

COMMISSION SHIFT >>>>>>ACTION

**Testimony on HB 2766 relating to the plugging of certain inactive wells subject to the jurisdiction of the Railroad Commission of Texas
Provided by Virginia Palacios
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Before the House Energy Resources Committee
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My name is Virginia Palacios, I'm the ninth generation of my family to be born in Webb County and I'm a fourth generation land and mineral owner. Ranches come with a lot of time-consuming maintenance, and when I was growing up we lived by the maxim "do it right the first time."

I live on my ranch in Webb County full-time, and I rely on a 560-foot deep water well for all my needs. In November 2023, I replaced the submersible pump on my water well. That pump went out a few weeks ago, and I learned from talking to my neighbors, county commissioner, and water well service companies in the area that the drought and water withdrawals for oil and gas use have been causing a lot of ranchers in the area to have to drop their pumps deeper. Water is becoming more scarce in Texas, and it's happening quickly.

On Saturday when the pump installer came out to install a new pump, part of that process involved pulling the pipe out of the well. Several joints of pipe came out of my water well coated with oil. That was not the case in 2023. Now, only about one hundred feet of water sits between my submersible pump and an oil slick that is now contaminating the shallow groundwater. I'm worried about drinking the water that comes out of this well, and of potential long term health-effects that could come from bathing in it. I don't yet know the cause of this contamination, but I do know that the legislature has tools available to prevent more groundwater

contamination across the state. Some of those tools are present in HB 2766, but the legislature must take a serious stance to strengthen the bill so that we can do it right the first time.

Current inactive well plugging extensions can go on forever, and this bill doesn't do enough to set a true limit to well plugging extensions because it allows plugging extensions for operators that have reactivated wells in the past - nevermind their intentions to reactivate the old wells this bill will apply to.

Importantly, this bill extends the age at which wells would have to be tested for mechanical integrity issues. A rancher from Crockett County, Texas relayed to me that their groundwater was polluted by a 50-year-old oil well-turned saltwater disposal well. The operator did not test the well as frequently as they should have, but they were still granted authority to continue operating by the RRC. Eventually a new operator took over and plugged the well, and they found the tubing was corroded and eaten away like swiss cheese.

Please take Texas' water crisis seriously - prioritize requests from landowners who have been stewarding Texas' water for multiple generations. We all need clean water to drink. Please take out the loopholes in this bill, and require fluid and pressure testing more frequently. Do it right the first time.