

Slew of new state laws take effect today

Changes affect ivermectin access, STAAR tests, bathrooms and more

BY ELEANOR DEARMAN  
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More than a dozen laws passed during a special legislative session earlier this year take effect on Dec. 4, governing things such as the STAAR test and access to medications. Here's what to know.

**Texas congressional redistricting**

Texas' new congressional map (House Bill 4) officially takes effect on Dec. 4, though whether it was drawn in a way that's racially discriminatory and whether it can be used for the 2026 midterm elections is under court review.

The U.S. Supreme Court is weighing whether the new congressional boundaries or old ones should be used for the election after the state appealed a lower court ruling that blocked the 2025 map from taking effect for 2026 elections. Justice Samuel Alito is temporarily allowing the new map to be used as the litigation continues.

Texans, the rest of the country and 2026 congressional prospects are watching to see which boundaries are ultimately in place for the midterms, especially since candidate filing for the March Democratic and Republican primaries closes Dec. 8.

**Stay tuned!**

On a related note: Most House Democrats broke quorum to try and block mid-decade congressional redistricting. Another new law, House Bill 18, limits the ability of lawmakers who break quorum to accept political contributions.

**Abortion medication access**

House Bill 7 allows a person to sue someone who manufactures, prescribes or distributes "abortion-inducing" drugs in a state where abortion access is already virtually banned. There are exceptions,

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'A WONDERFUL THING'

Families of Longview-area crime victims remember loved ones at Tree of Angels ceremony



Edna Nevill McKillop, third from left, is comforted by loved ones Tuesday during the Tree of Angels ceremony at the Gregg County Courthouse. McKillop's daughter, Sandy Smith, was murdered in 2018. (Jordan Green/Longview News-Journal Photo)

BY JORDAN GREEN  
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Sandy Smith was happy, incredibly happy, with her life. She was working as a Longview News-Journal carrier and had been accepted to Kilgore College. Her goal was to become a counselor to help troubled souls – troubled souls such as Rodrick Deshun Arkeith Elliott.

Elliott was 20 when police say he stabbed and killed Smith, 51, at her home on May 3, 2018. Though Elliott has not been tried and convicted, he confessed to his girlfriend that he killed a woman, according to police.

"She was gonna be a counselor to help people – like the man that killed her," Smith's mother, Edna Nevill McKillop, said Tuesday night as she stood in front of an adorned Christmas tree.

Once again, McKillop was joined by her family, friends and dozens of other East Texans who lost loved ones to violent crime. They gathered at the Gregg County Courthouse for the annual Tree of Angels ceremony, hosted by the District Attorney's Office.

One by one, families walked to the front of the 188th District Courtroom and hung orna-

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Sonya Sturns hangs an ornament honoring her brother, Garrett Neal, on Tuesday during the Tree of Angels ceremony at the Gregg County Courthouse. Neal was killed in 2015. (Jordan Green/Longview News-Journal Photo)

Hallsville alum, MLB pitcher honored with jersey hanging ceremony

BY LIA PORTILLO  
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HALLSVILLE – Hallsville High School students and staff gathered Monday to honor one of their own – and to hear that "dreams can come true, even from Hallsville, Texas."

Justin Slaten, a 2016 Hallsville graduate and Major League Baseball player, returned home to see his jersey hung inside the school's auxiliary gym. Slaten, who was born in Longview, is a relief pitcher for the Boston Red Sox.

Slaten is the first Bobcat to make it to the Major Leagues and is now a member of the Hallsville High School Athletics Hall of Fame.

Slaten's former coaches talked Monday about his time as a Bobcat and why recognizing his achievements matter to the community.

"These young kids get to see the results of hard work, determination, goal-setting," said Scott Mitchell, Slaten's former baseball coach who now coaches golf at Hallsville. "They get to see that dreams can come true, even from Hallsville, Texas – a small town. And I think that's important for these young men and young ladies to see that it doesn't matter where you're from, that if you dedicate yourself and you work hard, that dreams can come true."

Mitchell said he is proud to have coached Slaten and to see how he has grown as an athlete over the years.

Slaten's journey to the Major Leagues wasn't linear, but his dream of getting there always guided him.

"I was never the kid growing up through junior high going into high school that was looked at as like a star athlete," Slaten said. "I mean, to be honest with you, I was basically a junior on the (junior varsity) baseball team. I didn't really get a good chance to play varsity

Major League Baseball player Justin Slaten is seen Monday with his family during a jersey hanging ceremony at Hallsville High School. (Lia Portillo/Marshall News Messenger)



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