions in open meetings prior to their respective deadlines. PUC Chairman DeAnn Walker said, "As the world deals with an unprecedented array of challenges, we are working closely with industry participants, consumer advocates, and other state agencies to ensure we are taking the steps necessary to assist those customers impacted the hardest by the pandemic. As we all embrace the hope of a reopened economy discussed by Governor Abbott today, we are focused on an approach that helps the people most impacted by the situation while maintaining a robust competitive electric market. Regulatory certainty is a critical component of our state's economic vitality, allowing business owners to forecast their challenges and adopt strategies for survival. We will continue to monitor the situation and its impact on all

those it affects in the utility realm to ensure we are doing what we can to get through this together.”

Principles on Acceptance of Credit – On April 18th, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board endorsed the Statement of Principles on the Acceptance of Credit agreed to by the American Association of Community Colleges, Association of American Universities, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and American Council on Education. Higher Education Commissioner Harrison Keller encouraged all institutions of higher education across Texas to “review these principles and continue to embrace the spirit of flexibility and commitment to student success needed during these extraordinary and unprecedented times.” The following is the Statement of Principles on the Acceptance of Credit During the Current Emergency:

1. Institutional policies and the evaluation of grades and credit should recognize the extraordinary burden placed on students during this time. Even in the best of cases, student dislocation and the need to change the very basic patterns of life impose challenges on our students that may have an impact their performance.
2. Institutional policies and practices should recognize that traditional inequities are exacerbated in the current crisis and that “equal” treatment of students’ transcripts is unlikely to result in “equitable” outcomes.
3. Institutional policies and practices should, therefore, be as holistic as possible, taking into account the range of situational and behavioral circumstances in which our students find themselves.
4. Institutional policies should, wherever practicable, provide flexibility in the timely reporting of grades and other markers of achievement, understanding that the dislocations mentioned above are also present for faculty, staff, and others.
5. Institutional policies should aim for complete transparency. The circumstances under which credits and or grades are accepted and not accepted should be clear and publicly stated in accessible, specific, and easy to understand terms. The rationale for these policies should be made equally clear and transparent.

6. This transparency should extend inside as well as outside the institution. Institutional policies that respond to this unprecedented and unique situation should be broadly communicated and disseminated within institutions. At a time when telework has become the norm, it is in the collective best interest of higher education that each student-facing employee understands new and existing policies.
7. Institutional decision-making regarding individual students should be swift and definitive. Students and their families need clear, timely information on which to make decisions.
8. We ask that institutions clarify their policies as soon as possible. Students and families are making decisions now about, for example, whether to take courses pass/fail, whether to enroll in non-traditional coursework to fill gaps in their curricula, and whether to accept partial credit for coursework already underway. Uncertainty can only exacerbate the stress students are experiencing and could, in the end, harm students who make decisions today that might not serve them tomorrow.

Texas National Guard to Provide Mobile Testing – On April 20th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that the Texas National Guard will be mobilizing more than 1,200 personnel as part of COVID-19 mobile testing teams (MTT). The 45 member teams will be mobilized in various parts of the state providing greater access to medical testing. The areas for these MTTs will be identified by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) with the first two of the 25 teams deployed to Fredericksburg and Floresville, Texas. The remaining 23 teams will be deployed to additional locations based on assessments made by DSHS. Governor Abbott said, "The State of Texas continues to expand our COVID-19 testing capacities and ensure that communities across the Lone Star State have access to the resources they need. I am grateful for the dedication of our Guardsmen as they continue to serve their fellow Texans throughout the COVID-19 response." The teams will have 11 medical professionals and support staff, as well as 34 soldiers. Currently, the Texas National Guard has the capacity to test 150 people per day at each mobile testing team location. The Texas Military Department was activated by Governor Abbott in March to assist communities across Texas in the COVID-19 response. Currently, over 2,500 Guardsmen are serving in various capacities in response to this activation. In working with local communities they have helped manufacture over four million

pieces of personal protective equipment, conducted over 9,000 COVID-19 tests, and helped distribute food and supplies with local food banks to thousands of Texans each day. The MTTs are working in collaboration with the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) and DSHS.

TEKS-Aligned Educational Programming – On April 20th, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Texas PBS stations announced a joint initiative to air TEKS-aligned educational programming each week in 10 different PBS viewing areas during the COVID-19 pandemic. Officially known as the At-Home Learning Initiative, the collaboration strengthens TEA's efforts in assisting school districts and public charter schools with establishing instructional continuity and at-home learning during this unprecedented public health crisis. The partnership calls for all 10 of Texas's PBS affiliates to preempt regularly scheduled weekday programming with grade-level-appropriate programming featuring shows such as Peg+Cat, NOVA, and American Experience. Affiliates will air educational programming each weekday, with the slate of programming divided into three distinct age groups: Pre-K through 3rd grade, 5th through 8th grade, and high school. This free programming will reach 96 percent of Texas's student-age population and each age group will receive targeted programming at specific times throughout the school day. Education Commissioner Mike Morath said, "This joint initiative between TEA and PBS stands to benefit all students as they work each day to navigate uncharted waters and continue to do their best to learn and grow as students and individuals. While we're living through uncertain times, we are thankful to have PBS commit itself in such a meaningful way to serve the needs of communities across our state. We are all in this together, and our friends at PBS understand and exemplify that." Weekday education programming commenced statewide April 20.

