The 86th Session of the Texas Legislature

NURSES IN NUMBERS
TNA at the Capitol

By Andrew Cates, TNA General Council and Director of Government Affairs

The 86th Session of the Texas Legislature is right around the corner—beginning January 8, 2019. With the help of over 650 members, TNA has spent the last twelve months researching, collecting data, and honing our public policy positions to get ready.

Over the summer, the TNA Board of Directors approved a slate of public policy positions brought forward by the TNA Policy Council after nine months of rigorous development by the Policy Council’s seven committees. While lengthy and difficult, the process helped TNA prioritize inclusivity and accessibility so hundreds of members could influence the policy development process. And the results speak for themselves.

The breadth of involvement and expertise from our members allowed us to take positions on more issues than ever this year. We now have positions not only on advanced practice nursing and safe staffing issues, but also end-of-life care, mental health concerns, and statewide maternal morbidity and mortality issues.

However, developing policy is just the first step. Once TNA has policies in place, the TNA Government Affairs Committee (GAC) transitions from their political role of interviewing candidates and engaging in campaigns to developing the policy positions into action items for the legislative session.

Not all of the positions are ripe for consideration at the Texas Capitol at any given time, so the members of the GAC must filter the positions by considering which ones TNA can impact through legislation.
Some of the major pieces of 2019 legislation TNA plans to advocate for:

- Protecting nurses in the workplace
- Full practice authority for APRNs
- Increased flexibility and full funding for the nursing shortage reduction program
- Expanded access and funding of the nursing faculty loan repayment program

In addition to TNA’s priorities, we also support multiple coalitions that will advance bills TNA supports, including the Coalition for Healthy Minds (addressing behavioral health issues), Texas Public Health Coalition (population health issues like immunizations and tobacco usage), and the Coalition for Health Care Access, which TNA leads (consumer and business interests on the APRN full practice issue). TNA also heads the Nursing Legislative Agenda Coalition, which targets nursing issues broadly supported by dozens of Texas nursing groups.

However, as is the case with all things political, the success or failure of many of these priorities will depend in large part on the make-up of the elected body at the capitol.

The midterm election in early November saw twice as many voters as the last two midterm elections dating back to 2010. In total, it had the second most votes cast in an election in Texas in the last decade, including in Presidential elections! The “Blue Wave” materialized only slightly in Texas, with the Democrats picking up two Congressional seats, two Texas Senate seats, and 12 Texas House seats. It sounds like a big win, but the 2010 Tea Party wave through Texas picked up 22 Texas House seats, meaning the Democrats still have a long way to go to catch up.

Currently, the new House has 83 Republicans and 67 Democrats, and the Senate has 19 Republicans and 12 Democrats. Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick will still retain a three-fifths GOP majority in the Senate to make it easy to push through GOP agenda items, but the House will be different this time. With a larger Democratic caucus and with the Freedom Caucus having a relatively larger share of the overall House GOP Caucus, members of the Texas House will have to work together this session if any bills are going to have a chance.

For nursing, this means that we need to establish broad support across both aisles and across both chambers of the Texas capitol in order to move our agenda and make our voices heard!