

CITY | STATE

BILLS

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Commission on Law Enforcement and State Board of Education to develop a mandatory training program examining implicit biases, common stereotypes and cultural assumptions held by officers.

A bill from Rep. James Talarico, D-Round Rock, would prevent law enforcement from participating in reality television shows while acting in the line of duty. The bill is likely related to the death of Javier Ambler, an Austin-area resident who was killed last year during a police chase with Williamson County sheriff's deputies. That incident was filmed by the reality show "Live PD," prompting renewed outrage and investigation this summer.

The push for more control over law enforcement comes as Republican officials have widely condemned "defund the police" movements. For months, Gov. Greg Abbott and other top leaders have promoted "Back the Blue" pledges and promised matching legislation.

"All these folks that believe that they have a 'gotcha' moment on either side are going to have to explain themselves," said Charley Wilkison, the executive director of CLEAT, one of the largest law enforcement unions in the state. "Our unions are going to be focused on the distant future and making sure our police officers are highly qualified."

Thousands of bills will be filed in the coming weeks. Just a fraction of those bills will ever make it to Gov. Greg Abbott's desk, but the proposals also signal priorities for lawmakers.

A number of bills attempt to root out discriminatory practices in schools and workplaces. House Bill 38, by Rep. Ron Reynolds, D-Missouri City and its companion bill Senate Bill 77, by state Sen. Boris Miles, seek to put an end to discrimination in schools and workplaces based on hair grooming policy. Both follow national scrutiny on Texas' unevenly-enforced dress codes in particular, after a Houston-area incident last year that resulted in two boys from Barbers Hill being suspended because their hairstyles violated grooming codes.

If enacted, the bills would prohibit schools, higher education institutions and employers from adopting or enforcing dress codes that "discriminate against a hair texture or protective hairstyle commonly or historically associated with race." Both bills specifically point to "braids, locks, and twists."

Rep. Shawn Thierry, a Houston Democrat, filed two bills focusing on cultural competency in the medical field. They would require both physicians seeking license renewals and medical school students to undergo cultural competency and implicit bias training before they practice.

"Because many individuals are not consciously or intentionally providing disparate treatments to people of color, the need for implicit bias and cultural competency training is critical to ensure that medical professionals have the skills to provide equitable and appropriate care to all their patients," Thierry said in a statement. "Improving race relations and ending the COVID-19 pandemic should be on the list of our highest priorities for this unique legislative session."

At least two bills call for the removal of "Confederate Heroes Day" as a state holiday. The attempt is not new - Rep. Jarvis Johnson, a Houston Democrat, unsuccessfully tried to abolish the holiday in 2019. That bill never left the House State Affairs Committee.

Dancing at the beat of light



Annie Mulligan / Contributor

Dancers from Infused Performing Arts perform for Diwali, the Hindu festival of light, at the Larkspur at Shadow Creek apartment complex in Pearland on Saturday.

MATTRESS

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tion pandemic-safe, Hernandez said, considering some families didn't exit their vehicles before there was the threat of a virus. People were required to

wear a face covering while the organization positioned some sanitation stations and made the pick-up drive-thru.

Saturday's distribution was the last one of this year, but the need for beds is far from diminished. Hernandez said the families who re-

ceived beds applied for them in June or earlier. Before the pandemic, the waiting time for a family to receive beds after approval stretched about 60 days. Currently the charity has roughly a three-month waiting period. "Rain or shine, we are

here," Hernandez said. "It's about less phone calls I get that are: 'My child's sleeping on the floor.'"

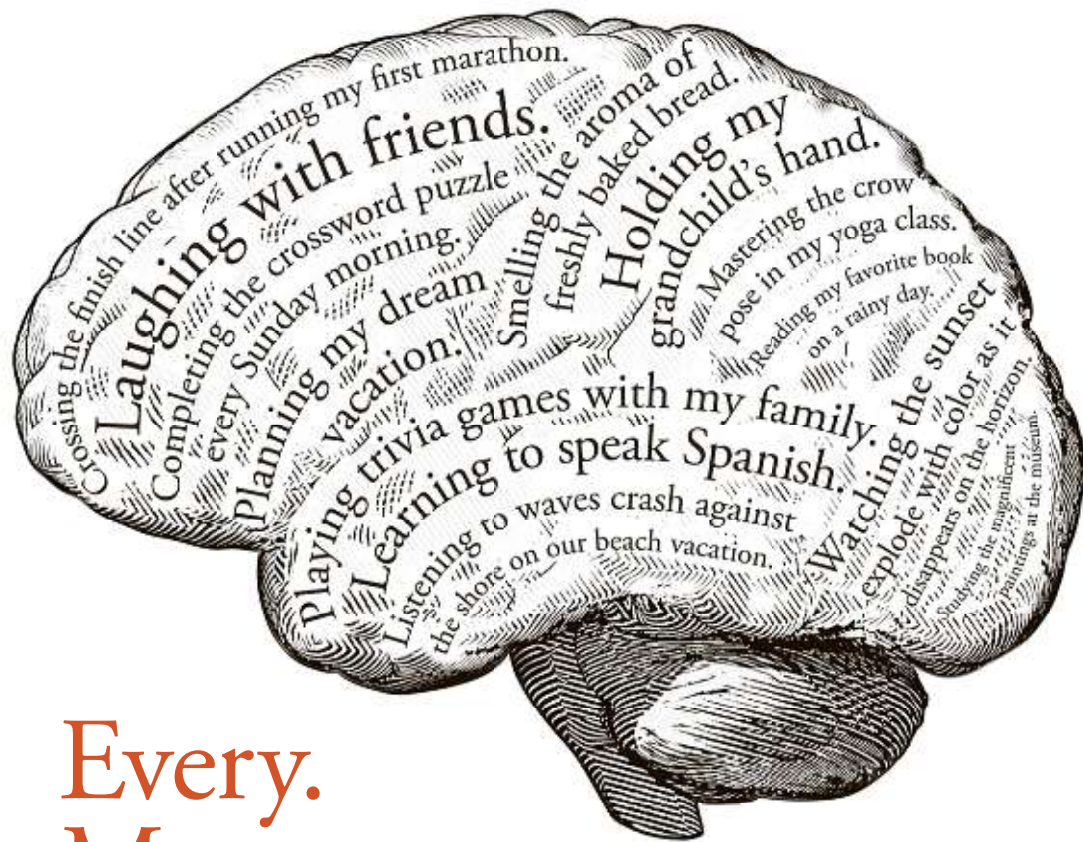
Michelle Fisher, 32, was picking up beds that her children very much needed, she said. Her 9-year-old had been sleeping on a pull-out bed.

"It's not comfy at all," Fisher said.

But that was to change Saturday.

"I'm pretty blessed to get this before Christmas," she said. "Especially this year."

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