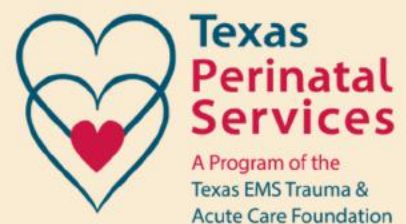


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# TETAF Advocacy Report

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87th Texas Legislative Session



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# A Message from the President/CEO and Lead Advocate

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The 87th Texas Legislature will undoubtedly be one to remember. With much uncertainty surrounding the start of the legislative session due to the COVID-19 pandemic, developing legislative priorities required flexibility and understanding that our needs may not be the top priorities of legislators. The pandemic, combined with a winter storm crisis during the legislative session, created a multitude of major issues that affected all Texans. Those needs took precedence, but there were opportunities that emerged to work for stronger trauma care, emergency health care, and perinatal care systems.

Conducting meetings with legislators and staff was also different from past sessions due to the pandemic. While they are not the same as meeting face-to-face, the virtual meetings allowed more advocates and concerned stakeholders to participate. Additionally, virtual testimony provided the opportunity for Texans to testify from areas outside of Austin without having to travel.

Through the many unique hurdles surrounding this legislative session, there were wins that included securing level funding for the 22 Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) and EMS, securing \$5 million from the General Revenue Fund for the biennium for the Texas Emergency Medical Task Force (EMTF), and ensuring RAC representation on the new PPE (personal protective equipment) Advisory Committee.

The work will continue in Fall 2021 as a special session, possibly more, will be held. As discussions surrounding federal funds take place, TETAF will look for all opportunities to secure funding for trauma and emergency health care.

It is an honor every day to serve as the voice for trauma, emergency, and perinatal care at the Capitol. I am humbled by the work all of you do to ensure our health care system and emergency response is world class. Thank you to everyone who had a role in advocating for these needs during this session. I encourage you to remain engaged for the special session(s) and during the interim as we prepare for the 88th Texas Legislature in 2023.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Welsh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dinah S. Welsh  
President and Chief Executive Officer

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# TETAF Legislative Priorities

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The TETAF Legislative Priorities were developed by the TETAF Advocacy team and approved by the TETAF Board of Directors prior to the start of the legislative session.

## **Preserve & Increase Funding for Regional Health Care Systems**

At a time of growing demands on the system and historic population growth, state funding has not kept up with an ever-increasing demand for trauma, emergency, and disaster-related health care services. Rural communities already are experiencing a lack of access to timely emergency health care. Urban areas have more resources but still struggle to maintain services. COVID-19 has challenged all, but the health care system has been stretched to the limit with Emergency Medical Services, Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), the Emergency Medical Task Force (EMTF), and hospitals designated to serve as frontline responders to the pandemic. TETAF will seek to increase and preserve funding for regional health care systems through several initiatives, including:

- **Maintain Funding for Regional Advisory Councils**

The role of the RACs has expanded greatly, especially in response to COVID-19 and Winter Storm Uri. RACs are regularly engaged in coordinating regional trauma and emergency preparedness, improving cardiac, stroke, and perinatal systems of care, and educating communities on injury prevention. During the COVID-19 pandemic and the February 2021 winter storm, this work continued while coordinating increased hospital transfers, adding efforts to acquire and distribute personal protective equipment, and working to report hospital capacity in some areas. While the state's ask of these entities has increased significantly since creation in 1989, funding has not kept up with demand. Maintaining funding for the system is critical.

- **Recognize Needs of the RACs in 2020 and 2021 Urgent Response**

2020 and 2021 have been a challenge unlike any other. The RACs responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and Winter Storm Uri on top of continued system needs. In addition to efforts mentioned above, the RACs met unique needs in their regions, such as serving as one of the nation's first monoclonal infusion sites and securing the safe air transport of an infant that accidentally ingested battery acid during the winter storm. Coordination of these efforts is a tremendous task, and the work of the RACs has been in the national spotlight. Funding needs must be a focus to support the RACs' efforts.

