

MARCH/APRIL 2022

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Drivers Wanted

By Jodi González



TEXAS TRUCKING STRIVES TO STAY ON THE MOVE

Trucks move 72 percent of U.S. domestic freight by weight, according to the American Trucking Associations (ATA). A commercial truck driver shortage across the nation has compounded supply chain problems, driving inflation, and experts have varying ideas on why it's happening and how to tap the brakes.

Often, ATA is quoted for its statistic of an 80,000-driver shortage, and John Esparza, president and chief executive officer of the Texas Trucking Association (TXTA), says the

shortfall is growing larger. "We will be at 160,000 at the end of the decade," he says. "We are losing a generation of drivers, and we aren't replacing them with a generation of potential drivers that is large enough."

About 3.5 million truck drivers, with an average age of 46, are on U.S. roadways, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. By 2030, more than half of current truck drivers will have passed retirement age.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 3)

"We are losing a generation of drivers, and we aren't replacing them with a generation of potential drivers that is large enough."

– John Esparza, president and chief executive officer, Texas Trucking Association

A Message from the Comptroller



It's safe to say that Texas' economy is performing well, and by some estimates, it has fully recovered since the coronavirus pandemic first hit. Yet our state still is experiencing labor shortages across a wide range of industries, including in two industries that Texans depend on every day — trucking and nursing. Labor shortages in key industries like these can have constant and

long-term effects on the overall health of the economy and the well-being of Texas families.

You may have heard the trucking industry is struggling to attract and retain employees. Big rig trucks are everywhere because, to put it mildly, the trucking industry is a crucial component of our state and nation's economy. In fact, more than 80 percent of Texas communities rely exclusively on trucks for necessities. It's not surprising then that Texas employs more truck drivers than any other state, including California.

But truck driving, especially long haul or "over the road" trucking, is far from an easy job, and the coronavirus pandemic has only created more difficulties for both employees and employers. The result: Trucking companies have extremely high employee turnover rates.

The nursing profession has seen its share of shortages as well, and those have been exacerbated during the pandemic. Although almost 400,000 nurses — most of them registered nurses — worked in Texas in 2021, our state needs a lot more. Research tells us that Texas has the fourth-lowest nurse-to-population ratio among the 50 states. The Texas Department of State Health Services projects that, in a decade, Texas will face a severe shortage of nurses if demand continues to outpace supply. This is concerning to say the least.

Some efforts are underway to address the shortage. You can read about them and dig into the range of nursing careers in this issue, including information on nursing aide shortages for elder care, a separate but related industry experiencing profound labor shortages.

And finally, this packed issue provides an update on the state's important new Broadband Development Office (administered by our agency) and how it is taking meaningful steps to begin closing the digital divide for residents and businesses across the state without high-speed internet.

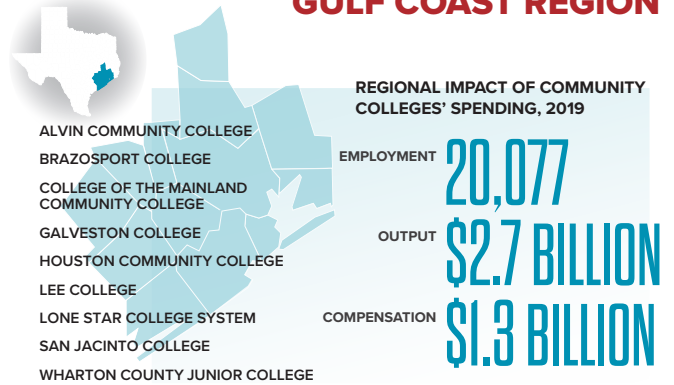
As always, I hope you enjoy this issue!

Glenn Hegar

Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGES

GULF COAST REGION



Texas' community college districts serve a vital role in our state's economy by developing our workforce, preparing students for further academic study and meeting specific vocational needs. The 13 counties in the Gulf Coast region include nine community college districts.

Note: Figures include direct, indirect and induced economic impacts.

Sources: JobsEQ, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Texas community colleges.

NOTE: THESE ANALYSES PREDATED THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND THE ECONOMIC IMPACTS THAT FOLLOWED.

WAGES BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, GULF COAST REGION, 2018



Community colleges provide their students with a good return on investment.

AVERAGE WAGE INCREASE OVER HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED: **\$6,408**

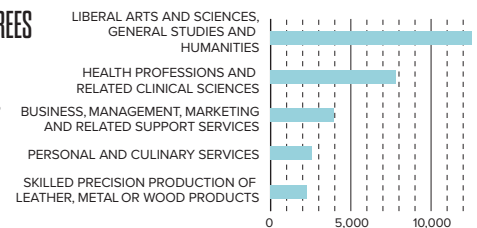
NUMBER OF WORKERS, SOME COLLEGE OR ASSOCIATE DEGREE: **796,592**

TOTAL REGIONAL ADDITIONAL WAGES: **\$5.1 BILLION**

CERTIFICATES AND DEGREES

TOP CERTIFICATES AND DEGREES, GULF COAST REGION, 2017-2018 SCHOOL YEAR

Source: JobsEQ



SUMMARY

The Gulf Coast region's nine community college districts account for more than 20,000 jobs and more than \$2.7 billion in economic output annually, while the greater skills and education of graduates add another \$5.1 billion to the region's total income. The region still has unmet demand for degrees and certificates in business fields.

TO SEE INFORMATION ON COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND THE TEXAS ECONOMY: <https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/economic-data/colleges/>

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TEXAS TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Texas is home to almost 200,000 commercial truck drivers and leads the nation in this occupation (**Exhibit 1**). Truck drivers run different types of routes, from local to regional, intrastate to interstate (also called long haul or over the road). In a state the size of Texas, intrastate routes are plentiful, especially considering that 82 percent of Texas communities depend *exclusively* on trucks for needed products, according to TXTA.

To drive a “big rig” — or other vehicles with a set weight or passenger load — requires a commercial driver license (CDL). Texas has more than 100 CDL schools, some private and some offered at postsecondary institutions such as San Jacinto College in Pasadena.