Reference: www.PBSlearningmedia.org

Announcement of Job Openings and Employment Resources – On April 21st, Governor Greg Abbott provided an update on job openings in the Lone Star State and outlined resources for Texans seeking employment due to the economic effects of COVID-19. The Governor also announced that nearly 500,000 job openings are currently listed on WorkInTexas.com, an online job matching and

workforce solution system developed by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). The system provides access to a complete set of employment tools in one website where job seekers can browse job postings, find education and training, and complete resumes and state applications. The governor presented different industries and certain employers that are hiring in each region of Texas and announced that many companies – including H-E-B, Amazon, and Randalls – are hiring statewide. Governor Abbott also discussed additional resources available through the 28 [local workforce development boards](#) located throughout the state of Texas. The local workforce solutions offices are also available to employers of all sizes who can receive assistance in recruiting, identifying, and hiring qualified individuals. These services are available to both employers and job seekers at no cost. Job seekers can visit Texas Economic Development and Tourism's [Texas Jobs](#) page for links to all 28 local workforce development boards. The webpage also contains additional COVID-19 resources for employers and job seekers alike. Governor Abbott said, "As we continue to slow the spread of COVID-19, we are also working to alleviate the severe economic devastation that has impacted so many Texans. People are ready to get to work and earn a paycheck again, and the State of Texas is committed to connecting Texans with the many job opportunities that exist throughout the state. I thank the Texas Workforce Commission, our local workforce organizations, and businesses across the state who are working tirelessly to connect Texans with job openings during these challenging times."

Here is a link to the job listing: <https://www.workintexas.com/vosnet/Default.aspx>

Here is a link to the local workforce boards: <https://www.twc.texas.gov/directory-workforce-solutions-offices-services>

Here is a link to the Texas Economic Development and Tourism office's Texas Jobs page: <https://gov.texas.gov/business/page/jobs>

Here is a link to the governor's powerpoint presentation: [https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/Jobs_Presentation_4.21.20_\(2\)_.pdf](https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/Jobs_Presentation_4.21.20_(2)_.pdf)

Advance Practice Registered Nurses – On April 22nd, Governor Greg Abbott waived certain testing requirements for Advance Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) as part of the state's response to COVID-19. As a result of the waiver, new APRN graduates who have applied for APRN licensure with the Board of Nursing and have met all licensure requirements except national certification may begin practicing under direct physician supervision. The graduate approval does not include prescriptive authority. Governor Abbott said, "The State of Texas is committed to removing barriers that could potentially prevent frontline health care workers like APRNs from serving their fellow Texans throughout the COVID-19 response. This temporary waiver will ensure more APRNs are available to serve in our communities. We are grateful for our frontline health care professionals and remain unwavering in our support of their crucial work."

Texas College Work-Study Program – On April 22nd, Governor Greg Abbott temporarily waived certain restrictions to allow Texas higher education institutions to transfer all unexpended student financial aid funds from the Texas College Work-Study (TCWS) program to other financial aid programs that do not have a work-study requirement to ensure students will continue receiving financial assistance. Those programs include the TEXAS Grant program, the Texas Educational Opportunity Grant program, and the Tuition Equalization Grant program. With physical campuses closed or under limited operation, the waiver will help students who normally rely on the TCWS program to receive other forms of financial assistance they may need to continue their education. Governor Abbott said, "With reduced campus operations due to COVID-19, many Texas students are unable to participate in the work-study programs they depend on to pay their tuition and other expenses. This waiver allows colleges and universities to put TCWS funds toward other forms of assistance, providing a financial lifeline to students in need."

Support for Area Agencies on Aging – On April 23rd, Governor Greg Abbott announced that Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) will receive nearly \$54 million in federal funds to support older Texans and people with disabilities during the COVID-19 response. The funding will be used to support programs and services administered by the state's 28 Area Agencies on Aging

such as home delivered meals, help with household chores, assistance with groceries, and respite care or other services for family caregivers. Governor Abbott said, "Older Texans and Texans with disabilities face a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and they need continued support during these trying times. These federal funds will help provide higher risk Texans with additional support and resources to meet their everyday needs while allowing them to stay at home and stay safe. I thank the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for providing Texas with this crucial financial support so that we can continue to serve our fellow Texans." The funding will also be used to support the Long-Term Care Ombudsman, which provides advocacy and complaint resolution services on behalf of residents in long-term care facilities. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living awarded Texas nearly \$54 million in funds through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic (CARES) Act recently signed into law by President Trump.

