



CITY OF HOUSTON

Office of the Mayor

Interoffice

Correspondence

To: Newly Elected Members of Houston City Council
From: Government Relations Team
Date: December 12th, 2023
Subject: New Member Orientation Script

Good afternoon, it is my pleasure to introduce you to the Mayor's Government Relations Team members and the role we serve within the City of Houston.

First, my name is Bill Kelly and I have served as the Director of the Mayor's Office of Government Relations since April of 2016.

Alexa Aragonese serves as Deputy Director, Ande Mattei is our Legislative Manager, and Desmond Taylor serves as Senior Communication & Policy Specialist.

The Government Relations (GR) Team is responsible for generating information for the Mayor, Council Members, and the public with regards to efforts made to partner with different levels of government to solve problems for Houstonians.

For both State and Federal matters, the GR Team serves as the lead for the City of Houston. Additionally, the team is responsible for managing the State and Federal lobby teams & contracts as well as special projects for the Mayor's Office.

We have provided you with a handout that highlights my team's work on State Advocacy, on Federal Advocacy, and our work in coordinating the State & Local Fiscal Relief Funding from the American Rescue Plan Act – also called ARPA funding.

I want to briefly describe our work in each of these areas and leave time for you to ask questions. So let's start off with State Advocacy:

As a general principle, the GR team is the point of contact, lead advocate, and the voice of the City of Houston at the state capitol. This is imperative as our state elected officials receive feedback on the city's position on fast-moving legislative matters.

State Advocacy involves the creation of Legislative Principles and Legislative Priorities before session, Legislative Analysis and Testimony during session, and generating a Legislative Report after session. Our team has worked hard to provide transparency and reports to City Council along with publishing this information in online reports.

Let's knock out these items quickly:

First, Legislative Principles

Legislative Principles serve as the guiding document that instruct the Government Relations staff and lobby team in Austin. They provide a general outline for areas of emphasis for the City of Houston.

- Draft language is presented before the City Council Committee on Budget & Fiscal Affairs in order to give City Council Members the opportunity for input before passing the principles in October.
- The Legislative Principles include reference to mental health funding and access as well as increased fiscal resources for education and higher education research.

After passed by City Council, the Legislative Principles are then posted online on the Government Relations website.

Second, Legislative Priorities

Legislative Priorities are the primary proactive part of the City of Houston's state legislative work. These priorities are a collection of bills that the City drafts, find authors for, provides background and testimony on, and advocates to pass.

Every department, division, and City Council Member is given the opportunity to submit bill ideas to the GR Team beginning in January of even numbered years and are due to the GR Team by the end of March.

After collecting the proposals, the GR Team works with the Ad Hoc Legislative Group composed of five City Council Members selected by the Mayor to review each of the proposals and decide if they should become part of the Legislative Priorities.

Meetings of this group occur in April/May/June and allow for each department or office to present their bill proposals to the members.

After screening the proposals, the Ad Hoc Legislative Group works with the GR Team to produce a list of Legislative Priorities for the Mayor to approve.

Once approved by the Mayor, the GR Team collaborates with the State Lobby Team and State Legislators to identify bill authors and finalize language.

The amount of proactive bills can vary from session to session, but no more than 10 is the number of proposals that the GR Team has capacity to effectively carry.

Legislative Analysis & Testimony

When a Texas House or Senate member files a bill, Ande Mattei begins organizing with city staff to analyze filed legislation and prepare for a briefing to the GR Team.

- These Legislative Liaisons are City of Houston employees who work with the GR Team's Legislative Manager as subject matter experts who analyze and testify on bills. This team was responsible analyzing almost 2,000 pieces of legislation and drafting well over 100 written testimonies in 2023.

During the bill filing period, these reviews are conducted weekly for face-to-face meetings with city staff to discuss the impact of legislation to Houston.

The analysis of bills impacting City services is the most important function of the GR Team and provides vital information for Houston, for other cities, & state elected officials.

The volume and severity of impacts make this a hugely important component of Houston's work, allowing concerns to be brought up in lobby meetings, TML meetings, and in meetings with legislators.

Legislative Report

The results of these efforts these efforts are summarized in our Legislative Report. Under my direction, the GR Team has produced an online Legislative Reports that summarizes the actions and results of the Legislative Session listed on our website.

The first part of every report details the Legislative Priorities, then categories of legislative areas worked on by the city's team. The Legislative Report also includes a link to the complete list of all written testimonies submitted by the City of Houston during the session.