- **Improve and Fund Statewide Health Data Collection Efforts**

While the State of Texas has historically provided funds for a statewide trauma registry, the data collected and shared has lacked robust, timely value to truly impact responses and improve patient outcomes. RACs have initiated regional data collection efforts to improve trauma, cardiac and stroke outcomes; however, a coordinated statewide initiative for trauma, cardiac, and stroke data is needed. The state also needs perinatal data to improve neonatal and maternal outcomes.

- **Continue State Efforts to Train Bystanders in Bleeding Control**

RACs have spearheaded regional efforts to train bystanders in bleeding control through the Stop the Bleed initiative. Funding is needed to continue providing this life-saving training and to place Stop the Bleed kits in publicly accessible locations alongside Automated External Defibrillator (AED) machines.

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# An Unorthodox Session

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Every legislative session is part of history in Texas, but the 87th Legislative Session proved to be unlike any other and that included the interim prior to session. During the interim, the TETAF Advocacy team started 2020 with an initial strategy and timeline. All plans changed when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and meetings in person did not happen but advocating for trauma and perinatal needs remained a focus.

During the interim, the pandemic did not stop the TETAF Advocacy team from securing Account 5111 funding for the biennium. Prior to the interim, in the 86th Texas Legislative Session, TETAF was successful in its efforts to repeal the Driver Responsibility Program (DRP) and replace the funds it generated for trauma. The legislation also modified the distribution of the Account 5111 money, allocating 1% more of the funding for EMS providers and 1% more for the Regional Advisory Councils. TETAF's Advocacy team worked with state leaders to ensure that an increase in funding for RACs and EMS from Account 5111 did not result in a decrease in funding from other revenue streams. The RACs and EMS received an increase in funding during the 2020-21 biennium due to the 1% to 2% change for RACs and 2% to 3% change for EMS. The estimated increase is just over \$800,000 per year for the RACs and \$800,000 for EMS.

TETAF also conducted two surveys, the COVID-19 Impact Survey for stakeholders and a survey for the 22 Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), to determine how to best meet trauma and perinatal needs during the upcoming session.

When the legislature gaveled in on January 12, 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic took center stage not only in legislative priorities, but also in how business was conducted. Visitors were limited inside the Capitol for almost two months into the session. Video conference meetings and phone calls were heavily used to conduct meetings with legislators and staff. The start of session had a different look and feel.

One month after the start of session, Winter Storm Uri added to the unprecedented legislative session. With ice and heavy snow prohibiting travel, the Texas House and Senate briefly stood in recess. After the storm, Governor Greg Abbott declared a reform of the state's electrical grid system as an emergency priority. This created opportunity to further advocate the needs and importance of the RACs that were central to the emergency response efforts of not only the ongoing pandemic, but also the winter storm.

In March, prior to the bill filing deadline, the Capitol was reopened to the public and although many safety protocols remained, the TETAF Advocacy team continued its work to focus on priorities for trauma and emergency care, perinatal care, and funding for the RACs and EMS.



# 87th Texas Legislature Bills of Note

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# Senate Bill 1 - State Budget

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TETAF worked diligently during the legislative session to level funding for the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) and EMS. The initial proposed budget submitted by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) required a 5% cut to all programs. This cut amounted to approximately \$315,000 in funding for the RACs and approximately \$91,000 for EMS.

The TETAF Advocacy team developed a rider to level funding for the RACs and EMS. Article II in the Texas Senate restored the cut in funding and the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Article II advanced the rider that TETAF submitted to "pend plus" level, which placed it at a high priority for funding. Additionally, TETAF Board of Directors member, TETAF Advocacy Committee chair, and Border Regional Advisory Council (RAC) executive director, Wanda Helgesen, testified virtually before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Article II. The testimony focused on three key issues: concern over budget reductions to components of the Texas Trauma System, including RACs, EMS providers, and trauma hospitals; support for enhanced security of the EMS/Trauma registry, and support for continued funding for perinatal health initiatives.