Here is a link to information on the state's Area Agencies on Aging: <https://hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/long-term-care-providers/area-agencies-aging-aaa>

Updated Guidance for Houses of Worship – On April 22nd, Attorney General Ken Paxton issued updated guidelines for Houses of Worship. He said, "Government and faith communities throughout Texas need to work together to love our neighbors and slow the spread of Coronavirus. This updated joint guidance from the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Governor is the official guidance regarding the effect of Executive Order GA 16 on religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship. The government must give special consideration to houses of worship when issuing orders related to the COVID-19 crisis. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution and Article I of the Texas Constitution protect the right of Texans to worship and freely exercise their religion according to the dictates of their own consciences. In addition, the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act ("RFRA") provides additional protections to faith communities, and government must ensure that it complies with RFRA when it acts, even during a disaster. Thus, when state or local governments issue orders prohibiting people from providing or obtaining certain services, they must ensure that these orders do not violate these

constitutional and statutory rights. Houses of worship provide 'essential services.' To the extent there is conflict between the Governor's Executive Order GA 16 and local orders, GA 16 controls. Local governments may not order houses of worship to close. Houses of worship should conduct as many activities as possible remotely, and should follow federal guidelines when providing services in person. Services that houses of worship cannot conduct remotely should be conducted in accordance with guidance from the White House and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC"). For example:

- Practice social distancing by maintaining appropriate distance between people;
- Maintain good hygiene by washing your hands frequently, using hand sanitizer, using your elbow to cover coughs, and not touching your face;
- Implement environmental cleanliness and sanitization practices; and
- Clean and disinfect work areas frequently.

Houses of worship, like providers of other essential services, are to follow additional guidance from the White House and CDC whenever possible. Houses of worship should help slow the spread of the virus. Texas is a big state and the transmission rate of COVID-19 varies in different communities. Houses of worship play an important role in this effort, and can use their creativity to help slow the spread of the virus. For example, a church could hold 'drive-in' style services. Or because Executive Order GA 16 permits drive-thrus to provide goods and services, a house of worship may, according to their faith practices, provide communion or a blessing through a similar drive-up service. When conducting services, houses of worship may consider implementing the following practices:

- Encourage all attendees who are 65 and above to stay home and watch the services online, or provide a 'senior service' exclusively for attendees 65 and above to attend in person.
- Ask all attendees who have an underlying at-risk health condition to stay home and watch the services online.
- Equip ushers and greeters with gloves and masks.
- Consider keeping child care closed, unless the house of worship can comply with CDC guidelines for child care facilities.

- Ensure all attendees sanitize their hands and put on a mask before entering the building.
- Ensure attendees sit with their family unit, use social distancing between each unit, and, if necessary, add more service times to facilitate distancing.
- Clergy should dismiss attendees by family unit, maintaining social distancing.
- Staff should sanitize seats and frequently touched surfaces between services.
- Consider refraining from passing collection plates and instead provide a central collection box in the building or encourage online giving.
- Consider how the sacraments can be administered without attendees having to touch the same surfaces and objects.

These guidelines do not violate the religious liberty of houses of worship. Under the extraordinary circumstances in which we temporarily live, these guidelines provide that houses of worship may remain open. The guidelines make only recommendations to houses of worship. They do not violate the religious liberty of houses of worship because the government has a compelling interest in recommending this guidance (stopping contagion) and the guidance is the least restrictive means of serving that compelling interest (allowing houses of worship to stay open for ministry, but suggesting ways that help slow the spread of COVID-19)."

Training for Local Officials on Administration of Federal Assistance – On April 23rd. Governor Greg Abbott announced that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service will provide a series of free online trainings to help local officials understand, acquire, and administer federal assistance available to the state of Texas and municipalities through the Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act and recently passed Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. AgriLife Extension will offer these trainings online to help local leaders navigate the federal funding process, and in turn, respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic as quickly and effectively as possible. Governor Abbott said, "Our local officials have done a tremendous job leading their communities throughout the COVID-19 response, and the state of Texas will continue to work alongside them and provide these leaders with the resources and support they need during this challenging time. These online trainings will assist local leaders in efficiently navigating the federal funding process and ensure that our communities receive the financial support that they need in a

timely manner." Texas A&M System Chancellor John Sharp added, "One thing we learned during our response to Hurricane Harvey was that federal funding is invaluable in the recovery process. However, it comes with all sorts of strings and requirements that can be confusing to those who don't know the rules. AgriLife Extension agents are well-positioned to guide county judges, mayors and other local officials through the federal funding maze." The first online training, [Federal Relief: An overview for local governments](#), is available now. Additional trainings will dive into the specifics of individual programs based on the needs of state and local officials. Extension agents will be available to assist local leaders with questions throughout the training and subsequent federal funding application process. The CARES Act authorizes approximately \$2 trillion in federal stimulus funds to combat the crisis and stabilize the economy, including \$150 billion available directly to states, territories and tribal governments. This includes a number of programs to address the issues that states and local governments are facing as they work to protect their communities during this challenging time.