BUSINESS IS BOOMING

San Jacinto’s CDL classrooms are jam-packed, especially since the college steered Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) money it received through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act, toward tuition assistance for students, including those on the CDL track.



Tony Rich, San Jacinto College (Pasadena), Applied Technology and Trades Department

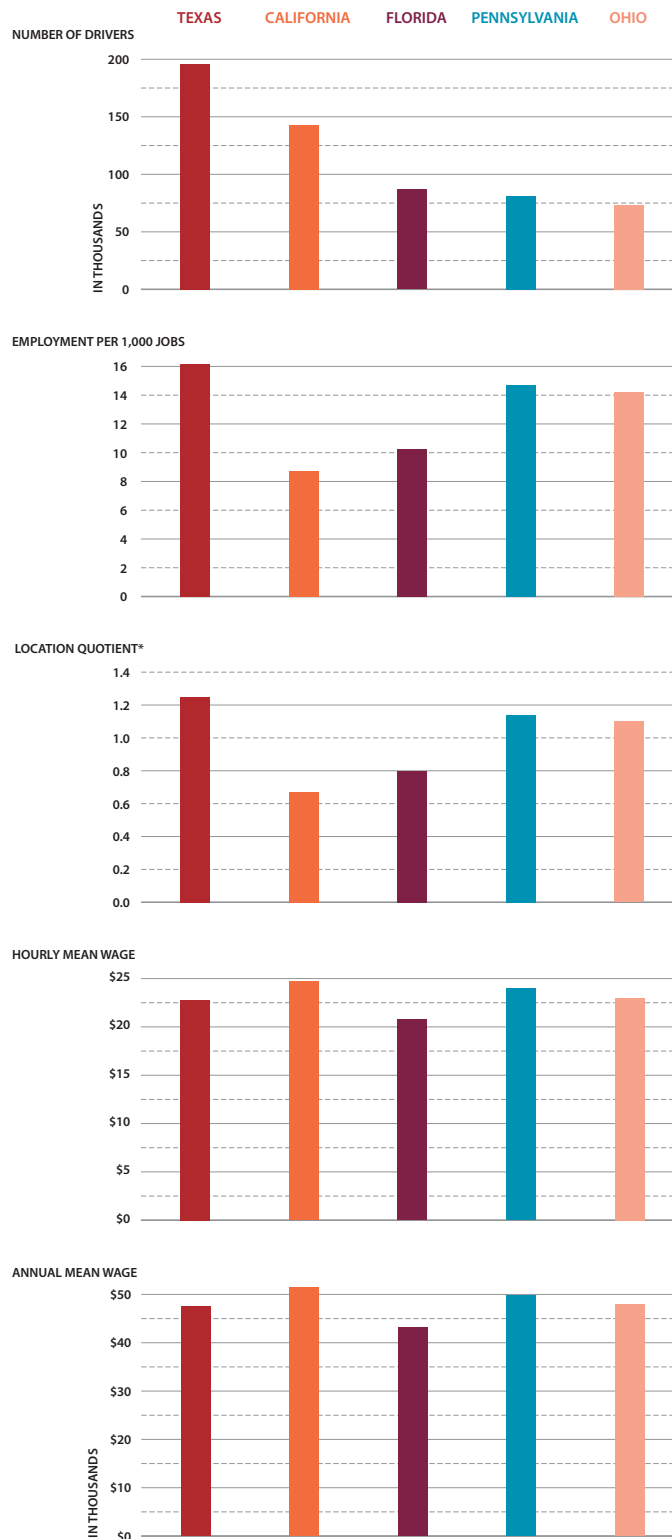
Tony Rich, director of the college’s Applied Technology and Trades Department, says enrollment in the CDL program has jumped 250 percent from fall 2020 to fall 2021. “This became a godsend for some who were out of

the workforce. They could come in and get training in five to six weeks without a financial burden.”

San Jacinto limits enrollment to 12 students per class, because it has 12 available trucks for training. Demand has the college looking at ways to build its fleet capacity. The school, however, is competing with the trucking industry, which also is trying to buy more trucks. Both the school and the industry face two challenges in their procurement efforts: Production of new diesel trucks is delayed due to supply chain shortages, and used trucks are scarce.

EXHIBIT 1

TOP 5 STATES FOR EMPLOYMENT IN HEAVY AND TRACTOR-TRAILER TRUCK DRIVERS, 2020



*Location quotient compares an industry’s share of jobs in a specific region with its share of nationwide employment; the higher the value, the more concentrated the industry.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2020

Starting a trucking career is a fast route to a paycheck, says Ken Tidwell, dean of the college's Workforce Development program (**Exhibit 2**). "Median wage is \$47,400 in our area, with starting wage a little bit lower than that. That's why we see so many people who want to join the program. It is addressing a financial need for them right now."

The limited capacity has created a sense of urgency for would-be truck drivers. "We are full through August," says Rich. "Every seat is taken. When we open up a class, within 48 hours, it's full. We expect to have about 144 [students] in the program this academic year."

Limited capacity has been an issue at driver license offices as well. The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) opened selected offices on some Saturdays in 2021 for CDL testing, and a pandemic waiver allowed driving schools to administer not only the skills tests allowed under a memorandum of understanding with DPS, but also the knowledge tests. That waiver expired May 31, 2021, but the Legislature passed House Bill (HB) 3395 into law, taking effect Sept. 1, 2021. The law allows other entities or people to administer both tests to relieve the DPS backlog.

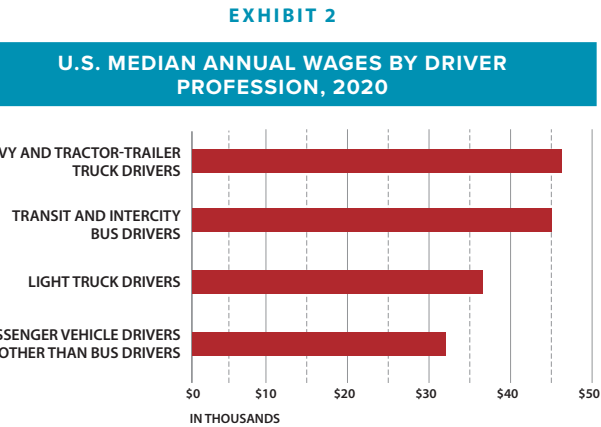
Another new law aimed at increasing the number of drivers is HB 3606, which requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to allow a public or private entity to offer vocational training, including CDL training, to inmates.

