



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

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March 20, 2023

The Honorable Paul Bettencourt
Chairman, Senate Committee on Local Government
P.O. Box 2919
Austin, TX 78768

Re: Support for Senate Bill 736

Dear Chairman Bettencourt and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity for me to share the concerns the City of Houston has on Senate Bill 736.

First, I would like to offer an update for members outside the City of Houston. When Mayor Turner works with Houston City Council to pass this year's budget, members of the Houston Fire Department are scheduled to receive a 6% raise in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget that begins July 1st.

That will be the 3rd straight 6% raise given to members of our Houston Fire Department, totaling an 18% cumulative raise over a 3-year period.

Second, in June of 2021, a press conference was held on the steps of City Hall that the leadership Houston Professional Fire Fighters' Association planned to gather signatures for a ballot proposition that would place binding arbitration as Charter Amendment.

Recently, the City of San Antonio found itself in a similar situation, where after a signature petition campaign - local voters approved a binding arbitration for their Fire Fighters. That election was voted on by San Antonio taxpayers regarding the level of fire service provided to the people of San Antonio. Their union there didn't try to come to Austin to get a deal that the people of their hometown would not get to vote on.

We have reached out to Senator Whitmire's office and as always appreciate the opportunity to work with his team. While Mayor Turner is very firm in his position against this policy change, he will not be Mayor next year. As such, one change to consider is the change the effective date of the legislation to July 1st, 2024 to make this policy change take affect for the next Mayor and allow whoever that person is to craft their budget around this measure. As a reminder, the City of Houston's fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th, meaning the current timeline would impose this change 5 months into a budget literally while voters are electing a new Mayor and City Council.

There are additional concerns that Houston has with the measure. The proposed legislation does not require arbitrators to take the unique fiscal constraints that the city has, such as our voter approved property tax revenue cap and the provisions of TX Local Government Code Sec 142.0017 which sets a lower overtime threshold for City of Houston Firefighters than for any other municipal firefighters in Texas - resulting in tens of million in added overtime obligation each fiscal year.

If it is the will of this body to impose this on the City of Houston, we would ask to continue the opportunity to work with Senator Whitmire on changes.

Bill Kelly
Director of Government Relations
Mayor's Office, City of Houston