

The Texas Bet

How Builders and Lawmakers Backed a Better Path to Energy Codes, and Results Exceeded Every Projection

What happens when the government establishes an energy performance goal but allows builders to determine the most cost-effective way to achieve it? Texas decided to find out. In 2021, House Bill 3215 gave builders a new option. Rather than following a one-size-fits-all list of construction requirements, builders could demonstrate equivalent or better energy performance with a verified HERS® Index score. The results delivered more energy-efficient homes, greater builder participation, and greater flexibility for builders to manage construction costs.

The legislation wasn't a shot in the dark. It was backed by every Home Builders Association (HBA) in Texas after years of advocating for a verified, performance-based alternative to prescriptive energy codes. Supporters believed that if builders were given a choice, the homebuyers would benefit. They were right. Adoption exceeded expectations, demonstrating that flexibility and independent verification can work together to improve energy performance while helping builders manage construction costs.

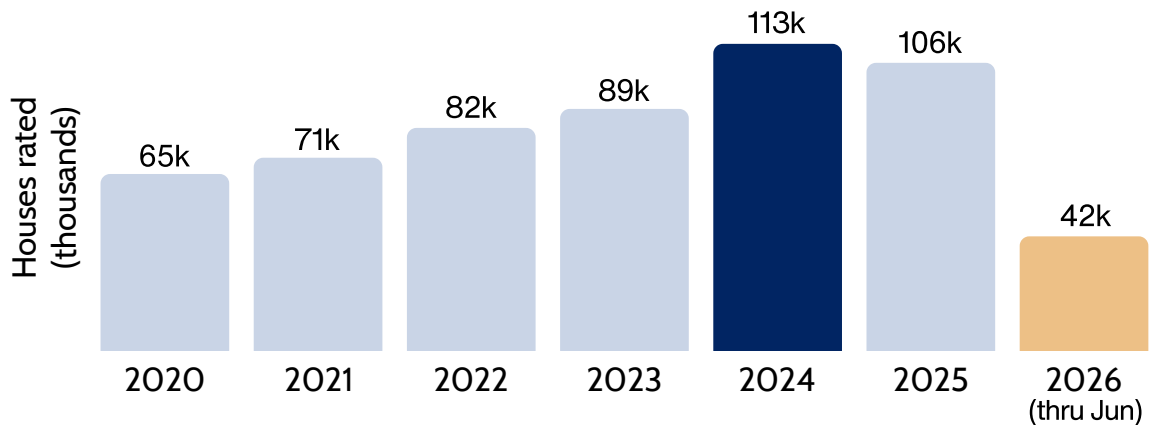
A Bill Built on Industry Expertise, Not Guesswork

House Bill 3215 gave Texas builders a new option: instead of following the state's standard construction code line by line, they could demonstrate compliance by meeting a verified HERS Index performance target, regardless of which version of the energy code their local jurisdiction had adopted. The law was designed to remain in effect for a full decade, providing builders with the certainty to plan designs and purchasing decisions years in advance and better manage construction costs.

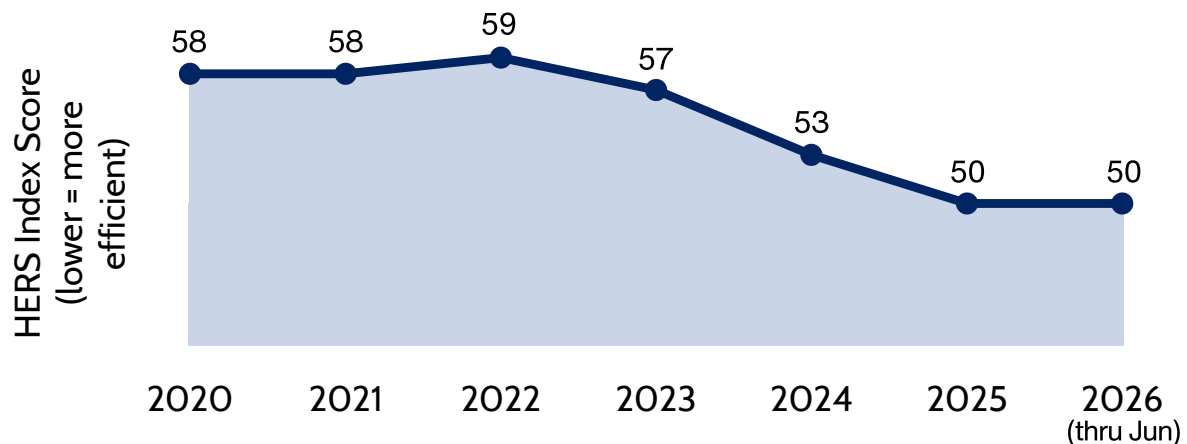
Builder associations that helped shape the bill's development knew what they were supporting. Advancing building code language through the legislature is rarely simple—competing interests and technical complexity make it difficult to translate industry expertise into workable statute—but HB 3215 struck a balance that held up in practice. Energy rating professionals who worked alongside builders on the new pathway saw the same thing: a genuinely rigorous benchmark that still gave builders far more flexibility than the prescriptive code it replaced.