It isn't just students rushing through the doors. Recruiters come calling often, Rich says. Some students are offered jobs right away, contingent on them successfully finishing the program, he says. And 90 percent of those who sign up to earn their CDL finish the job.

REALITIES OF THE JOB

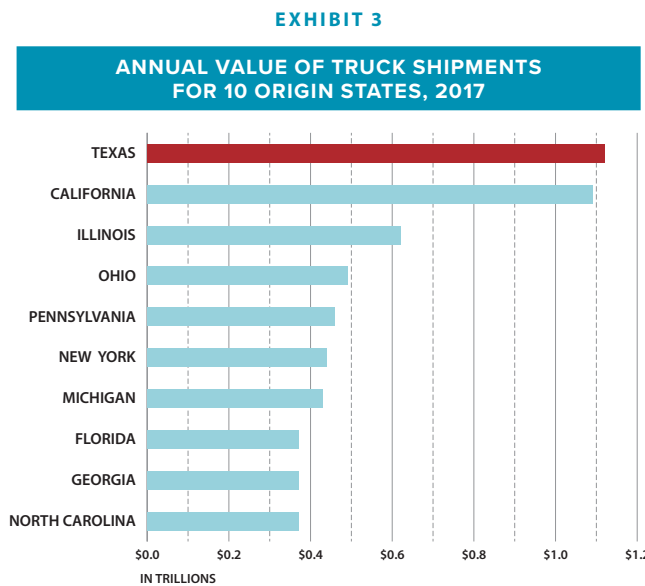
Despite the number of people clamoring to start a trucking career, there remains a shortage. The reasons are complex, but most roads lead to an issue of retention.

"Some [companies] have 100 percent turnover, and that's terrible," says TXTA's Esparza. "The demands on the driver and the fact that they can easily make six figures in the



Note: Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers are often paid by the mile.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 Commodity Flow Survey

world today, that's an amazing number to think about. It speaks to the importance of driving trucks. They are the linchpin in the links of the supply chain."

The numbers bear out the importance of trucking to the supply chain. Texas alone has transported goods worth more than \$1.1 trillion out of state (**Exhibit 3**).

"The demands on the driver and the fact that they can easily make six figures in the world today, that's an amazing number to think about. It speaks to the importance of driving trucks. They are the linchpin in the links of the supply chain."

– John Esparza

Drivers Wanted

Tidwell echoes sentiments about the importance of truck drivers and says, “We could [train] 80,000 new truck drivers across the nation tomorrow, and in a year from now, we’d have to [train] 72,000 more. There is a real shortage, but that shortage is only compounded by COVID.” Before the pandemic, around 90 percent of people who started a trucking career would leave the industry, he says.

Drivers frequently cite poor treatment by employers as a reason for leaving, but there is no getting



Ken Tidwell, San Jacinto College (Pasadena), Workforce Development Program

around some of the realities, especially in long-haul work. “It is a grueling, hard job,” says Tidwell. “It’s hard on families. It’s hard on relationships.”

Indeed, interstate truck drivers can be away from home for weeks at a time. And for a portion of that time, some of them aren’t compensated.

Many drivers are paid by the mile as independent contractors, so when they aren’t adding miles to the odometer, they can’t charge the employer. Federal law restricts a truck driver’s driving hours regardless of the miles traveled. So if drivers hit traffic or weather and aren’t moving, their hourly rate drops.

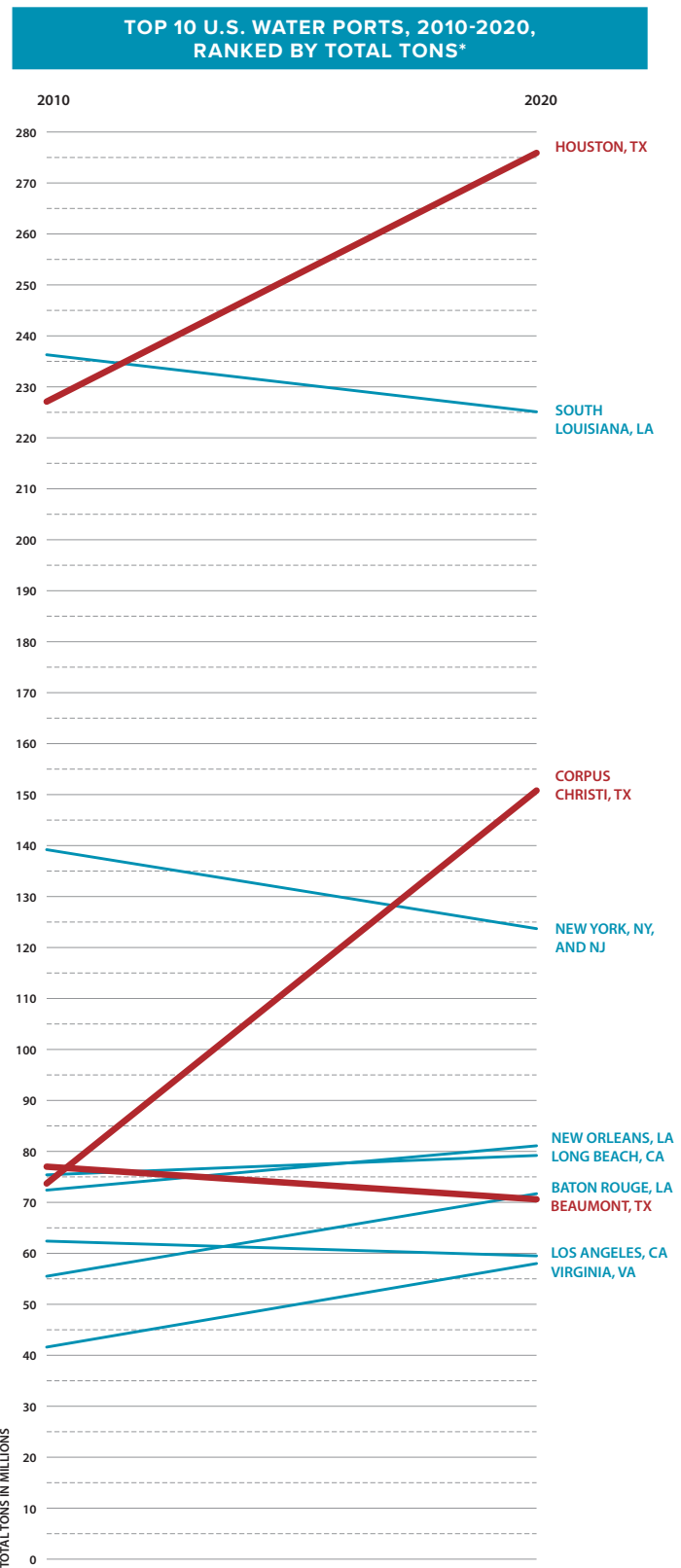
San Jacinto’s CDL program doesn’t turn out a lot of licensed CDL drivers who wind up with a career in long hauls. “It’s still there,” says Tidwell, “but a lot of what we are getting is, ‘We need lorry drivers [short haul] taking things from the [Port of Houston].’ These drivers have a regular shift and go home when they are done for the day.”

