

Trafficking, teacher bills among those Abbott axed  
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Gov. Greg Abbott vetoed more than two dozen bills last week, ranging from a teacher retention advisory committee to a slew of criminal justice-related changes. He sent state lawmakers back to the drawing board on six of the rejected proposals and completely scrapped the rest.

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Abbott is calling state lawmakers back to Austin on July 21 for a special session to take up several of the vetoed measures. The big priority will be creating regulations for hemp products to replace the all-out ban that Abbott vetoed earlier last week.

Here are some notable bills that didn't make the cut:

Vetoed bills for special session

Ban on hemp-derived THC

Senate Bill 3 by Sen. Charles Perry, R-Lubbock, sought to ban consumable hemp products with THC, which have proliferated in Texas since the state legalized hemp farming in 2019. The legislation, championed by Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, would have created significant criminal penalties for possessing, manufacturing and distributing a variety of consumable products that have become ubiquitous in grocery stores, gas stations and vape shops across Texas.

Abbott vetoed the measure, saying it was "well-intentioned" but would not have survived legal challenges. In calling lawmakers back to Austin, he said he wants them to impose some regulation on the industry, which has grown dramatically in recent years with little state oversight.

Human trafficking victims

Senate Bill 1278 by Sen. Tan Parker, R-Flower Mound, was aimed at survivors of trafficking who allegedly committed crimes under coercion by their abusers.

The bill would have established an affirmative defense to prosecution for criminal offenses if survivors can demonstrate that their conduct was coerced or committed under duress or that they, or a member of their family or household, were threatened with imminent death or serious bodily injury.

Abbott said he vetoed the bill over concerns that it could be abused by criminals who falsely claim to be victims of human trafficking or compelled prostitution and say they acted under duress. The bill "severs the link between culpability and conduct" by allowing the defense to be used for any prosecution.

"We can and should recognize that victimization begets more victimization," Abbott wrote in his veto statement. "But legal responsibility cannot always be passed off to someone else. Some who started off as victims later make a choice to perpetrate similar crimes against others."

Abbott said he put the proposal on the special session agenda because he wants to work with the authors on a "more narrowly tailored piece of legislation," but he did not elaborate on what that would look like.

#### Protecting homeowners

Senate Bill 648 by Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas, strengthened the requirements to record vital documents related to the sale of real estate, such as mortgages or deeds. West told senators that when a fraudulent deed is filed, it can be used to sell a property or borrow against it, often without the knowledge of the true owners. The bill would have required additional signatures and witnesses.

Abbott vetoed the legislation and said it would require people who cannot afford an attorney or title agent to jump through additional hoops and amounted to "separate rules for the haves and have-nots." He said he wants to see a similar bill but without that differentiation and plans to bring it up in the special session.

#### Incentivizing property developers

Senate Bill 1253 by Sen. Charles Perry, R-Lubbock, was meant to encourage developers to install water and wastewater infrastructure and appliances that reduce water consumption and encourage reuse in new developments. The bill would have done so by providing credits against impact fees charged by political subdivisions to cover the costs associated with growth, but the measure would apply only in the Hays Trinity Groundwater Conservation District in Central Texas.

Though Abbott said this is an "important problem," he didn't like that the bill was amended to affect only one groundwater district.

He said he had concerns about the bill imposing on private property owners' rights, such as by subjecting them to increasing fees of another type, called production fees.

#### Judicial omnibus bill

Senate Bill 2878 by Sen. Bryan Hughes, R-Mineola, would have made many changes to the judiciary, including creating some new county courts and making changes to existing courts and district attorneys' jurisdictions. It also included some new policy proposals, such as adjusting pay for justices on the new state business courts and increasing the minimum age someone can claim an exemption from grand jury service from 70 to 75 years of age.

Abbott said the bill, presented as "routine" and "noncontroversial," contains policy proposals that "failed to receive adequate consideration during the legislative session." He named as an example a provision that would allow unlimited automatic expunctions for completing any pretrial intervention program.

"While most of this bill should become law, parts of it should be excluded," Abbott said in his veto statement.