Tenant-Based Rental Assistant – On April 24th, Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) announced that Texas will provide HOME Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) to Texans experiencing housing challenges due to COVID-19. These TBRA funds have been made possible through a series of waivers recently authorized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). These waivers give Texas the flexibility needed to provide assistance to Texans in need. Governor Abbott and TDHCA initially requested the waiver on April 1st. The HUD waivers will allow a portion of TDHCA funds to be used to help families and individuals with up to 100 percent of the cost of rent, security deposit payments and utility bills for tenants affected by loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Up to \$11.3 million will be available to current TBRA administrators in coming weeks who will then distribute the aid to qualifying Texans. Governor Abbott said, "Thanks to these waivers from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the State of Texas will be able to provide much-needed financial relief to Texans struggling with housing due to challenges posed by COVID-19. We are committed to supporting Texans facing severe economic hardship brought on by this pandemic, and the state will continue to work closely with our federal partners to give Texans the resources and assistance

they need."

Here is a link to the [Help for Texans](#) to search for rental assistance providers in their area:

<https://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/texans.htm>

COVID-19 Test Collection Map – On April 24th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) have launched an online COVID-19 test collection map to help Texans locate test collection sites within their community. The interactive map displays detailed information on public and private mobile, walk-in, and drive-thru test collection sites around the state. A search feature allows Texans to locate test collection sites near them and includes important details such as contact information and hours of operation for each location. Governor Abbott said, "This mapping tool will help Texans locate test collection sites in their communities and it is part of our commitment to expanding COVID-19 testing throughout Texas. By using this map, Texans will have access to pertinent information on a variety of test collection options that will help fulfill testing needs in communities across the Lone Star State." Over 340 test collection sites are currently listed on the map and additional locations will be added as more sites are identified across the state. Texans can submit updated information about a test collection site or suggest additional sites by filling out an online form.

Here is a link to the map:

<https://txdps.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8bf7c6a436a64bfe9a5ce25be580e4ff>

Senate Working Groups on the COVID-19 Pandemic – On April 24th, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick announced that he has established six Senate working groups to discuss challenges the state will face in the next legislative session as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lt. Governor Patrick said, "COVID-19 has changed our lives in Texas and in America in ways that will continue to impact us going forward as we re-open our state. I have asked every senator to work together in small

discussion groups – using a think tank model – to discuss the challenges Texas will face in the next legislative session as a result of the pandemic. The Texas Senate is committed to making sure our state continues to lead, not only in combating this awful disease but also in making sure our economy can move forward. As with all Senate work groups, the purpose of these work groups is to discuss challenges and options, not to craft legislation. Every senator is participating, and I am in regular contact with them on these discussions and I will continue to discuss these issues with them as we move forward.” The work groups are:

Economic Impact & Budgeting:

- Jane Nelson (R–Flower Mound)
- Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa (D–McAllen)
- Robert Nichols (R–Jacksonville)
- John Whitmire (D–Houston)
- Joan Huffman (R–Houston)
- Brian Birdwell (R–Granbury)
- Paul Bettencourt (R–Houston)
- Charles Schwertner (R–Georgetown)

Senate Pandemic Preparedness:

- Bryan Hughes (R–Mineola)
- John Whitmire (D–Houston)
- Pat Fallon (R–Prosper)
- Joan Huffman (R–Houston)
- Kelly Hancock (R–North Richland Hills)
- Paul Bettencourt (R–Houston)
- Carol Alvarado (D–Houston)

Public Schools & Higher Education:

- Larry Taylor (R–Friendswood)

- Royce West (D–Dallas)
- Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D–Brownsville)
- Brandon Creighton (R–Conroe)
- Angela Paxton (R–McKinney)
- Beverly Powell (D–Burleson)

Health, Hospitals & COVID–19 Issues:

- Lois Kolkhorst (R–Brenham)
- Dawn Buckingham (R–Lakeway)
- Donna Campbell (R–New Braunfels)
- Charles Schwertner (R–Georgetown)
- Borris Miles (D–Houston)

Jobs & Re–Opening the Economy:

- Kelly Hancock (R–North Richland Hills)
- Robert Nichols (R–Jacksonville)
- Nathan Johnson (D–Dallas)
- Pat Fallon (R–Prosper)
- Brandon Creighton (R–Conroe)
- Judith Zaffirini (D–Laredo)
- Charles Perry (R–Lubbock)

Food Supply Chain, Food Banks & Agriculture:

- Charles Perry (R–Lubbock)
- Kel Seliger (R–Amarillo)
- Jose Menendez (D–San Antonio)
- Bob Hall (R–Edgewood)
- Peter Flores (R–Pleasanton)

- Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D-Brownsville)