TETAF would like to thank Rep. John Raney (R-Bryan) for his support of the rider as well as Senators Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham), Dawn Buckingham (R-Lakeway), Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D-Brownsville), and Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown). The potential funding cuts for RACs and EMS were removed from Senate Bill 1 which will allow for level funding in the next biennium.

Additionally, TETAF supported a rider for the Texas Emergency Medical Task Force (EMTF), which was adopted as Rider 28 of the Texas Department of State Health Services' bill pattern. The rider sought \$10 million in funding for the biennium to support EMTF management and readiness and to replenish critical emergency medical response equipment. Ultimately, the state budget adopted \$5 million from the General Revenue Fund for the biennium, marking the first General Revenue Fund monies dedicated to the EMTF.



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# Senate Bill 984 - Public Health Disaster and Emergency Preparedness Response

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Many bills were filed during the 87th Legislative Session that focused on response, data, PPE, and other issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The lessons learned during that unprecedented time led to new legislation aimed at strengthening response and needs during future public health disasters.

Senator Charles Schwertner (R - Georgetown) authored [Senate Bill 984](#) which focuses on state preparedness and response, including the collection of demographic data by the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs). TETAF submitted written testimony reinforcing the RACs efforts during the past year and emphasized the need for funding. Additionally, former TETAF board member and Southwest Texas Regional Advisory Council (STRAC) executive director, [Eric Epley](#), testified in support of this bill during the [Senate Committee on Health and Human Services](#).

TETAF will closely monitor the implementation of this legislation and will seek collaboration from all 22 RACs.



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# Senate Bill 969 - Reporting Procedures During a Public Health Disaster

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[Senate Bill \(SB\) 969](#), authored by Senator Lois Kolkhorst (R - Brenham), stems from what we learned during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and closely relates to SB 984. It addresses the procedures for sharing information during a public health disaster. Working with stakeholders, including RACs, SB 969 also requires the Texas Department of State Health Services to conduct an evaluation of the state's ability to respond to public health threats and an analysis of how to improve data collection and reporting.

After it is signed by the governor, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) will collect data and work with the RACs.

TETAF will closely monitor the progress of this legislation and seek collaboration from all 22 RACs on the implementation.

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## Senate Bill 437 - Establishing a Personal Protective Equipment Reserve and Advisory Committee

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Senate Bill (SB) 437 was another bill filed during the legislative session that was a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Senator Cesar Blanco (D - El Paso) authored this bill focused on the creation of a personal protective equipment (PPE) reserve and the creation of a PPE Advisory Committee. TETAF worked through the legislative session to ensure representation for the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) on this committee and the TETAF Advocacy team was successful in this effort.

This legislation also clarifies if no funds are appropriated, then the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) would not be required to fund the PPE out of existing funds.



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## Senate Bill 1397 - Protocols and Processes for Patient Transfers

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SB 1397 relates to the regional protocols and processes for patient transfers and related services within the area that is served by certain RACs and was specifically focused on the Lower Rio Grande Valley RAC.

The TETAF Advocacy team worked throughout the legislative session to express concerns about singling out one RAC. As passed, SB 1397 puts into statute RAC guidelines that the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) currently has the authority to enforce through contract compliance.

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## Senate Bill 1876 - Emergency Preparedness and Notification of Regional Advisory Councils

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Similar to many bills during the legislative session that focused on emergency preparedness, [Senate Bill \(SB\) 1876](#) also gives reference to the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs). This bill relates to emergency planning for the continued treatment and safety of end stage renal disease facility patients.

As passed, this bill requires each end stage renal disease facility to adopt a written emergency preparedness and contingency operations plan to address care during an emergency. This plan requires the facilities to contact their RACs during an emergency as part of the protocols for patient transfers.

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## Senate Bill 640 - Interoperability Needs and Technology Readiness of Behavioral Health Service Providers

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[SB 640](#) launches a study focused on the interoperability needs and the technology readiness of behavioral health service providers. The TETAF Advocacy team will follow this study as it relates to the RACs.

This study requires the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to also assess the needs and readiness of various entities and organizations, including the RACs, and their use of electronic health record management systems.

A written report of this study is to be completed by August 31, 2022.



