



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

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August 27, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

The Honorable Dan Patrick
Lt. Governor of the State of Texas
Office of the Lt. Governor
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711

The Honorable Dennis Bonnen
Speaker of the Texas House
122 E Myrtle St
Angleton, Texas 77515

Dear Governor Abbott, Lt. Governor Patrick, and Speaker Bonnen,

Earlier this year, in response to the pandemic of COVID-19, the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) requested that “each state agency and institution of higher education submit a plan identifying savings that will reduce your general, and general revenue-related appropriations, by five percent for the 2020-2021 biennium.”

This order wisely exempted deployed agencies such as the Texas Division of Emergency Management, Child Protective Services, and critically important funding for behavioral health services.

The LBB actions were proven prudent when Comptroller Glenn Hegar’s July report projected a \$4.6 billion shortfall for the 87th Legislative Session, a significant swing from the estimated \$3 billion surplus forecast last October.

However, the LBB’s instructions of August 18th for Legislative Appropriations Requests in the 2022-2023 biennium do not exempt behavioral health services.

I urge the LBB to reconsider this decision on behavioral health.

Accessing mental health care services in Texas is already challenging. I do acknowledge the State of Texas has made significant moves in the right direction in investing in behavioral health, but more is needed.

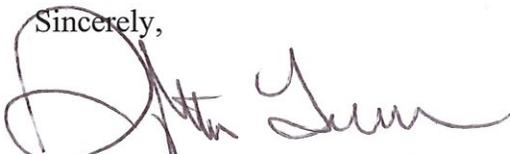
- According to Mental Health America, Texas ranks 51st in access to care in 2020. The Access Ranking indicates how much access to mental health care exists within a state, including access to insurance, access to treatment, quality and cost of insurance, access to special education, and workforce availability.
- The upcoming expiration of the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payments (DSRIP) under the 1115 Waiver will eliminate one third of the public capacity for mental healthcare for adults.
- Nearly one in five persons in the Greater Houston area lacks health insurance. This puts added pressure on the public health system to provide behavioral health services. This is especially true for children, many of whom have had the support system of their public school thrown into uncertainty.

That is one reason why the City of Houston collaborates with MHA of Greater Houston through its Center for School Behavioral Health, coordinating among local mental health providers and school districts to provide training for teachers in identifying and addressing signs of trauma. This was especially needed in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Funding was made possible through a grant from UNICEF USA, whose work includes bi-monthly gatherings facilitated by MHA of Greater Houston with 30 greater Houston area school and charter districts and 100 organizations that serve children.

The State of Texas has stood with behavioral health advocates in passing insurance parity, certified peer support services, and school safety reforms with intervention teams. This is an area of bipartisan agreement and shared values.

Given the events of 2020, I urge the LBB to reconsider the five percent funding reduction for behavioral health services. Under your leadership, you have a record of funding these needed services. I hope you can again push for this funding for our shared constituents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Sylvester Turner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "T".

Sylvester Turner
Mayor