Comptroller Update on Sales Tax Remittance – On April 24th, Comptroller Glenn Hegar issued a statement about sales tax remittance targeted to businesses that collect and remit sales taxes and clarified that those taxes are still subject to the usual due dates. He said, “We’re thankful to those businesses that have and continue to remit state and local sales taxes they collected from customers during the time periods prior to April 1, 2020. We understand that virtually all of our taxpayers are doing their best to remain in compliance and be responsible in submitting the taxes they collected from their customers prior to the imposition of the changes related to addressing the impact of the COVID-19 virus. Our agency is here to offer assistance to those businesses that are struggling to pay the full amount of sales taxes they collected from their customers prior to April 1, 2020, as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. For businesses that find themselves in this situation, our agency is offering assistance in the form of short-term payment agreements and, in most instances, waivers of penalties and interest. We ask that you file the sales tax returns that were due on April 20, 2020, make a good faith partial payment and contact our **Enforcement Hotline at 800-252-8880** to learn about your options for remaining in compliance and avoiding interest and late fees on taxes due. We understand the closures and/or reduced ability to operate was unexpected and sudden, impacting taxpayers’ business finances and operations. But it is important to remind all taxpayers that state and local sales taxes collected from their customers are trust fund revenues and, by law, are not intended to be used by businesses as operating funds. Please keep in mind that the sales taxes that taxpayers are continuing to collect from consumers in their current ongoing limited operations after April 1, 2020, will be due on the applicable future due dates with an expectation of full payment of the collected taxes. We strongly encourage you to use our online tools and other resources for tax services.”

House Freedom Caucus Letter to the Governor – On April 24th, the House Freedom Caucus sent a letter to Governor Abbott asking him to open the Texas Economy. The letter said, “On behalf of our constituents, we urge you to fully reopen the Texas economy. You have had to make many hard decisions – all of them made based on your love for our great state and keeping its people safe. But

now, with the Texas Workforce Commission reporting that over 1.7 million Texans have filed for unemployment relating to COVID-19 job loss, oil prices falling to devastating lows, calls to suicide and substance abuse hotlines on the rise, and the overall mental health of Texans in increasing jeopardy, our constituents demand that the economy be opened back up today. A substantial percentage of the Texas working-age population is now out of work, and the longer we wait to reopen, the longer it will take for us to recover. Texans across the state are voluntarily practicing social distancing. Using proper care and common sense, we can begin to get back to our normal lives. We have written some of our thoughts below on potentially effective ways to open the state while remaining sensitive to the fact that many are still vulnerable:

General Guidelines:

- Vulnerable Texans should continue to voluntarily quarantine
- Those testing positive for COVID-19 should still be subject to a 2-week quarantine
- The guidelines you announced should be a “ceiling” rather than a “floor” – that is, local governments should have the freedom to relax state mandates should they see it fit to do so, but they may not impose stricter measures than your Executive Order calls for. Only in the most severe cases should exceptions be made, and only then on an individual basis.
- Remove the distinction between “essential” and “non-essential” businesses – all jobs are essential

Long-Term Care Facilities: According to HHSC, over 40 percent of the COVID-related deaths in Texas come from cases in long-term care facilities. The figure is likely higher than this as it does not factor in the number of deaths that have occurred in independent senior living communities not reporting to HHSC. With so many of these severe cases occurring in these communities, we should:

- Isolate and fortify these facilities – both public and private – to the greatest extent possible
- Impose the most stringent testing and precautionary measures on all who enter or leave these facilities to decrease community spread and mitigate the risk to vulnerable

Texas Retail Establishments: Retail business owners know full well that reopening without proper precautions will likely drive customers away. Small businesses across the state have expressed readiness to implement the following measures necessary to keep Texans safe:

- Sending employees home who display symptoms of COVID-19
- Limiting the number of people allowed into the businesses at any time
- Increasing the frequency and efficacy of sanitization measures
- Enforcing 6-foot social distancing spacing measures, such as marking floors for customers to use as a guide

Restaurants: Restaurants may also reopen using proper social distancing and heightened hygiene requirements. We are not alone in this sentiment – as you know, the Texas Restaurant Association presented this week their “Texas Restaurant Promise” to you, outlining safe ways they can immediately reopen. Restaurants can adopt the same measures outlined above for retail establishments, as well as:

- Remove commonly-shared items from tables (such as salt shakers, ketchup containers, etc.)
- Restricting table use to a limited number of people
- Sanitizing chairs and tables after each use
- Providing hand sanitizer at each table
- Providing disposable utensils and menus to be discarded after use
- Eliminating cash transactions and encouraging touchless pay options

Taxes & Regulations: Your waiving of many of the regulations that stood in the way of effective COVID19 mitigation is something of which all Texans were grateful. Other states that did not implement such waivers are not faring as well as Texas. Texas should:

- Continue to waive these unneeded regulations until the Legislature has an opportunity to debate whether they should be re-implemented (thus, they should be suspended until the Legislature either successfully or unsuccessfully passes these measures – through the end of session, or earlier should these items be recommended by you as emergency items)

- Implement a two-week long sales tax holiday to help jumpstart the economy

Conclusion – Governor Abbott, these are but a few recommendations we can implement to open up Texas's economy today, and we make these recommendations in earnest. Too many jobs have been lost; too many sit at home as their livelihoods wither away, uncertain if they'll be able to pay their mortgage or buy groceries next week. We must rebuild this economy by allowing those who built it in the first place to reopen."

