



**Houston Area
Urban League**

*Empowering Communities
Changing Lives*

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A United Way Agency
Affiliated With The
National Urban League

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As President of the Houston Area Urban League, Inc. (HAUL), I write today to strongly encourage you to support House Bill 43 by Chairman Dan Flynn, the pension reform proposal for the City of Houston put forward by Mayor Sylvester Turner. As an organization that strives to bring equity to Houston’s African American community and other communities of people of marginal means, we have much to ask the Legislature when it comes to matters of economic justice. House Bill 43 represents one of our simpler requests: Pass this compromise, which will bring sustainable change to the City of Houston’s budget and stave off significant layoffs and cuts to city services.

The failure to pass meaningful pension reform will result in adding another \$130 million to the City’s expected deficit for Fiscal Year 2018. Those funds are more than just dollars and cents on a budget ledger. They represent lost opportunities and a failure of the City’s capability to deliver services to neighborhoods where they are most needed.

President Trump’s proposed budget zeroes out programs like the Community Development Block Grant, which has been used to improve the quality of life providing economic opportunity to African Americans and other under resourced populations. While we hope to ultimately preserve these programs, we anticipate there will be cuts. With fewer federal dollars going to our neighborhoods, we need local institutions like the City to be as strong as they can be. If the Legislature does not pass the Mayor’s proposal to fix pensions, it will severely weaken the City.

Failure to pass the Mayor’s proposal would mean city services would be cut to the bone. Such a significant deficit would erase any progress we have made. The resulting damage to the City’s credit rating would mean fewer improvements on the horizon. The result would be devastating to neighborhoods of people of color, which have long suffered the far-reaching impacts of neglect.

Fewer police officers will be available to patrol our streets. Fewer firefighters and paramedics will be available to respond to our calls. Our neighborhoods, many of whom have seen their schools close, will see their libraries reduce hours and even shutter. Parks will become dilapidated, and children will find new and potentially dangerous places to spend their time. City-operated health care clinics will no longer offer preventative services, which will lead to more emergency room visits at the expense of taxpayers.

Every neighborhood would feel the consequences of the failure to pass House Bill 43. But the neighborhoods least able to afford these cuts would suffer the most.





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Damage to neighborhoods would not be the only way people of color would be negatively affected by the failure to pass House Bill 43. The City is one of the five largest employers in the Houston region. The City of Houston's workforce is 34 percent Anglo, 34 percent black, 25 percent Latino, five percent Asian and two percent of other races or unidentified. The City employs nearly 7,000 women. If the Legislature fails to pass the Houston pension solution, the resulting layoffs would mean the City's longstanding commitment to diversity in hiring results in more women and minorities in the unemployment line, struggling to provide for their families.

The Houston Area Urban League and other nonprofits strain to provide services to those in need – a strain that will grow greater under likely federal budget cuts. In the wake of wide-scale service cuts and a significant increase in the number of people who are unemployed, that burden will increase exponentially. The already-fragile safety net formed by public resources and organizations like HAUL does need any more stress – certainly not the kind an additional \$130 million deficit would place on it.

The Mayor's proposal was born of compromise and shared sacrifice. It is supported by the pension boards of Houston police officers and municipal employees, who have agreed to cut their own benefits in order to create a sustainable defined benefit system. It is also supported by the Greater Houston Partnership, which has made its passage the number one priority of the group's lobbying efforts this Legislative session due to its impact on the economy.

Organizations like the Houston Area Urban League understand the economic impact from a different perspective. The failure to pass the Houston pension solution would disproportionately affect those who need the City at its strongest..

I strongly urge you to vote for House Bill 43. Economic justice can only be achieved with public institutions able to deliver services to those needing it the most, and the City of Houston can only deliver with the passage of the Mayor's pension solution.

Sincerely,

Judson W. Robinson III
President & CEO