SITTING ON THE DOCKS

The pay structure for long-haul drivers produces incomes that are much lower than many new truck drivers anticipate. With COVID, the unpaid wait time has become an even bigger issue as trucks have idled for hours while waiting to pick up freight at the nation’s ports.

Media attention has focused on a backlog of ships waiting to unload their wares, the enormous tonnage moving through the nation’s top ports (**Exhibit 4**) and the ripple effect the backlog has had on the U. S. supply chain. Tidwell says the reality of the supply chain dynamic is more complex.

EXHIBIT 4



* Tonnage totals include both domestic and foreign waterborne trade.

Sources: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Principal Ports of the United States, Waterborne tonnage for principal U.S. ports and all 50 states and U.S. territories

Drivers Wanted

© COURTESY OF COURTNEY MORRIS, SAN JACINTO COLLEGE



Javier Caballero, CDL student at San Jacinto College

"If you get a truck in, you have to hope that no one is sick on the cranes," he says. "It's having the right bodies, at the right time, in the right place to make it all work. Before COVID, those in the industry understood how small the margins were across the whole supply chain. COVID messed that all up."

Esparza points to unrealistic expectations as a reason for the backups. "They want a level of commitment for people to work on Saturday if they are going to open a Saturday gate," he says. "Just because the gates are open from 7 a.m.-6 p.m. doesn't mean you have enough people working those docks to move those containers. It's a fickle environment that can turn on a dime."

Such frustration makes it difficult to hold on to those drivers. "We are our own worst enemy," Esparza says. "[Some] segments of trucking will take drivers from other segments of trucking that perhaps are not as efficient. It's a huge challenge."

ENDORSEMENTS AND SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

According to DPS, an endorsement listed on a CDL allows the license holder to operate certain types of commercial vehicles and transport specific items. Extra testing is required to earn these endorsements and having them gives the driver a broader range of job options, such as the ability to haul hazardous material and the opportunity for higher pay.

CDL holders doing short-haul driving from a seaport to a warehouse or other freight station also must have a federally mandated Transportation Worker Identification Credential.

For some endorsements, the prospective license holder is required to hold a commercial learner permit (CLP) for that endorsement for a minimum of 14 days before it can be added to a CDL.

Endorsement Code	Description
<i>H</i>	Transportation of hazardous material (CDL)
<i>N</i>	Operation of a tank vehicle (CDL, CLP)
<i>P</i>	Operation of vehicle transporting passengers (CDL, CLP)
<i>S</i>	Operation of a school bus (CDL, CLP)
<i>T</i>	Towing double or triple trailers over a specified weight (CDL)
<i>X</i>	Operation of a combination of hazardous material and tank vehicle (CDL)

“If you are looking for and need a job that is going to pay a family-supporting wage, truck driving is one of the best options out there. I can’t say you will be in it for 20 years, but there is no better program out there that can do that.”

– Ken Tidwell, dean, Workforce Development Program, San Jacinto College (Pasadena)

OTHER ROADBLOCKS

Esparza says labor shortages currently represent trucking’s biggest problem but cites other challenges as well — like what he pegs as “frivolous lawsuits” and changes to training.

Lawsuits “are driving companies out of business,” he says. “If we are triaging the trucking industry today, you are prioritizing the companies that are going out of business because their insurance is doubling and tripling overnight in annual renewals at a time when they don’t even have an accident on their record.”



John Esparza, Texas Trucking Association

Lawmakers addressed this issue during the 87th Legislature. HB 19 allows a trial against a carrier to have two phases: The first addresses only the crash at issue, and a determination of whether

the carrier is grossly negligent in that crash. A second phase can include all evidence related to the carrier’s operations.

On the training side, Esparza says a 2016 federal change to skills tests reduced the availability of test sites. The change effectively added pieces to the skills test, he says, and reduced what were 200 available testing locations to about 25. There were two-month waits to get CDLs, and unfortunately, two months down the road, potential drivers already might be working elsewhere.

For all the complexities of trucking issues today, the job remains appealing to many, Tidwell says. “If you are looking for and need a job that is going to pay a family-supporting wage, truck driving is one of the best options out there. I can’t say you will be in it for 20 years, but there is no better program out there that can do that.”



Brionne Boston, CDL student at San Jacinto College

© COURTESY OF COURTNEY MORRIS, SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

AUTOMATION ON THE HORIZON?

The industry is exploring automation as one way to fill the gap between drivers needed and drivers available. “Texas is leading the way in its application,” says Esparza. “[Automated trucks] are already on Texas roads.” As an example, one major shipping company is using partially automated trucks along Interstate 45 between Dallas and Houston.

