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County to buy multi-patient ambulance

By Catherine Dominguez
STAFF WRITER

Montgomery County commissioners on Wednesday agreed to purchase a \$1.25 million ambulance that can hold up to 21 patients, prompted by a fire last month that forced the evacuation of several residents at a Willis nursing and rehabilitation home.

No one was injured in the fire, but Jason Millsaps, executive director of the county's Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, said that in-

cident forced emergency officials to be better prepared to deal with public health emergencies and disaster response.

Commissioners approved the purchase in a 4-1 vote and will use money from the American Rescue Plan Act. Precinct 2 Commissioner Charlie Riley, who opposed the purchase, said he would like to gather more information.

"It's a very versatile vehicle to add to the fleet of emergency medical equipment in the county," Millsaps said, adding that the 500-foot unit can be recon-



Fort Bend County

Montgomery County is purchasing a multi-patient ambulance, similar to the one pictured, for disaster response.

figured to hold patients on stretchers.

The unit will be only the fifth

of its kind in the region, including Houston, Atascocita, Fort Bend County and a private-run

unit in the Beaumont area, he said.

Millsaps explained the unit would have been helpful when Montgomery ESD 1 was dispatched July 13 to a small fire at the Willis Nursing & Rehabilitation Center, 3000 N. Danville, where several residents needed to be evacuated. The fire was quickly extinguished and no one was injured.

"The plan was to evacuate about nine COVID patients so we ordered the Atascocita Am Bus to the scene and we waited and

County continues on A3



Jerry Lara/Staff photographer

Love Heals Youth Founder and CEO Rebecca Smith-Nash, right, surprises Utopia ISD counselor Ashleigh Kay with supplies for the district's therapy room Monday in Utopia, Texas.

Love Heals

Conroe nonprofit delivers therapy tools, 650 meals

By Sondra Hernandez
STAFF WRITER

At Utopia ISD, school counselor Ashleigh Kay has seen the impact the massacre at nearby Uvalde has had on her stu-

dent. And while security concerns have been addressed, she said, mental health needs have not.

"We've had zero counseling assistance," Kay said. "I feel like the mental health needs

are just as important as the security aspect."

That's where the Conroe-based nonprofit Love Heals Youth has stepped in to help.

A group of 16 Montgomery County residents, led by group founder Rebecca Smith-Nash,

traveled to the Uvalde area Monday and delivered therapy kits and items for the therapy room at Utopia ISD.

Kay explained that the two communities are closely intertwined with staff and students

Love Heals continues on A3

Abortion ban now in effect

By Cayla Harris
AUSTIN BUREAU

Texas' new law prohibiting all abortions from the moment of fertilization, except if the mother's life is at risk, took effect Thursday.

Doctors now face life in prison and at least \$100,000 in penalties if they perform the procedure. They could also lose their medical licenses.

The state's GOP-led Legislature passed the "trigger ban" last year, allowing the state to almost immediately outlaw abortions if the U.S. Supreme Court overturned federal abortion protections granted in the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision. The high court did so in late June, allowing every state to implement its own abortion rules.

MORE INSIDE

What to know as "trigger ban" on abortion takes effect. Page A3

Republicans have celebrated the new law as a win for life in a state that once had 50,000 abortions a year. But Democrats, who are hoping abortion rights will give them momentum in the November elections, have characterized the measure as an attack on a person's right to make their own medical decisions.

The trigger ban provides no exceptions for rape, incest or severe fetal abnormality. Its only exemptions cover pregnancies that risk death or "substantial impairment of a major bodily function."

"We have lost total control over our own bodies — even victims of rape or incest, no matter how young," Rochelle Garza, the

Abortion continues on A3

Across town or country, pros offer tips for a smooth move

By Diane Cowen
STAFF WRITER

We really shouldn't be surprised that Houstonians are pack rats, living large and filling our big homes with more and more stuff.

Bellhop, the moving company that began 11 years ago to help college students move in and out of dorms and now operates in 31 states, evaluated 55,000 moves last year and determined — based on the quantity of stuff and amount of time it took to pack,

move and unpack — that Houston has the worst pack rats.

Among Houston customers, 41 percent needed two or more trucks and it took an average of 897 minutes — almost 15 hours — to move them. Orlando placed second, and San Antonio came in third.

Bill Chase, Bellhop's chief marketing officer, said that most of its customers are people moving across town, and the average move will fill a 26-foot truck.

