



Mayor Sylvester Turner, City of Houston

Support for House Bill 2653

March 25, 2019

The City of Houston is pleased to offer this written testimony in support of Rep. Jon Rosenthal's House Bill 2653 requiring the establishment of threat assessment teams. This measure is a legislative priority for the Mayor's Commission to End Gun Violence.

First, some background on the formation and background of the Mayor's Commission:

In March of 2017, Mayor Turner announced plans to establish the Mayor's Commission Against Gun Violence. The mayor, who has a lengthy legislative record advocating for schools and for responsible gun use, is inspired by young people who have organized to educate elected officials and the public about the need to improve school safety and effectively address gun violence issues on school campuses.

In May of 2017, he announced the names of 37 individuals who represent a cross-section of the Houston community to serve on his new Commission. The diverse group includes students, parents, physicians, law enforcement officials, gun-rights advocates, gun violence victims and members of faith-based and civil rights organizations, with Haley Carter as Chair.

Haley is a native Houstonian, MBA, retired United States Marine officer, former Houston Dash soccer player and a 2nd year law student at the University of Houston.

Mayor Turner gave the Commission the time and resources it needed to research and submit recommendations. He asked the Commission to provide recommendations before the next school year starts in the fall, and the rest before the start of the 2019 session of the Texas Legislature.

We would like to thank Rep. Rosenthal for meeting with Haley and members of the Commission to discuss how the recommendations could be implemented.

The Commission believes the Legislature should push for funding for Independent School Districts to develop threat assessment teams and mental health teams to help identify students who may pose a threat to themselves or others, and to respond in times of crises.

These teams will provide the appropriate intervention and communication plans. Behavioral threat assessment teams should be designed to evaluate and manage threats on and off campus. Coupled with mental health teams, these evaluations can aide in sorting out miscommunicated reports from true concerns, as well as offer support and normalization to students in times of tragedy.

These teams also provide a process in helping intervene with a person who may be planning an act of violence.

It is the Commission's hope that in supporting House Bill 2653 that the Legislature would adopt these recommendations. The Mayor's Commission to End Gun Violence greatly appreciates Rep. Jon Rosenthal's efforts and believes his legislation will help protect students throughout Texas.

The City of Houston supports House Bill 2653 and urges the Legislature to pass the measure.