



**CITY OF HOUSTON**  
Houston Health Department

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May 15, 2023

The Honorable Stephanie Klick  
House Committee on Public Health  
Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78768

Dear Chairwoman Klick and Members of the Committee,

The City of Houston appreciates this opportunity to testify and express concerns with Senate Bill (S.B.) 587.

Currently, the City of Houston exercises regulatory permitting and oversight for 15,300 retail food establishments. Of those establishments, over 1,100 of those permits are currently held by religious and non-profit organizations. This bill will eliminate the food safety permitting and oversight that is provided to those religious and non-profit organizations.

Furthermore, the consequences of this bill will remove childcare facilities, hospitals, large charitable food donation organizations, and schools from food safety permitting and oversight. This will expose the most vulnerable populations, children, and elderly, to potential foodborne illnesses. The largest religious and non-profit organizations in Houston serviced more than 6 million kids and served over 153 million meals in 2022. By allowing these organizations to serve the public without permitting and regulatory oversight, there will be an increased risk of food borne illness.

As with most municipalities, the City of Houston utilizes a fee for service structure. Permitting can offset food safety program costs with revenue obtained. In Houston, the over 1,100 religious and non-profit organizations, currently permitted, contribute nearly \$300,000 per year. To honor religious and non-profit organizations status, Houston discounts permit fees, in some cases up to 80%, compared to for-profit entities. By allowing this bill to pass, it would eliminate the ability to permit these organizations and have a significant economic impact on the food safety program, staffing, and food safety inspections performed.

For these reasons, the City of Houston respectfully opposes S.B. 587.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Christopher Sparks in cursive.

Christopher Sparks  
Bureau Chief  
Consumer Health Services

Houston Health Department