“Someone is in the back of the cab, monitoring the systems, but in the next couple of years, that person won’t be there,” says Esparza. “It will be touchless. It’s a part of the solution to the driver shortage.” **FN**

To learn more about the supply chain and current disruptions, see our past Fiscal Notes issue about the “Good for Texas Tour: Supply Chains” at FiscalNotes.org/2022/jan/tour.php.



CHARTING THE STATE'S NURSING PROFESSION

Nursing today has come a long way since the days of Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton and involves a broad scope of duties requiring extensive education and a technical skill set. Nursing is one of the most in-demand fields in the health care industry. It also is one of the most challenging. Nurses are responsible for providing high-quality and high-volume patient care while applying the latest medical technologies — often in stressful and difficult situations — and the need for nurses often outpaces the supply.

NURSING WORKFORCE IN TEXAS

In 2021, nearly 400,000 nurses were working in Texas, representing different levels of the profession: certified nursing assistants (CNAs), who are unlicensed but ancillary to the nursing profession; licensed vocational nurses (LVNs); registered nurses (RNs); and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) such as nurse midwives, nurse practitioners and nurse anesthetists. Each category requires a progressively higher level of education and training.

EXHIBIT 1

TEXAS NURSING WORKFORCE PROFILE



Source: JobsEQ

Nursing in Texas

Fifty-eight percent of nurses in Texas are RNs, followed by LVNs at 16.7 percent and CNAs at 20.1 percent. APRNs are a comparatively small group, comprising just 5.2 percent of Texas nursing employment, but they command much higher wages (**Exhibit 1**). The annual wages of RNs in Texas typically start at \$57,300 and increase to \$86,500, depending on their level of experience. On average, nurse anesthetists are paid the most, with some earning more than \$200,000 per year.

According to the Texas Board of Nursing's 2021 Annual Report, new licenses are growing the fastest for advanced practice registered nurses in Texas — a 12 percent increase from fiscal 2020 to fiscal 2021. New RNs increased by 3.5 percent during the same time, but the number of vocational nurses declined by 1.7 percent.

Though 41.1 percent of Texas nurses work in hospitals, nurses also fill a variety of positions in other health care settings such as long-term care facilities, doctors' offices, schools and businesses (**Exhibit 2**).

EXHIBIT 2



Source: JobsEQ

NURSING SHORTAGE

The quality of health care and Texans’ access to it could be at risk due to a nationwide nursing shortage. As our population ages and the demand for health care continues to grow, the number of nursing school graduates simply is not keeping pace with demand. In a 2019 survey by jobs site CareerCast, RNs were the fifth most in-demand profession in the United States.

According to a March 2022 NurseJournal analysis of U.S. Bureau of Health Workforce data, Texas had the fourth-lowest nurse-to-population ratio among all states, with only 9.25 nurses per 1,000 residents (**Exhibit 3**).

The Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies (TCNWS), part of the Center for Health Statistics at the Texas Department of State Health Services, conducted a March 2021 study of the projected demand for nurses in Texas. The Updated Nurse Supply and Demand Projection, which used 2018 as its baseline year and projected nursing demand through 2032, concluded that Texas faces an increased shortage in every nursing category if, as expected, demand continues to outpace the supply. The supply of vocational nurses, for example, is expected to grow 13.8 percent by 2032, but the demand will grow by 45.5 percent. The outlook for RNs also is dire: The study estimates that 16.3 percent of the projected demand for registered nurses in 2032 will not be met.



Kathy Thomas, Texas Board of Nursing

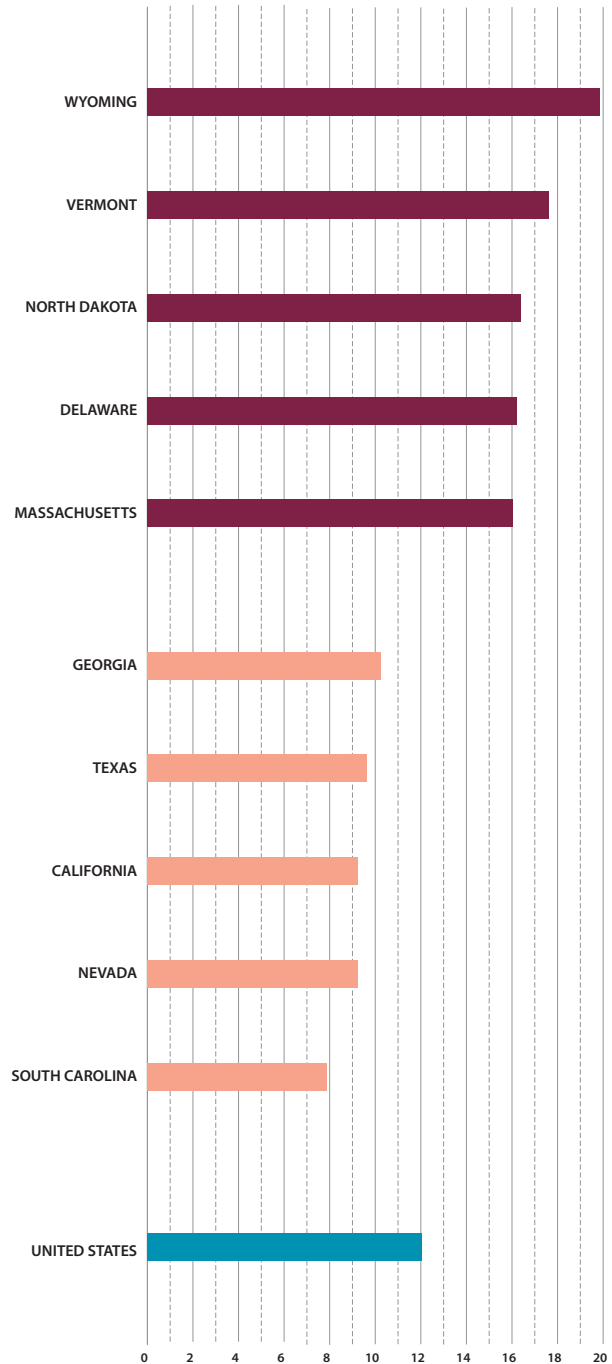
Although the demand for nurses is expected to increase in all settings, the largest shortage of RNs is expected primarily in inpatient hospital settings. Shortages of vocational nurses are expected to fall on inpatient hospital settings and nursing homes almost equally (see “Elder Care in Texas” on next page). Shortages are expected to be worse in rural areas of the state.