Adoption and Performance That Outpaced Expectations

HERS® Ratings Issued In Texas, by Year



Median HERS Index Score in Texas, by Year



*The 2026 bar reflects partial-year data only — ratings issued through June 24, 2026, not a full year — so it is not directly comparable to prior full-year totals.

Builders embraced the new compliance pathway quickly. The number of homes receiving a HERS® rating in Texas grew from approximately 65,000 in 2020 to a peak of nearly 113,000 in 2024. Energy performance improved alongside that growth: the median HERS Index declined from 58 in 2020 to 53 in 2024 and continued to decline to 50 in 2025—a faster and more significant improvement than is typically achieved through prescriptive code change alone. This success was built on a program that was already well established: since 2013, more than 843,000 Texas homes have received a HERS rating, including over 309,000 ENERGY STAR-certified homes and more than 12,000 DOE Zero Energy Ready Homes.

The benefits are reflected directly in Texans' utility bills. Compared to homes built using the prescriptive energy code, homes rated under this performance pathway in 2024 are estimated to save homeowners more than \$58 million in annual energy costs—while reducing electricity consumption by more than 325 million kilowatt-hours and natural gas use by 4.4 million therms. The resulting emission reductions are equivalent to removing more than 29,000 cars from the road. Since 2013, HERS Rated homes in Texas are estimated to deliver more than \$620 million in annual energy savings, built by a network of more than 1,000 builders and 70-plus certified rating companies.

A Win for Builders and Buyers Alike

A HERS Index is more than a calculated score. It is backed by standardized inspections and testing, independent verification, quality assurance, and a national registry.

For Builders

Predictability: HERS Index targets are published years in advance and remain in place for a decade, giving builders the certainty to plan home designs, material selections, and labor costs without having to adjust to changing code cycles.

Flexibility: A HERS Index target can be achieved using the most cost-effective combination of building materials, products, and energy-efficiency improvements for a home's design, location, and climate, rather than requiring every prescriptive measure regardless of cost.

Access to incentives: A verified HERS Index score may qualify homes for the Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac green mortgage-backed securities programs and utility rebates. These benefits are available only after a home's energy performance is independently verified.

A marketing advantage: A HERS Rating provides an independently verified measure of a home's energy performance, enabling builders to differentiate their homes in the marketplace, demonstrate value to buyers, and support sustainability reporting.

For Buyers

Lower monthly utility bills: A lower HERS Index score indicates a home was built to waste less energy, resulting in lower heating, cooling, and electricity costs.

A more comfortable home: The same improvements that contribute to a lower HERS Index score — such as sealing air leaks and tightening ductwork — help reduce drafts and maintain more consistent temperatures throughout the home. Each HERS Rating includes standardized inspections and testing performed by a certified RESNET® HERS® Rater, subject to oversight and quality-assurance requirements.

Real transparency: Instead of relying on a builder's claim about a home's energy performance, homebuyers receive an independently verified HERS Index score—providing a trusted, standardized measure of efficiency, much like a vehicle's fuel economy rating. The rating is recorded in the RESNET® National Registry.

Texas HERS Ratings by Major Market (Cumulative, 2013–2025)

Metro Area	HERS® Ratings
Houston	309,927
Dallas-Fort Worth	240,558
San Antonio	128,598
Austin	106,884

Success in Texas extends well beyond the state's major metropolitan areas. HERS Ratings are now common in dozens of smaller communities, demonstrating that builders of every size are embracing this flexible, performance-based compliance pathway. The municipalities below illustrate the broad adoption of the HERS Index option throughout Texas.

Municipality	HERS® Ratings
El Paso	9,107
Corpus Christi	6,519
Killeen	2,708
Temple	2,271
Horizon City	2,210
Waco	1,921
McAllen	1,679
Bryan	1,573
Sherman	1,485
Brownsville	1,270
Van Alstyne	1,245
Belton	1,069
Odessa	1,003

Municipality	HERS® Ratings
College Station	989
Portland	921
Copperas Cove	920
Midland	685
Fredericksburg	680
Beaumont	676
Harker Heights	651
Edinburg	629
Kerrville	615
Lorena	572
Tyler	551
Rockport	542
Other	17,905

A Model Other States Are Now Watching

Texas's success is getting attention beyond the state. Southern Nevada adopted the HERS Index as a compliance pathway in 2025, followed by Utah with a HERS Index target of 67. In 2026, North Carolina also expanded its use of performance-based compliance.

The Bottom Line

This wasn't a leap of faith that simply happened to work out. It was a deliberate bet by Texas home builders and policymakers who understood the industry, creating a compliance pathway built on choice rather than mandates, and trusting the market to respond. It did—with greater builder participation, better HERS Index scores, and measurable energy savings for Texas homeowners. This isn't just a Texas success story; it is a model other states can make their own.

To learn more about the HERS Index, find a certified HERS Rater, or explore how a HERS-based compliance pathway could work in your state:

visit [RESNET.org](https://resnet.org) or contact programs@resnet.us