



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

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The Honorable Joan Huffman, Chair, the Honorable Bryan Hughes, Vice Chair, and the Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on State Affairs:

As Mayor of the largest municipality in Texas, I write today to oppose efforts to prohibit a governmental entity from collecting union dues. As the elected leader in charge of thousands of employees, our employees work as a team to provide essential services to the people we serve. This legislation is an unneeded threat on those frontline employees and will not help save money or provide better services. In Houston, we are in it together.

The City of Houston currently has just over 22,000 active City of Houston Employees. From those employees, over 17,000 voluntary deductions going to a dozen different unions or fraternal orders. Almost 13,000 of these deductions are union dues for the three bargaining units for the City of Houston, the Houston Organization of Public Employees (HOPE), the Houston Professional Firefighters Association, Local Chapter 341 of the International Association of Firefighters, and Houston Police Officer's Union (HPOU).

Additionally, we have approximately 65,000 voluntary deductions going to more than 50 other organizations varying from charitable contributions, to outside insurance premium payments to loan repayments.

To be clear: The City of Houston does not associate any cost in currently providing for these deductions, but changing our system, the way processing payroll every 2 weeks for more than 22,000 employees, would require resources of both time and personnel.

As Deputy Assistant Director of Payroll Services for the City of Houston Bill Stephens testified before this body during the regular session, passing legislation that would change the way we currently do business would add to his workload in the short term because new processes and procedures would be required to implement these changes and would cause a disruption to our current processing requirements.

Logistically, the City of Houston, as a general rule, does not pay employees with paper checks. Of the more than 22,000 employees paid each pay period all but about 200 are paid with direct deposit. Approximately 200 are paid with debit cards. No one receives a paper check on a regular basis.

As this body no doubt remembers, and thanks in large part to your support, we were able to achieve landmark pension reform during the regular session. It should be well noted that public employees gave back almost \$3 billion in future benefits to make our deal work. I cannot support measures that would make it harder on my employees to organize.

It is my hope Senators will understand how disruptive these changes could be to Houston, and undoubtedly to other cities and counties across the state. I thank my friends in the Senate for all you do and hope you take time to visit the next time you are in Houston.

Sincerely,

Sylvester Turner
Mayor, City of Houston