Phase One to Open Texas – On April 27th, Governor Greg Abbott announced the first phase of the State of Texas' ongoing plan to safely and strategically open Texas while minimizing the spread of COVID-19. Under Phase I, certain services and activities are allowed to open with limited occupancy, and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is issuing minimum standard health protocols for all businesses and individuals to follow. The governor also outlined special guidance for Texans over 65 and detailed a comprehensive mitigation plan for nursing homes in Texas. He also announced a statewide testing and tracing program developed by DSHS that will help public health officials quickly identify and test Texans who contract COVID-19 and mitigate further spread of the virus.

Texans Helping Texans: Report to Open Texas – The Governor's announcement was accompanied by [Texans Helping Texans: The Governor's Report to Open Texas](#). The detailed report, available on the strike force website, helps Texans understand phase one by outlining the new protocols, guidance, and recommendations. The report also includes a series of Open Texas Checklists that outline DSHS' minimum standard health protocols for all Texans. Governor Abbott said, "This strategic approach to opening the state of Texas prioritizes the health and safety of our communities and follows the guidelines laid out by our team of medical experts. Now more than ever, Texans must remain committed to safe distancing practices that reduce the spread of COVID-19, and we must continue to rely on doctors and data to provide us with the safest strategies to restore Texans' livelihoods. We must also focus on protecting the most vulnerable Texans from exposure to COVID-19. If we remain focused on protecting the lives of our fellow Texans, we can continue to open the Lone Star State."

Retail, Restaurants, Movie Theaters and Malls – Executive Order GA-18 allows all retail stores,

restaurants, movie theaters, and malls to reopen on Friday, May 1st. These services must limit their capacity to 25% of their listed occupancy. Within shopping malls, the food-court dining areas, play areas, and interactive displays and settings must remain closed.

Museums and Libraries – All museums and libraries may open under the same 25% occupancy limitation, but interactive areas of museums must remain closed. State libraries and museums will open by May 1, and local public museums and libraries may reopen only if permitted by the local government.

Single-Person Offices – Single-person offices may also reopen on May 1st.

Churches and Places of Worship – Churches and places of worship remain open.

Outdoor Sports – Outdoor sports are allowed to resume so long as no more than four participants are playing together at one time. Certain social distancing practices must also be followed.

Local Government Operations – Local government operations, including county and municipal government operations relating to permitting, recordation, and document-filing services, may reopen as determined by the local government.

Minimum Health Protocols – DSHS has recommended minimum standard health protocols for all [individuals](#), all [employers and employees](#), as well as industry-specific protocols for [retailers](#), [retail customers](#), [restaurants](#), [restaurant patrons](#), [movie theaters](#), [movie theater customers](#), [museums and libraries](#), [museum and library visitors](#), [outdoor sports participants](#), [single-person offices](#), and [low COVID-19 counties](#). These protocols are outlined in the Open Texas Checklists within the [Governor's report](#).

Essential Services – Essential services such as farmers and ranchers, grocery and drug stores, banks, and gas stations will continue to operate.

Businesses That Must Remain Closed – Public swimming pools, bars, gyms, cosmetology salons, massage establishments, interactive amusement venues, such as bowling alleys and video arcades, and tattoo and piercing studios will remain closed through Phase I. Nursing homes, state supported living centers, assisted living facilities, and long-term care facilities must remain closed to visitors unless to provide critical assistance.

Counties With Fewer Than Five COVID-19 Cases – The Governor also established increased occupancy protocols for certain counties with five or fewer laboratory confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Those counties may, on an individualized basis, increase occupancy limits to up to 50% for restaurants, retail, shopping malls, museums and libraries, and movie theaters if they meet certain criteria. The county judge must certify and affirm to DSHS that the following standards have been investigated and confirmed to be met:

- The county had five or fewer COVID-19 laboratory confirmed cases on April 30, 2020 or, at a later date, five or fewer active COVID-19 cases as verified by DSHS.
- The county has created a list of testing opportunities in the county or the area.
- The county has been in contact with its designated regional advisory council to ensure the community is prepared for any needed health care transfers.
- The county has provided public notice to the residents of the county, including: Signs and symptoms of COVID-19; Recommended health and safety protocols in line with CDC guidance; Information regarding how residents can get tested in the area; A link to the DSHS website where residents can go to learn about community spread in nearby communities, in order to help county residents understand their risk to exposure if they travel regularly outside of the county.
- The county has contacted each of the following types of facilities located in the county to ensure they are complying with Texas Health and Human Services (HHSC) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines regarding COVID-19: Nursing homes; Assisted living facilities; Industrial, agricultural, or business facilities with a significant number of employees; and City or county jails.
- The county is equipped and prepared to protect vulnerable populations, including nursing homes and assisted living facilities.
- The county has documented procedures to be activated if a resident becomes COVID-19 positive, including procedures to take appropriate measures as necessary in line with the plan to open Texas.
- The county has contacted DSHS in order to create a plan to ensure contact tracing will occur within 48 hours of a positive test reported to DSHS.