We asked Chase and two professional organizers — Lisa Gies-

ler of Lisagiesler.com and Gail Goddard, the Clutter Fairy — how to make your next move simpler and less expensive. Here's their advice:

1. Planning and preparation

The longer you've been in your home, the more stuff you'll have and the more time you will need to plan, purge and pack. Know when your heavy trash pickup day is, or contact a thrift store for a pickup if you're not giving items to family or friends or sell-

Moving continues on A6



Getty Images

Bubble wrap, duct tape and sturdy cardboard boxes ensure your belongings arrive unbroken.

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ABORTION

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Democratic candidate for attorney general, declared in an advertisement that begins airing Thursday. “We need change in Texas.”

The new ban is an escalation of the so-called heartbeat bill that the Legislature approved last year. That measure, which now co-exists alongside the trigger law, allows private citizens to sue anyone who helps a pregnant person obtain an abortion after fetal cardiac activity is detected.

That usually happens around six weeks of pregnancy, when many Texans do not yet know they are pregnant.

The heartbeat bill imposes civil penalties of at least \$10,000. The trigger ban includes both criminal and civil penalties, allowing Attorney General Ken Paxton to pursue no less than \$100,000 in damages per offense.

Performing an abortion is now a first-degree felony if the procedure is successful. That’s a class of crimes that includes capital murder and aggravated sexual assault, and offenders could receive life in prison.

It’s a second-degree felony — in the same realm of manslaughter and arson — if the fetus lives. Those offenses carry penalties of up to 20 years in jail.

Texans seeking abortions must travel out of state, or potentially out of the country, if they want to obtain the procedure. That’s been the case in Texas since the Supreme Court overturned Roe, as abortion clinics — already offering limited services under the heartbeat bill — feared legal repercussions and closed their doors.

But even prior to the ruling, pregnant Texans who

passed the six-week mark were traveling to states that still offered abortions. A March study found that many women still accessed the procedure by leaving Texas or ordering abortion pills online.

Working-class Texans will be the most affected by the bans, said Jon Taylor, a political science professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Some may even try to self-induce an abortion, a dangerous endeavor that could result in injury or death.

“Lower-income, working pregnant people are much more likely to be forced to carry their child to term than someone with greater means who could just fly and take time off to go out of state,” he said. “It’s creating an income disparity and a class disparity in that regard.”

Democrats running for statewide office are marking the implementation of the trigger law Thursday with a series of online attacks and media hits, blasting the state’s GOP leaders who made the ban possible.

Garza co-starred in her advertisement with Mike Collier, the Democrat challenging Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick. In the video, he accused Patrick and Paxton of leading a “war on our personal freedoms in Texas.”

In a release issued after the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, Gov. Greg Abbott called Texas a “pro-life state” that protects the “sanctity of life.”

“Texas will always fight for the innocent unborn, and I will continue working with the Texas Legislature and all Texans to save every child from the ravaging of abortion and help our expectant mothers in need,” he said.

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Q&A

By **Jeremy Blackman**
STAFF WRITER

Abortion access has been out of reach for most Texans over the past 12 months, and all but nonexistent since June, when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade. But starting Thursday, the cost for violating those rules becomes even stiffer as a new law goes into effect.

Triggered by the high court’s decision, the law creates debilitating civil and criminal penalties and outlaws nearly all abortions starting from conception, with only narrow exceptions for pregnant people at risk of dying or suffering “substantial impairment.” Pregnancies that result from rape or incest, or that show severe fetal abnormalities, are not exempted.

Since Texas already has a number of abortion bans and restrictions on the books, with some of them overlapping, here are answers to a few key questions about the law.

Q: How is the new law different from pre-Roe bans?

A: Texas outlawed abortion going as far back as the 1850s. That statute was recoded in 1925 and remained in place even after the Supreme Court established the right to abortion in the Roe decision. It became effective again when the court reversed the Roe decision this summer, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*.

Given that, the trigger ban won’t likely have much impact on elective

abortions; most clinics have already shut down their abortion operations or turned their focus to other health services.

But Seema Mohapatra, a professor at the Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law, said the law could create new problems for people with wanted pregnancies, by making it tougher for hospitals and other providers to intervene if they experience a potentially life-threatening complication.

“The pre-Roe bans had a kind of more nominal penalty, not the same kind of really, really restrictive penalties that would make a physician or hospital second-guess whether a person’s life is really in danger,” Mohapatra said.

People who violate the trigger law can be charged with felony crimes that include sentences of up to life in prison, plus the loss of their medical licenses. The law also enables the attorney general to seek up to \$100,000 in civil damages per procedure.