The state’s aging population — which comes with a higher degree of chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, obesity and dementia — puts pressure on Texas’ already overburdened nursing workforce, and the COVID-19 pandemic hasn’t helped. Because of the pandemic, nurses have been working longer hours, seeing more difficult cases and dealing with the constant threat of exposure to a deadly disease — with a dramatic impact on the nursing workforce.

“COVID-19 has really increased the shortage,” says Texas Board of Nursing’s executive director, Kathy Thomas. “Nurses are walking out. They’re worn out, they’re burned out and they’re stepping away from their jobs.”

EXHIBIT 3

NURSES PER 1,000 POPULATION: 5 HIGHEST AND 5 LOWEST STATES



Source: NurseJournal

Thomas is particularly concerned about what she called a “severe” shortage of vocational nurses in long-term care facilities such as nursing homes. “Many new nursing graduates want to go work in the emergency room or the ICU, not a nursing facility — but that’s where the need really exists.”

Elder Care in Texas By Jodi González

More Texans are turning 65, but the number of nursing facility employees needed to care for them isn't keeping pace.

Almost 13 percent of Texans — 3.7 million people — are in the 65 and older age bracket, and the figure is expected to rise to 17 percent by 2050, according to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. As many as 70 percent of people hitting 65 can expect to need long-term care at some point, according to Long-TermCare.gov.

Since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, the nursing home industry has lost almost 400,000 jobs nationally, with many employees leaving for jobs with better pay and working conditions. The Texas Health Care Association (THCA) and the education and advocacy group LeadingAge recently surveyed more than 200 nursing facilities and more than 30 assisted living facilities, and the results illustrate a dire situation in the state as well. All surveyed facilities had open positions for Certified Nurse Aides, and 94 percent had unfilled Licensed Vocational Nurses spots. At 63 percent of those facilities, no one had applied for the open positions.

Such a severe shortage of staff and applicants moves more of the caregiving to families who might not be prepared for those duties. Though Texas saves money in care costs when families provide for their aging loved ones, many caregivers who choose not to work or are unable to work outside the home while providing care forfeit potential income and limit their discretionary spending. The latter helps generate more sales tax revenue — currently 59 percent of Texas' state collections.

“In our society, there is so much focus on raising children, and there isn't a whole lot of cultural knowledge around [elder] caregiving.”

– Annette Juba

“What I see in general is [that] family caregiving is largely a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants thing,” says Annette Juba, chief program officer with AGE of Central Texas, an organization focused on providing information and resources for older Texas adults and their caregivers. “In our society, there is so much focus on raising children, and there isn't a whole lot of cultural knowledge around [elder] caregiving.”

“Given rapid population aging in Texas, more institutional arrangements are needed that address the preferences and needs of older adults and their caregivers.”

– Jacqueline Angel



Jacqueline Angel, University of Texas at Austin, Center for Health and Social Policy at the LBJ School



Annette Juba, AGE of Central Texas

Last year's third called special legislative session provided some relief for Texas' skilled nursing industry. Lawmakers agreed to allocate \$378 million in grants from the federal American Rescue Plan Act to nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Some of the money is being used for recruitment and retention bonuses for care positions, according to the THCA. These positions, and others focused on elder care outside of facilities, will continue to be in high demand.

“Given rapid population aging in Texas, more institutional arrangements are needed that address the preferences and needs of older adults and their caregivers,”

says Jacqueline Angel, professor of public affairs and sociology at the University of Texas at Austin Center for Health and Social Policy at the LBJ School. “State agencies serving the elderly and family caregivers are using new technologies to creatively disseminate as much information about senior services as possible to as many as possible. These agencies hope to enable frail elderly people to find the help they need to stay in the community and remain independent in their own homes.”

EDUCATION AND LICENSURE

Education has been one of the key advancements in the nursing profession. In the late 19th century, most student nurses received on-the-job training in a hospital setting. As medical care became more complex, the hospital-based education model was supplanted by training programs at colleges and universities. Today, more than 120 Texas colleges, universities and private schools offer nursing degrees and certificates of various levels.

Texas nursing schools offer five different undergraduate and graduate degree programs requiring from one to six years of study. (The certificate or diploma for nursing assistants is not included in this list because, although nursing-adjacent, this designation technically is not considered nursing education.)

- *Certificate or diploma (12-18 months) for LVN.*
- *Associate in Nursing (two years) for RN.*
- *Bachelor of Science in Nursing (four years) for RN.*
- *Master of Science in Nursing (two years, not counting prerequisite undergraduate degree) for both APRN (such as nurse midwife, nurse practitioner or nurse anesthetist) and non-APRN such as nurse administrator.*
- *Ph.D. for nursing researchers or Doctor of Nursing for APRN and non-APRN majors (four to six years, not counting prerequisite degrees).*

According to TCNWS reports, Texas nursing programs produced more than 27,000 graduates in the 2020-21 academic year (**Exhibit 4**).

In 2021, the state had 85 vocational nursing programs, offered primarily through community, state and technical colleges. Data from TCNWS indicate that 49 vocational programs were unable to admit all qualified applicants for reasons that included lack of clinical space, limited classroom space and lack of faculty.

TCNWS also reported 126 registered nursing programs in Texas during 2021 offered by community colleges, universities and private schools. Most of them (81.7 percent) offered alternate education tracks in addition to basic programs. In the state, 86 registered nursing programs were unable to accept all qualified applicants for reasons that included lack of clinical space and lack of faculty.