Phase I – Phase I will begin Friday May 1 and continue until at least May 18. The Governor will continue to evaluate next steps for the state.

Mitigation Plan for Nursing Homes – The Governor’s Report to Open Texas also outlines a long-term comprehensive mitigation plan for nursing homes that includes eight recommendations that have been developed by HHSC to help mitigate the further spread of COVID-19 and decrease the risk of infection in these facilities. The recommendations include:

- Quantify the extent of infection immediately
- Establish a comprehensive mitigation plan
- Re-evaluate current COVID-19 positive facilities
- Appropriate isolation and placement of COVID-19 patients
- Implement enhanced access controls
- Enhance control of staff access
- Effective notifications
- Continue containment efforts

Testing and Contact Tracing – During the press conference, the governor also announced a new statewide testing and contact tracing program. Developed and implemented by DSHS, the program will help identify individuals who have contracted COVID-19 and those who may need to quarantine or be tested due to potential exposure. The phased implementation will allow Texans to box in the virus and slow, or even stop, further spread. Phase I of the tracing program has been completed, and Phase II begins April 27th. Phase III begins May 11th.

Easing Restrictions on Health Care Professionals and Hospital Capacity – Governor Abbott also relaxed certain restrictions related to health care professionals and issued amended requirements related to hospital capacity. This is included in Executive GA-19:

- All licensed health care professionals shall be limited in their practice by, and must comply with, any emergency rules promulgated by their respective licensing agencies dictating minimum standards for safe practice during the COVID-19 disaster.

- Every hospital licensed under Chapter 241 of the Texas Health & Safety Code shall reserve at least 15% of its hospital capacity for treatment of COVID-19 patients, accounting for the range of clinical severity of COVID-19 patients, as determined by HHSC.

Lifting of Quarantining of Individuals From Louisiana – Governor Abbott also issued Executive Order GA-20 to eliminate the mandatory 14-day quarantine period for individuals traveling from Louisiana. Under GA-20, the **mandated 14-day quarantine for travelers from the following areas remains in place**: California; Connecticut; New York; New Jersey; Washington; Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan, and Miami, Florida.

Here is a link to [Texans Helping Texans: The Governor's Report to Open Texas](#).

<https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/opentexas/OpenTexas-Report.pdf>

Here is a link to Executive Order GA-18 relating to expanded reopening of services:

https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA-18_expanded_reopening_of_services_COVID-19.pdf

Here is a link to Executive Order GA-19 relating to hospital capacity:

https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA-19_hospital_capacity_COVID-19.pdf

Here is a link to Executive Order GA-20 relating to expanding travel restrictions:

https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA-20_expanding_travel_without_restrictions_COVID-19.pdf

Texas Emergency Aid Grant Program – On April 27th, The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Greater Texas Foundation, and Trellis Foundation launched the collaborative Texas Emergency Aid Grant Program to support students across Texas public, private, and non-profit higher education institutions during the COVID-19 crisis. The goal of this public-private partnership is to raise up to \$2 million to support the state's two- and four-year institutions with block grants of \$10,000 to \$35,000, depending on the size and need of each institution and its student body.

The grants are designed to expand existing emergency aid programs offered by Texas higher education institutions and complement the federal funds provided by the recently passed CARES Act by providing resources for capacity-building support of emergency aid programs or to fill gaps through direct emergency student aid. The Coordinating Board's primary role in the COVID-19 crisis has been to act as a facilitator, partner and advocate for institutions of higher education and the students they serve. The Texas Emergency Aid Grant Program will provide assistance to many of the colleges and universities that collectively serve nearly 1.6 million students across the state. Higher Education Commissioner Harrison Keller said, "Across Texas, the financial situations of thousands of college students and their families have been severely impacted due to the COVID-19 crisis. Many students face housing and food insecurity and are at high risk of dropping out. I'm thrilled to partner with Greater Texas Foundation and Trellis Foundation to support Texas students and their institutions, to help students make ends meet and stay on track to graduate. Helping students obtain high-value credentials is critical not only for these individuals but because Texas graduates will help drive the recovery of the state economy." The Texas Higher Education Foundation will serve as the fiscal agent for the Texas Emergency Aid Grant Program, working to identify additional sources of funds that may be used as a match to private philanthropic dollars, such as the anchor funding donations by GTF and Trellis of \$500,000 and \$200,000, respectively. Individuals may also join this effort by contributing online.