Q: What happens to the six-week abortion ban enacted last fall?

A: Last year, Texas Republicans passed the country’s first effective six-week abortion ban, known as Senate Bill 8, which prohibits abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detected, at around six weeks of pregnancy.

That law enables private citizens to sue doctors and anyone else who helps a person access the procedure, and makes it financially difficult for providers to defend themselves in

court.

With the trigger law taking effect, SB 8 now becomes a kind of backstop for some counties where prosecutors have vowed not to bring charges against abortion providers. That’s because even if a provider escapes criminal penalties, they would still be subject to potentially endless citizen-led lawsuits.

And since the pre-Roe bans also exist, prosecutors who oppose abortion access can basically pick which criminal statutes under which they want to indict a provider. The 1925 law carries a much lower punishment of two to five years in prison.

“Texas is one of the most complicated landscapes because there were already a lot of pre-Roe bans,” Mohapatra said.

Q: What can abortion funds do to help Texans access the procedure?

A: The short answer: We don’t know. Abortion funds in Texas say they stopped paying for abortion travel and procedures in states where it is legal, given indications from Attorney General Ken Paxton that his office would consider that a crime after the *Dobbs* decision in June.

The confusion is over whether an abortion fund can be charged under Texas criminal law if they help a Texan obtain an abortion in another state where the procedure is still legal. New Mexico is the only neighboring state where abortion is still protected.

Several of the funds

sued Paxton’s office this week in federal court, seeking the ability to restart their financial assistance programs. Anything less, they said, would be a violation of their rights to free speech and travel.

“Abortion access is critical,” the groups wrote in a pleading. Texas abortion funds “all want to resume their prior activities as permitted by the United States Constitution.”

But this lawsuit comes after a string of legal losses for abortion rights groups since SB 8 took effect one year ago, and some Republican leaders have made clear they intend to go after providers and others who help Texans obtain out-of-state abortions.

“This is the first time we’re going to see who the state actually goes after,” Mohapatra said. “There’s a lot of justified suspicion about how the state is going to enforce this.”

She reiterated that, more than anything, these changes are likely to impact maternity care and emergency care for pregnant Texans.

“Since SB 8, we have seen a lot of reports of people who are having miscarriages, people that have been really suffering health consequences,” Mohapatra said. “That’s before we even had these criminal penalties and these huge civil monetary penalties and the risk of loss of license, so we can just imagine that it’s going to be worse.”

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COUNTY

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waited until the decision was made that OEM and fire could handle the situation on our own,” Millsaps said. “Sitting there waiting for an apparatus to come from another jurisdiction really irked me.”

Millsaps said the Montgomery County Hospital District will staff the ambulance when needed and

the county has at least eight drivers licensed to drive the unit.

“This wouldn’t sit idle,” Millsaps said. “There are thousands of reasons to get this out and used.”

Randy Johnson, CEO of the hospital district, said the ambulance would be critical in many situations including mass casualties, natural disasters and events like the Hermann Memorial Ironman event in The Woodlands.

“There are lots of events where they are not emergency events but are an urgent event,” Johnson said, explaining that the unit would be used instead of numerous ambulances. “The driver would bring the unit out to the event and then we would coordinate care on scene.”

Millsaps said the ambulance is expected to be delivered by April 1.

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LOVE HEALS

From page A1

from Utopia having ties to Uvalde and vice versa.

One big difference is the 1A UIL classified Utopia ISD has not received the outpouring of resources that Uvalde has since the shooting.

“These are materials I can’t afford to purchase on my budget,” said Kay. “These items are considered a luxury but they’re not really a luxury because these are all really important tools used to counsel kids.”

Nash brought them tactile items, art pieces, soothing lamps, music and noise makers, essential oils and diffusers.

“These are therapeutic items for children to help them express feelings and develop a vocabulary for their emotions that they experience,” said Nash, whose group provides therapeutic services to foster youths in group homes. “This will better help them process and talk about events that they go through and start learning how to cope with their anxiety or depression.”

Janeen McSwain was among those who took the trip. The group first went to Robb Elementary, where 19 students and two teachers were killed on May 24. The school is boarded up.

“It just breaks my heart,” said McSwain, the executive director of the Montgomery County Veteran’s Memorial Commission.

Nash organized a fundraiser in June in Montgomery County to support the Uvalde community, collecting nearly \$35,000.

She worked with friend and Texas Ranger Wesley Doolittle, who has been close to the tragedy in Uvalde.

