

Capitol Watch 418: Pre-filed Bills

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Thursday, 27 January 2011 11:48 - Last Updated Thursday, 27 January 2011 12:13

Jan. 27. 2011 - The 82nd legislative session began Tuesday, Jan. 11. Legislators will debate the House Rules this upcoming week and are waiting to receive their committee assignments. This week, I will continue to talk about a few of the bills that have been filed by other legislators from around the state for the upcoming legislative session.

HB 199 would move the sales tax holiday for clothing, footwear, and other back-to-school items from the third weekend in August to the first weekend in August. The limits on what items are eligible for the tax exemption remain; the sales price of the article must be less than \$100 and the sale begins at 12:01 a.m. on Friday and ends at midnight on the following Sunday.

HB 224 would make provisions for bullying, including cyber-bullying, in public schools.

Among other things, the bill would require teachers to undergo training to prevent, identify, respond to, and report incidents of bullying. It would also allow the board of trustees of a school district, on request of bullying victim's parents, to transfer a student who engaged in bullying to another class or school within the district. "Bullying" is defined in the bill as engaging in written, verbal, or physical conduct that has the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or of damage to the student's property; is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student; interferes with a student's educational opportunities; or substantially disrupts the orderly operation of a school. "Cyber-bullying" is bullying that is done using electronic communication, such as e-mail or a social networking site. The bill would also require each school district to adopt a policy regarding bullying.

HB 243 would prohibit drivers from engaging in text-based communication while operating a vehicle. Text-based communications include text messages, instant messages, and email. A driver could not read, write, or send a text-based communication while operating a motor vehicle unless the vehicle was stopped. If passed, this bill would take effect Sept. 1, 2011.

For more information on these bills, or to review all of the legislation that has been filed, please visit the website www.capitol.state.tx.us. You can contact my office by writing to P.O. Box 2910, Austin, TX 78768-2910 or by emailing me at larry.phillips@house.state.tx.us. My district office phone number is (903) 891-7297.