Kristin Benton, Texas Board of Nursing

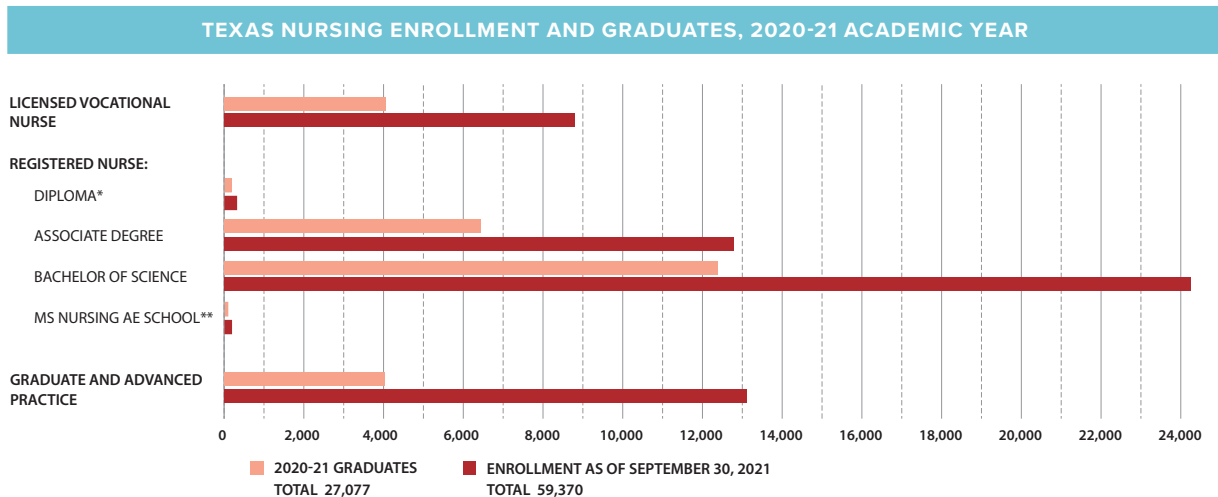
The Texas Board of Nursing is responsible for regulating not only the practice of nursing but also the state's nursing education. The board's director of nursing, Kristin Benton, says there is a need for additional nursing school faculty.

"We don't have enough qualified faculty," says Benton. "If we don't address the faculty shortage, we

can't increase the number of nursing graduates because we can't take any more students in those settings."

She cited comparatively low faculty pay as a deterrent for many prospective professors, who potentially can earn twice as much working in a clinical setting.

EXHIBIT 4



*Covenant School of Nursing in Lubbock offers a diploma upon completion of eight specific prerequisite courses at an accredited college or university followed by a full-time, 64-week hospital-based program.

**AE = Alternative Entry and is available for students who already hold non-nursing bachelor's degrees.

Source: Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies

**“If we don’t address the faculty shortage,
we can’t increase the number of nursing graduates
because we can’t take any more students in those settings.”**

– Kristin Benton, director of nursing, Texas Board of Nursing

Increasing Access to Nursing

The need for well-educated and highly skilled nurses has led to many innovative programs within nursing education that allow more Texans to enter the field. For example, Alamo College in San Antonio offers the Military to Registered Nursing Career Mobility Track, a three-semester program that allows those who trained as Army combat medics, Navy corpsmen or Air Force medical technicians within the past 10 years to more easily earn an associate degree in nursing.

Some nursing programs are being made available to Texas high school students as well. As of 2020, Texas had seven vocational nursing programs, offered in partnership with local community, state or technical colleges and usually taught by nursing program faculty. Hudson High School in Lufkin, for example, offers its seniors the option of enrolling in a vocational nursing program that continues into postsecondary courses.

Online Options

Online courses often are less costly than campus classes, and innovative web-based technologies allow students to participate in classes in real time. Most online nursing programs in Texas don’t impose class credit minimums, so students can take as few or as many classes as they are able, proceeding at their own pace.

Texas State University’s St. David’s School of Nursing offers a Master of Science in Nursing program online. The program was named one of the best online nursing master’s programs by U.S. News and World Report for 2022. The program consists of online classes, recorded lectures, face-to-face instruction and skills practice two weekends each semester.

In 2017, the 85th Texas Legislature authorized the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to allow certain public community colleges to offer bachelor’s degrees in nursing — provided they meet all Texas Board of

Nursing requirements. By the end of fiscal 2021, 13 public community colleges had been approved to offer these nursing programs.

NURSING SHORTAGE REDUCTION PROGRAM

The Nursing Shortage Reduction Program (NSRP) was enacted by the 77th Texas Legislature in 2001 to increase the number of registered nurses in the state. The NSRP allows THECB to administer dedicated funds to Texas nursing education programs. In 2009, those programs gained the ability to use NSRP funds at the time of student enrollment rather than at graduation.

The NSRP program has been funded since 2004, with the 87th Legislature allocating \$18.8 million for the 2022-23 biennium. A prorated portion of the funds must be paid back, however, if certain targeted goals are not met.

Though the number of Texas nursing graduates has increased since the establishment of NSRP, a recent legislatively mandated evaluation of the program criticized the complexity of NSRP spending formulas and the uncertainty of funding, which makes it difficult for institutions to budget and hire permanent nursing faculty.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR NURSES?

Nurses have always played an essential role in patient care, but today, that role is even more important. The nursing profession continues to undergo changes as it adapts to the needs of modern health care, and Texas nurses have continued to maintain a high standard of education and professionalism. The need for nurses at all levels is growing in Texas, however. The state’s nursing community is trying to step up to meet the challenge, but as Thomas summed it up, “We have a long way to go.” **FN**

Nurses are required to hold a license to practice. Read more about occupational licenses in our article “Occupational Licensing in Texas” from the Fiscal Notes archives at [FiscalNotes.org/2019/nov/licensing.php](https://www.fiscalnotes.org/2019/nov/licensing.php).

COMPTROLLER'S BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE HOSTS TOWN HALLS

Among the many things the pandemic has revealed, one is Texans' reliance on quality broadband services that connect teachers to students, nurses to rural patients, farmers to markets and consumers to products. Access to reliable internet and broadband services contributes to a thriving workforce.

And yet lack of access to quality broadband threatens communities and their economic and educational prosperity. According to an Ernst & Young analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey five-year estimates for 2019, almost one in five U.S. households does not have internet of any kind, and 36 percent do not have wireline.

This lagging access disproportionately impacts poorer communities and communities of color. Rural Texans are especially hard hit. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2019, 25 percent of the nearly 247,000 farms in Texas had no internet access.

