



# CITY OF HOUSTON

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**Sylvester Turner**

Mayor

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The Honorable Dan Huberty  
Chair, House Public Education Committee  
Texas House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

Dear Chairman Huberty,

A high prevalence of physical and emotional trauma exists among public school students, with national prevalence estimates indicating one in five children has a mental illness or addictive disorder. This means approximately *one million* Texas public school students are dealing with these issues on a daily basis. Physical and emotional trauma often leads to failure in school, dropping out, disciplinary placements, involvement with the juvenile justice system, and, in extreme cases, suicide.

With these statistics in mind, I wholeheartedly support House Bill 1623. This bill amends Section 21.451 (d)(3) of the Education Code (Professional Development Activities For Teachers And Administrators) that outlines technical assistance and professional development activities in the staff development training of school district and open enrollment charter school educators. This bill adds training in trauma-informed practices as a required training, in addition to suicide prevention training, and ensures educators are retrained on trauma and suicide prevention as new developments in the field arise, at the discretion of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) commissioner.

As drafted, this bill also amends Section 161.325 of the Health and Safety Code, (Mental Health Promotion And Intervention, Substance Abuse Prevention And Intervention, And Suicide Prevention) which outlines possible training programs and practices school districts may implement to encourage the promotion of safe, supportive classroom environments. This bill streamlines the existing code language - removing the duplicative language, as necessary - and ensures school districts and open enrollment charter schools have clear direction regarding training educators on how to recognize and respond to possible physical and emotional trauma suffered by students. This section is also amended to include trauma-informed practices as a required training, in addition to suicide prevention training, and ensures educators are retrained on trauma and suicide prevention as new developments in the field arise.

Under this legislation, school districts and public charters will be required to report annually to the TEA the number of teachers, principals, and counselors employed by the district who have completed training under this section, and the total number of teachers, principals, and counselors employed by the district. Reporting information would be made available to the public on a state, district, and campus level, upon request. In addition, the reporting mechanism would allow for the prioritization of successfully reporting school districts and public charter schools to participate in competitive grant programs for mental health services.

This bill acknowledges that educators play an essential role in identifying children who may need help. For many traumatized youth, teachers may be the only adults in their lives who see their post-traumatic reactions and/or behaviors – making schools a critical point of entry. Currently, educators are not receiving adequate training in how to recognize and respond to these issues, particularly around trauma.

As proposed, this bill would require school districts to report the trauma-informed training numbers to the TEA. School districts and public charter schools who report training numbers to the TEA would be eligible for prioritization in the awarding of competitive grant programs for mental health services. In addition, the bill would include trauma-informed practices training as a required part of educators' staff development and campus mental health interventions and ensure educators are retrained on trauma and suicide prevention as new developments in the field arise.

It is time that Texas treats mental illness like we treat cancer — with early intervention. HB 1623 is a positive step in that direction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sylvester Turner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "T".

Sylvester Turner  
Mayor