While there was support coming in from across the country and \$11 million had been raised for the community, Doolittle wanted to do something for Uvalde on a more personal level and chose to address the mental health services, Nash

said.

The group left Nash’s house in Montgomery before dawn Monday and arrived at Oasis Outback BBQ & Grill in Uvalde around 11 a.m. to pick up 650 meals to deliver to the Uvalde fire department, police department, city employees and Uvalde Memorial Hospital with the nonprofit Love Heals Youth footing the bill.

“Everyone we visited was so grateful, not just for us bringing food, but that we would take the time away and drive five hours to be with them,” Nash said. “Knowing that people are willing to pause their day to come out and support them is what will help them recover and get through this incredibly horrible time.”

Monday was filled with many emotions, she said.

“You felt inspired and connected but at the same time heavy and sad,” she said as they visited with the people of Uvalde.

Nash said she’d like to set up a network of virtual therapy for the people of Uvalde. But in the meantime, she is focusing her efforts on putting together therapy kits for the schools around Uvalde.

Kay said Love Heals Youth’s impact will be far reaching in the Utopia and Uvalde communities. Utopia ISD started school Aug. 18. Uvalde students will return to school on Sept. 6

“Not only will I use these materials, I also plan to share with the special education department as well. The head of the department came in last night and said ‘Oh you have a weighted blanket. I’ve always wanted one of these for one of my students. I’ve had to use one from home.’” she said. “This has blessed so many kids in so many ways.”

Visit <https://lovehealsyouth.com/> or <https://counselingcentermc.com/> for more about Love Heals Youth or the Counseling Center of Montgomery County.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING ON TAX INCREASE

A tax rate of \$0.2712 per \$100 valuation has been proposed by the governing body of City of Woodbranch Village.

PROPOSED TAX RATE	\$0.2712 per \$100
NO-NEW-REVENUE TAX RATE	\$0.2601 per \$100
VOTER-APPROVAL TAX RATE	\$0.2712 per \$100

The no-new-revenue tax rate is the tax rate for the 2022 tax year that will raise the same amount of property tax revenue for City of Woodbranch Village from the same properties in both the 2021 tax year and the 2022 tax year.

The voter-approval rate is the highest tax rate that City of Woodbranch Village may adopt without holding an election to seek voter approval of the rate.

The proposed tax rate is greater than the no-new-revenue tax rate. This means that City of Woodbranch Village is proposing to increase property taxes for the 2022 tax year.

A PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED TAX RATE WILL BE HELD ON September 1, 2022 AT 7:00 PM AT 58A Woodbranch Dr., New Caney TX 77357.

The proposed tax rate is not greater than the voter-approval tax rate. As a result, City of Woodbranch Village is not required to hold an election at which voters may accept or reject the proposed tax rate. However, you may express your support for or opposition to the proposed tax rate by contacting the members of the City Council of City of Woodbranch Village at their offices or by attending the public hearing mentioned above.

YOUR TAXES OWED UNDER ANY OF THE RATES MENTIONED ABOVE CAN BE CALCULATED AS FOLLOWS:

Property tax amount = (tax rate) x (taxable value of your property) / 100		
FOR the proposal:	Scottie Pouncey	Trisha Marie Cranney
	Mark Kroll	Nancy Mulhern
	Carey Porter	
AGAINST the proposal:	None	
PRESENT and not voting:	None	
ABSENT:	Mayor Mike Tyson	

Visit [Texas.gov/PropertyTaxes](https://www.texas.gov/PropertyTaxes) to find a link to your local property tax database on which you can easily access information regarding your property taxes, including information about proposed tax rates and scheduled public hearings of each entity that taxes your property.

The 86th Texas Legislature modified the manner in which the voter-approval tax rate is calculated to limit the rate of growth of property taxes in the state.

The following table compares the taxes imposed on the average residence homestead by City of Woodbranch Village last year to the taxes proposed to be imposed on the average residence homestead by City of Woodbranch Village this year.

	2021	2022	Change
Total tax rate (per \$100 of value)	\$0.3067	\$0.2712	decrease of -0.0355, or -11.57%
Average homestead taxable value	\$178,032	\$205,378	increase of 27,346, or 15.36%
Tax on average homestead	\$546.02	\$556.99	increase of 10.97, or 2.01%
Total tax levy on all properties	\$297,811	\$325,550	increase of 27,739, or 9.31%

For assistance with tax calculations, please contact the tax assessor for City of Woodbranch Village at 936.538.8124 or tammy.mcrae@mctx.org, or visit www.mocotaxes.org for more information.