"The pandemic exposed a lot of cracks in the walls," Comptroller Glenn Hegar said recently. "I'm not overstating when I say not having access to quality broadband is like not having access to electricity. Parents, teachers, consumers and farmers all depend on these services to live and do business. I strongly believe that Texans deserve access and support."

Hegar kicked off his 2022 Texas Broadband Listening Tour with a visit to Prairie View A&M University. The full tour is taking place over two months, making stops in a dozen Texas communities. This "boots-on-the-ground" approach aims to collect raw, unfiltered feedback from Texans about their communities' state of broadband services.

"Just because a community has DSL doesn't mean it's functional — it might be delivering 2 megabits per second (Mbps)," one Harris County resident reported at an event. (DSL refers to digital subscriber lines that use modems to move data over landlines.)

The Texas Broadband Development Office (BDO), administered by the Comptroller's office, will compile feedback collected from the tour and use it in the state's first broadband plan, which BDO will publish later this year. The plan will outline barriers to broadband use, among other challenges.

The Texas Legislature also tasked the BDO with overseeing and awarding grants, loans and other financial incentives to internet service providers who expand access to broadband service in unserved and underserved areas.

The town hall-style tour is multimodal, and feedback is being collected from in-person breakout sessions and conversations. Texans who are not able to attend meetings may still provide feedback and are encouraged to do so via English and Spanish online surveys. PDF copies also are available to print and distribute to libraries, community groups and other organizations and individuals without online services. Feedback will be collected through May 5.

"My goal is really to meet Texans where they are and deeply listen to their experiences with broadband in Texas," Hegar said. "This is by far the best way for my staff to understand and help resolve this issue. I'm especially thankful for those who have taken the time to give us feedback, whether they participated in person or online." **FN**



Comptroller Hegar speaks to media at the tour stop in Fort Worth.



A business owner speaks at the tour stop in Amarillo.

Take a deeper dive into how the Comptroller's Broadband Development Office is working to resolve disparities in broadband access. Also check out the BDO toolkit to see specific ways communities can help close their digital divides by visiting Comptroller.Texas.Gov/programs/broadband/toolkit.



Monthly and Year-to-Date Collections: Percent Change from Previous Year

(IN THOUSANDS)

This table presents data on net state revenue collections by source. It includes most recent monthly collections, year-to-date (YTD) totals for the current fiscal year and a comparison of current YTD totals with those in the equivalent period of the previous fiscal year. These numbers were current at press time. For the most current data as well as downloadable files, visit comptroller.texas.gov/transparency.

Note: Texas' fiscal year begins on Sept. 1 and ends on Aug. 31.

1. Includes public utility gross receipts assessment, gas, electric and water utility tax and gas utility pipeline tax.

2. Includes taxes not separately listed, such as taxes on oil well services, coin-operated amusement machines, cement and combative sports admissions as well as refunds to employers of certain welfare recipients.

3. Includes various health-related service fees and rebates that were previously in "license, fees, fines and penalties" or in other non-tax revenue categories.

4. Gross sales less retailer commission and the smaller prizes paid by retailers.

Notes: Totals may not add due to rounding. Excludes local funds and deposits by certain semi-independent agencies. Includes certain state revenues that are deposited in the State Treasury but not appropriated.

TAX COLLECTIONS BY MAJOR TAX	MARCH 2022	YEAR TO DATE: Total	YEAR TO DATE: Change from Previous Year
SALES TAX	\$3,374,616	\$24,125,876	24.69%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	28.47%		
MOTOR VEHICLE SALES AND RENTAL TAXES	\$386,250	\$3,479,908	15.73%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	-17.26%		
MOTOR FUEL TAXES	\$276,216	\$2,161,482	8.34%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	18.97%		
FRANCHISE TAX	\$231,667	\$137,386	64.25%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	47.12%		
OIL PRODUCTION TAX	\$475,978	\$3,118,593	94.13%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	100.69%		
INSURANCE TAXES	\$672,433	\$1,797,056	13.60%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	7.60%		
CIGARETTE AND TOBACCO TAXES	\$103,975	\$684,596	-10.92%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	-3.90%		
NATURAL GAS PRODUCTION TAX	\$347,624	\$2,221,047	244.96%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	150.33%		
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES TAXES	\$123,471	\$894,905	47.34%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	26.82%		
HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX	\$50,161	\$344,956	64.78%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	55.30%		
UTILITY TAXES ¹	\$718	\$244,655	10.15%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	-89.60%		
OTHER TAXES ²	\$114,606	\$106,015	48.87%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	1184.71%		
TOTAL TAX COLLECTIONS	\$6,157,715	\$39,316,474	30.42%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	29.97%		

REVENUE BY SOURCE	MARCH 2022	YEAR TO DATE: Total	YEAR TO DATE: Change from Previous Year
TOTAL TAX COLLECTIONS	\$6,157,715	\$39,316,474	30.42%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	29.97%		
FEDERAL INCOME	\$7,375,913	\$39,972,005	10.94%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	21.31%		
LICENSES, FEES, FINES AND PENALTIES	\$473,218	\$3,856,719	3.64%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	-1.34%		
STATE HEALTH SERVICE FEES AND REBATES ³	\$632,724	\$4,647,501	61.70%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	120.86%		
NET LOTTERY PROCEEDS ⁴	\$271,279	\$1,735,521	-1.60%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	-5.66%		
LAND INCOME	\$310,783	\$2,185,465	119.19%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	80.00%		
INTEREST AND INVESTMENT INCOME	\$372,273	\$1,222,475	4.47%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	7.64%		
SETTLEMENTS OF CLAIMS	\$49,588	\$536,694	15.69%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	1,218.70%		
ESCHEATED ESTATES	\$10,741	\$107,542	-24.12%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	-15.98%		
SALES OF GOODS AND SERVICES	\$29,974	\$182,040	2.48%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	-10.06%		
OTHER REVENUE	\$106,181	\$1,297,721	-1.44%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	-17.19%		
TOTAL NET REVENUE	\$15,790,388	\$95,060,156	20.63%
<i>Percent Change from March 2021</i>	25.63%		



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Glenn Hegar
Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

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