



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Legislature Approves Hunter's Beach Safety Measures

(AUSTIN) – Two legislative proposals that State Rep. Todd Hunter authored to improve beach safety have been passed by the Legislature and are on their way to Gov. Greg Abbott for his signature.

House Bill 3807, the Je'Sani Smith Act, would require cities, counties, and the Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to add signs and lifeguards in certain areas to improve the safety of public beaches. The city, county, or TPWD would have to provide occupied lifeguard towers or mobile lifeguard units on each side of each pier, jetty, or other structure that protruded into the Gulf of Mexico, was within its corporate boundaries, on a certain public beach, or within a state park. The requirement would be in place from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

House Concurrent Resolution 46 designates April as Beach Safety and Rip Current Awareness Month in order to raise awareness of the potential dangers of swimming in the ocean. The resolution calls for a public awareness campaign focused on beach safety each April.

"Our community worked in a collaborative way to support these bills," Rep. Hunter said. "Greater public awareness, along with more lifeguards and more signs, will make a big difference in helping Texans and visitors from other states stay safe on our beaches. The bills on their way to Governor Abbott will make the Coastal Bend even more attractive as a tourist destination and, most importantly, they could help save lives."

Rip currents have an average speed of around one to two feet per second, but some can be as fast as eight feet per second. Many swimmers are caught off guard by the sensation of being pulled out to sea and react by attempting to swim directly to shore, putting themselves at risk of exhaustion and drowning. Signs that a rip current may be present include a break in the wave pattern, a visible channel of choppy, churning water, a line of foam or debris moving seaward, and a difference in the color of water.

In April 2019, 18-year-old Je'Sani Smith was swept away by a rip current at Whitecap Beach in Corpus Christi. Although he was a great athlete and swimmer, the rip current was stronger. In Je'Sani's memory, his parents, Kiwana and Terry Denson, created the Je'Sani Smith Foundation to carry their son's legacy and help spread the message about the dangers of coastal hazards in hopes to save lives. The foundation is designed to provide education, awareness, and water skills training on beach safety, seaward-flowing water currents, and other coastal hazards.

"I am especially grateful to Je'Sani's parents and the Je'Sani Smith Foundation for helping us build the support needed to pass these bills," Rep. Hunter said. "Our work on these issues will help prevent future tragedies so Texans can fully and safely enjoy our beaches."

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About Rep. Todd Hunter

Todd Hunter is the state representative for Texas House District 32 in Nueces County. He is the Chairman of the House Redistricting Committee. He is also a member of the State Affairs Committee, which deals with significant matters of state policy, ranging from the administration of the state government to cybersecurity, and he sits on the International Relations & Economic Development Committee.

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