Additionally, the Legislative Reports have also included a list of the Legislative Team members. The Legislative Team link includes the 4 members of the GR Team, all members of the city's Lobby Team, and all the Legislative Liaisons across the city.

At the conclusion of the Legislative Session, the GR Team makes a presentation to the City Council Committee that summarizes the Legislative Report which adds to our transparency efforts.

Next, an important piece of GR's work is Federal Advocacy

In 2023, GR Team released the first Federal Update, which details the federal advocacy efforts during the Biden Administration. In that update, the categories of federal action include the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Congressional Earmarks, and Advocacy.

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

Congress passed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL or also known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act - IIJA), a \$1.2 trillion bill investment in the nation's infrastructure and competitiveness in 2021.

The IIJA funds a number of programs that are state grants or formula funding, but GR Team's focus our efforts and associated advocacy on the Competitive Grants.

The GR Team works closely with Houston Public Works and the Planning Department to advocate for competitive grant projects. The successes for those awards are listed on the Federal Update and include:

- **\$21 million** RAISE Grant for Telephone Road
- **\$29 million** Safe Streets for All Grant for Bissonnet
- **\$500k** Reconnecting Communities Planning Grant for Gulfton
- **\$21 million** Low-No Emissions Program for 20 electric METRO buses
- **\$37 million** Railroad Crossing Elimination grant for Navigation & Commerce Street

The Federal Update also includes the context of competitive grant awards by listing the other major awards in Texas cities received in funding categories.

Congressional Earmarks

Congressional earmarks returned in 2021 and have been rebranded as “community project funding” and “congressional directed spending.”

The Government Relations Team is directly involved in working with City departments to identify earmark projects that are eligible under federal program guidelines and will appeal to specific members of the delegation. The GR team then coordinates the submittals and tracks the earmark through the appropriations process.

Please note that GR's coordination with city departments is essential to the City's success. Those familiar with federal grants understand the matching funds and other restrictions that come when receiving federal dollars. Without this coordination, projects would cost more and take longer.

City Council Members looking for projects **MUST** coordinate with the GR Team and operating departments in order to get the maximum return and ensure project viability.

When working with the members of Congress themselves, the GR Team offers a menu of project options. This outreach allows GR to offer city programs that address the specific concerns of each Congressional Member.

For Fiscal Year 2024, the results will not be known until Congress passes a new budget instead of monthly Continuing Resolutions (CRs).

Executive & Legislative Advocacy

The GR Team works with the White House and Congress to champion federal policies, funding, and programs on behalf of the City of Houston.

Whether it is the President or members of the cabinet, the GR Team takes the lead in working with the executive branch on testimony & programing with the White House Intergovernmental Affairs office.

Legislatively, the Mayor continues to work with members on both sides of the aisle to help all levels of government be more responsive to community needs. Some legislation is specific to Houston's experience, such as Rep. Lizzie Fletcher's HELP Act to reduce the timeline to complete mitigation projects. Others include Senator Cornyn's Safe Communities Act which applies national best practices like closing the "boyfriend loophole" for gun purchases.

Additionally, the GR Team serves as the lead in coordinating Congressional testimony as well as other communication from the city to the federal government. Working with the subject matter experts in various departments, the GR Team helps develop and submit how federal policies are best implemented for the City of Houston.

ARPA

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) is a 1.9 trillion-dollar measure designed to address the continued impact of COVID-19 on the economy, public health, state and local governments, individuals, and businesses.

- The City of Houston received a total of **607 million dollars** in State & Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (LFRF) funds across two years.

The GR Team is the City of Houston's lead on ARPA dollars, including coordination, compliance, and communication. Working with Legal and Finance on an ongoing basis, the GR Team has executed the Mayor's priorities in funding programs as well as developing and publishing quarterly reports for Treasury Department Compliance. Our next ARPA report will be published at the end of January 2024.

Both the "One Safe Houston" and "One Clean Houston" initiatives were funded, at least in part, with ARPA dollars, meaning the GR Team has been working with HPD and Solid Waste closely to ensure the success of these initiatives.

In addition to the Federal Update portion, the GR Team has developed a stand-alone ARPA web page and has worked with the Office of Police Reform to publish a One Safe Houston webpage as well.

There was a great deal of information in a very short time, but as we mentioned the GR Team has posted all of these reports online. We invite both you and your staff to check out our website for additional details and follow up, but would pause now to answer any questions you may have.