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# House Bill 133 - Extending Medicaid Coverage for Eligible Postpartum Mothers

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TETAF and its perinatal division, Texas Perinatal Services, were focused on legislation aimed at improving the alarmingly high maternal mortality rates in Texas.

TETAF strongly supported [House Bill \(HB\) 133](#), authored by Representative Toni Rose (D - Dallas). The original text of the bill extended the length of Medicaid coverage for eligible postpartum mothers from 60 days to 12 months. The state's Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee provided the initial 12-month recommendation. However, the legislation was amended in the Senate to six months instead of 12 months as approved in the House. The six months of extension is funded in the state budget.



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# House Bill 1164 - Patient Safety Regarding Placenta Accreta Disorder

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TETAF and Texas Perinatal Services were closely engaged on another piece of legislation intended to improve maternal care, [HB 1164](#). Authored by Representative Tom Oliverson (R - Houston), the bill, as originally filed, would have designated centers of excellence for the management and treatment of placenta accreta spectrum disorder.

Placenta accreta spectrum disorder is a serious pregnancy condition but there is limited data for this condition, or many perinatal issues, to provide understanding of the full scope of the disorder. Ultimately, the bill as passed requires the Texas Health and Human Services Commissioner to work with the Perinatal Advisory Council (PAC) to establish rules for developing patient safety practices regarding placenta accreta spectrum disorder. While the PAC will begin developing rules soon for patient safety practices of placenta accreta syndrome in designated maternal level care facilities, hospitals that are maternal level of care designated shall adopt patient safety practices by October 1, 2022 and comply to the new rules by January 1, 2023. Once developed, these rules will be monitored through the maternal levels of care designations.

Texas Perinatal Services will closely follow the implementation of this legislation and the rule process.



# The Advocacy Process

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# A Team of Advocates

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TETAF president and CEO, Dinah Welsh, serves as the lead advocate with more than two decades of experience producing results advocating for trauma, emergency, and perinatal care issues. The effort to change legislation as it goes through the legislative process not only takes a knowledgeable leader but also a team of experts who work cohesively with Welsh to address and monitor numerous issues throughout the legislative session to ensure the best interest for Texans.

The team at Erben & Yarbrough in Austin, consisting of Brian Yarbrough, Ashley Morgan, and Janiece Williams, strategize during the interim with Welsh and the TETAF Advocacy Committee. The committee, consisting of members of the TETAF Board of Directors, have trauma, emergency, disaster, perinatal, and regional health system expertise. That expertise, combined with Welsh's extensive advocacy background in health care and the legislative skills of Erben & Yarbrough, gives TETAF a strong voice at the Capitol.

## TETAF Advocacy Team



Dinah Welsh  
Lead Advocate



Wanda Helgesen, RN, MSN  
Chair



Eric Epley, NREMT-P



Christine Reeves



Ricky Reeves, EMT-P



David Weisoly, D.O.



Brian Yarbrough



Janiece Williams



Ashley Morgan

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# The Support of Stakeholders

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Advocating for the best in trauma, stroke, maternal, and neonatal care, along with the needs of all 22 Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) across Texas requires passionate stakeholders continuously sharing experiences and their knowledge with the TETAF Advocacy team.

During the legislative session, TETAF hosted weekly, virtual Legislative Workgroup meetings and invited all stakeholders to participate in discussions. Summaries of those meetings were shared each week to keep participants informed and provide additional opportunities for feedback.



With limited public access to the Capitol during the beginning of the legislative session, TETAF developed an alternative to its traditional Day at the Capitol event. During previous legislative sessions, stakeholders from across Texas would go to the Capitol and meet with legislators and their staff members to educate them about the needs and issues in trauma and emergency health care.

Similar to most events during the pandemic, TETAF's Day at the Capitol evolved into TETAF Legislative Focus Week that included a virtual kickoff event in March. TETAF stakeholders were invited to join the one-hour virtual discussion with questions answered by Representative Donna Howard (D - Austin). During the week, stakeholders were provided with a complete packet of tools to make it easier for them to advocate for trauma, emergency, and perinatal care in Texas.