#### Vetoed bills not coming back

##### Limiting pretrial jail time

House Bill 413 by Rep. Jolanda Jones, D-Houston, would have ensured that a person charged with a midlevel misdemeanor or higher would not be held in jail awaiting trial for longer than the maximum sentence they'd receive if convicted.

Abbott vetoed the bill, calling it a "common-sense reform" but one that "fails to specify that the method of release must provide sufficient sureties to ensure public safety and appearance at trial."

The veto came as Abbott has pushed Republican-priority legislation that made it easier for judges to deny bail and keep suspects in serious crimes behind bars. He said he is open to considering HB413's proposed reforms again in the future with revisions.

##### Studying teacher retention

House Bill 2243 by Rep. Tom Oliverson, R-Cypress, would have created a commission to study and recommend strategies to improve teacher retention statewide.

Abbott liked the idea but disagreed with how it would be implemented. He said its setup would be unconstitutional and violate the separation of powers principle by allowing members of the

Legislature on the commission to take on executive branch tasks. He said he would instead convene a task force on this subject between now and the next legislative session in 2027.

#### Summer food assistance for kids

Senate Bill 1, the state budget legislation, included roughly \$60 million that would have brought in an estimated \$450 million in federal dollars to fund a summer food aid program for low-income children.

Texas is one of a dozen states that don't participate in the federally funded Biden-era program. Roughly 3.8 million in Texas would qualify for the extra meals.

Abbott line-item vetoed the budget item, saying there's too much uncertainty at the federal level as Congress looks to slash spending.

"Once there is more clarity about the long-term ramifications for creating such a program, the Legislature can reconsider funding this program," Abbott wrote in his veto statement.

#### Child detention facilities

House Bill 3120 by Rep. Stan Kitzman, R-Pattison, would have strengthened regulations on residential child detention facilities, such as by requiring criminal background checks for employees, contractors and volunteers and implementing oversight by the state.

Abbott called the bill "well-intentioned" but disagreed with how it would be implemented: through memorandums of understanding with local governments. He said those "should be things of the past."

He pointed to a Trump administration motion last month seeking to put an end to a 1997 settlement agreement, known as the Flores Agreement, that sets standards for safety and sanitation for child detention facilities.

"Given all this change, now is not the right time to adjust the rules governing such facilities," Abbott said in his veto statement. "I look forward to revisiting this issue with a clearer picture of available options in the future.

#### Not a veto, not a signature either

#### Semiconductor plants

Senate Bill 1758 by Sen. Brian Birdwell, R-Granbury, creates a pilot program in Grayson County, north of Dallas, for a six-year study on ways to safely allow manufacturers of

semiconductor wafers (materials used to power electronics) to operate in close proximity to cement kilns and aggregate production operations.

Cement kilns are facilities used to produce cement, and aggregates are granular materials such as sand or gravel that can be combined with cement and water to create concrete.

Semiconductor wafer manufacturers have said they need varying amounts of distance to avoid problems with their operations caused by the vibrations from cement kiln and aggregate production facilities, Birdwell said in his bill layout in committee.

The study, to be conducted by the Bureau of Economic Geology of the University of Texas at Austin, seeks to determine what kind of effect the vibrations have on semiconductor operations and the amount of space needed to ensure the plants can operate successfully.

"What we are fundamentally doing, members, is we are buying time to get better data to make a decision next legislative session or beyond, rather than trying to make a decision this session without the scientific data," Birdwell said in committee.

In the study area, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality will not be allowed to issue permits for cement kilns within 10 miles of a semiconductor wafer manufacturing facility, and existing permits will be paused.

The bill also will separately exempt cement kiln and aggregate production operators from liability if vibrations from their plants cause damage to a semiconductor wafer manufacturing facility.

The rule only applies if the cement kiln and aggregate production operators began operating before the semiconductor wafer manufacturing facility did.

Abbott has a third option that is not as widely known as a veto or signature: do nothing at all. He didn't sign the bill, so it went into law effective immediately, as the bill prescribes. He also put the issue on the special session agenda.

In a non-signing statement, Abbott said he was doing it "so that legislators will better link any restraint on property with demonstrated real-world harms and avoid an unconstitutional taking."

Neither Abbott's nor Birdwell's offices responded to a request for comment.