Notarized Real Estate Instruments – On April 29th, Governor Greg Abbott suspended a statute concerning appearance before a notary public to acknowledge real-estate instruments such as mortgages. The suspension temporarily allows for appearance before a notary public via videoconference when executing such documents, avoiding the need for in-person contact during the COVID-19 pandemic. Governor Abbott said, "Texas is providing flexibility in the notarization process by way of this temporary suspension to ensure Texans can continue to stay home as much as possible to keep themselves and others safe. Allowing for appearance before a notary public via videoconference will aid in our continued efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and protect public health." This suspension will remain in effect until the earlier of May 30, 2020, or until the March 13, 2020 disaster declaration is lifted or expires. Documents executed while this suspension

is in effect, and in accordance with its terms, will remain valid after the termination of the suspension. Attorney General Ken Paxton issued an advisory on the conditions that will apply whenever the suspension is invoked including:

- A notary public must use two-way audio-video communication technology that allows for direct and contemporaneous interaction between a person signing a document and the notary public by sight and sound.
- A notary public must verify the identity of a signatory at the time the signature is taken by using two-way audio-video communication technology. A notary public may verify identity by:
 - personal knowledge of the signatory;
 - analysis based on the signatory's remote presentation of a government-issued identification credential, including a passport or driver's license, that contains the signature and a photograph of the signatory, and is of sufficient quality to allow for identification; or
 - an introduction of the signatory by oath of a credible witness who personally knows the signatory, and who is personally known to the notary public.
- During the two-way audio-video communication:
 - the notary public must attest to being physically located in Texas;
 - the signatory must attest to being physically located in Texas;
 - the signatory must affirmatively state what documents are being signed; and
 - the signatory's act of signing must be close enough to the camera for the notary public to observe it clearly.
- A recording of the two-way audio-video communication of the notarial act must be kept by the notary public for two years from the date of the notarial act.
- The signatory must send the original signed documents by courier, U.S. Mail, or overnight carrier directly to the notary public for the notary public to sign and to affix the official stamp or seal.

- The official date and time of the notarization must be the date and time when the notary public witnessed the signatory signing the documents during the two-way audio-video communication.
- The documents must include, whether in a notarial certificate, a jurat, or an acknowledgement, language substantially similar to the following: "This notarization involved the use of two-way audio-video communication pursuant to the suspension granted by the Office of the Governor on April 24, 2020, under section 418.016 of the Texas Government Code."

Training for Child Care Providers and Parents – On April 29th, Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service announced a series of free online trainings for child care providers and parents who are either in need of, or who will be providing care for, children of essential employees throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The first three trainings are available on Texas A&M AgriLife's [online learning platform](#). Additional free training sessions will be rolled out incrementally and will address health and safety guidelines, practices for staffing, essential materials for child care operations, developmentally appropriate activities, adult-child interactions and more. Trainings will also address topics such as emergency management planning, stress management and self-care for caregivers, planning at-home activities for children, parent-child communication, and supporting children's emotional needs. Additionally, Texas First Lady Cecilia Abbott provided an [introductory video](#) for the child care training sessions. Governor Abbott said, "These trainings provide crucial health and safety information to parents and child care providers affected by the COVID-19 response, and ensure that providers and parents alike have the tools they need to effectively care for young Texans. I am grateful for this ongoing collaboration with our public and private partners to support Texans throughout this challenging time." The online training courses were developed through a collaboration between the Governor's Texas Frontline Child Care Task Force, specialists in child and early child development, health, disaster assessment and recovery and family economics from AgriLife's Family and Community Health Unit. It also included experts from the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children, Children's Learning

Institute, Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Health and Human Services Commission and Texas Department of State Health Services. The first three trainings available now are:

- Special Considerations for Infection Control During COVID-19
- High-Quality Emergency Child Care During COVID-19
- When & How to Provide Child Care During COVID-19

Here is a link to Texas A&M AgriLife's online learning platform:

<https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/catalog?pagename=child-care-and-covid-19>

Eligibility for Unemployment Benefits – On April 30th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) issued new guidance to unemployment claimants concerning their eligibility for unemployment benefits should they choose not to return to work at this time due to COVID-19. Under this guidance, Texans can continue to receive unemployment benefits throughout the COVID-19 response if they choose not to return to work for certain reasons as specified by TWC. Governor Abbott said, "As the Lone Star State begins the process of safely and strategically opening the economy, our top priority is protecting the health and safety of all Texans – especially those who are most vulnerable to COVID-19. This flexibility in the unemployment benefit process will help ensure that Texans with certain health and safety concerns will not be penalized for choosing not to return to work." Each unemployment insurance claim is currently evaluated on an individual basis. However, because of the COVID-19 emergency, the following are reasons benefits would be granted if the individual refused suitable work.

Reason for refusal – At High Risk:

- People 65 years or older or who are at a higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19.
- Household member at high risk – People 65 years or older or are at a higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19.
- Diagnosed with COVID – The individual has tested positive for COVID-19 by a source authorized by the State of Texas and is not recovered.

- Family member with COVID – Anybody in the household has tested positive for COVID-19 by a source authorized by the State of Texas and is not recovered and 14 days have not yet passed.
- Quarantined – Individual is currently in 14-day quarantine due to close contact exposure to COVID-19.
- Child care – Child’s school or daycare closed and no alternatives are available.

Other Circumstances – Any other situation will be subject to a case-by-case review by TWC based on individual circumstances.

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