This packet included links to legislators, the TETAF Guide to Advocacy, a rider that TETAF filed concerning budget cuts affecting the RACs and EMS programs, and the TETAF Legislative Priorities. Additionally, the packet provided talking points, a sample letter, and a handout for legislators.

Participants included stakeholders, TETAF board members, and RAC leaders, many of whom reached out to their senators and representatives during that week.

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# Because of a RAC

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The 1989 Omnibus Rural Healthcare Rescue Act led to the formation of the 22 Trauma Service Areas in Texas and the creation of the 22 Regional Advisory Councils, or RACs. Since that time, the RACs have evolved substantially. The scope of work for the RACs has expanded significantly to include disaster readiness and response, along with efforts to improve cardiac, stroke, maternal, and neonatal systems of care. Simultaneously, the RACs also responded to the needs of Texans during the COVID-19 pandemic and Winter Storm Uri. The RACs were on the front lines and behind the scenes for Texans to receive the health care they needed during an unprecedented time.

One of TETAF's duties is to advocate for the RACs. The TETAF Advocacy team worked to emphasize the difference each RAC made in its region and collectively across the state during the past year. It is because of the RACs that the lives of Texans were saved during the pandemic and winter storm and TETAF chose the headline, "Because of a RAC," in a handout created specifically for legislators to emphasize the critical roles that the RACs served. Additionally, individual handouts were developed for RACs to use with their local lawmakers to specifically highlight their accomplishments.

Providing this information to legislators was necessary as TETAF advocated to maintain funding for the RACs and EMS, which were initially part of a proposed 5% budget cut to the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). In addition to the handouts, the TETAF Advocacy team submitted a rider that requested level funding. These efforts paid off and the potential cuts to funding for RACs and EMS were removed. This amounts to approximately \$315,000 in funding for the RACs and approximately \$91,000 for EMS.

As the RACs serve as a conduit to connect health care partners in their regions to provide lifesaving care, TETAF works to advocate the needs of the RACs to ensure these vital efforts continue for all Texans.

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## Stop the Bleed Day in Texas

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TETAF was honored to work with the Stop the Bleed Texas Coalition during the legislative session to have a proclamation issued by Governor Greg Abbott recognizing May 20 as Stop the Bleed Day in Texas.

Uncontrolled bleeding from an extremity is the #1 cause of preventable death in trauma. During the 86th Texas Legislative Session, [House Bill 496](#) was passed which mandated bleeding control kits in every school and requiring all Texas public and charter school personnel to participate in Stop the Bleed training.

There are 10,654 Stop the Bleed instructors registered in Texas, the highest number of trained instructors in the United States. Check with your RAC to find out more about courses in your area.





# Beyond the Dome

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# Advocating for the Best in Texas, All Year Long

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The role of advocating for effective public policy in patient care and regional health care delivery is not limited to the legislative session. The work to ensure quality trauma, emergency, and perinatal care never ends.

TETAF participates in dozens of meetings throughout the year with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), the Governor's EMS and Trauma Advisory Council (GETAC), and the Perinatal Advisory Council (PAC), among many other organizations. As an example, Texas Perinatal Services submitted a letter to the PAC chair that provided input on rule revisions, which led to an invite for Texas Perinatal Services to participate in the perinatal rule revisions during a meeting in 2020.

Whether it is submitting a letter, attending a meeting, having meetings with state leaders and legislators, or reaching out to stakeholders, TETAF will always focus on what is best for patient outcomes and opportunities to strengthen our trauma, stroke, maternal, and neonatal levels of care.



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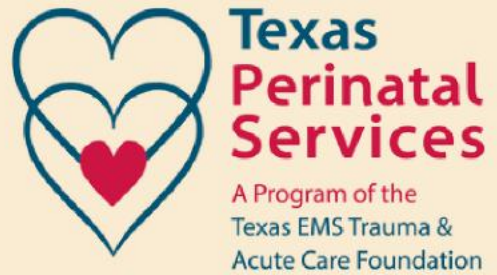
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