



# CITY OF HOUSTON

**Sylvester Turner**

Mayor

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May 20, 2021

The Honorable Joan Huffman  
Chairman, Texas Senate Committee on Jurisprudence  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, TX 78768

Re: Opposition to House Bill 1900

Dear Chair Huffman and Senators of the Committee,

Last fiscal year, the City of Houston increased the budget of the Houston Police Department to \$964 million. With ongoing budget workshops already underway, this year looks to be a \$30 million increase, pending approval from Houston City Council.

For Houston, House Bill 1900 is a solution in search of a problem that simply does not exist.

While the intention of the bill seeks to secure public safety funding, which in and of itself is not irrational. Yet the enforcement mechanisms are nothing short of a central planning government that will break up communities to enforce its will. The de-annexation policy alone is a bad thought experiment turned into worse public policy. It should not be made law, and it is made even worse when compared to the thoughtful approach embodied in Senate Bill 23.

What makes the bill even worse is how it avoided common sense amendments for programs strongly supported by law enforcement.

For example, Rep. Jarvis Johnson (himself a former Houston City Councilman) offered amendments that targeted real world implications of this measure. In Houston, we have mental health professionals answering 911 calls at the Houston Emergency Center. The first of its kind in the nation, the Crisis Call Diversion (CCD) program is a collaboration between the Houston Police Department (HPD), Houston Fire Department (HFD), Houston Emergency Center (HEC) and the Harris Center for Mental Health & IDD.

Providing a better service – immediate access to mental health professions – that has become a best practice recommendation nationwide is directly threatened by the provisions of this bill. HB 1900 would require that Houston keep this program within the Houston Police Department as moving these civilian positions over into any other department – even if the person sits in the same desk and does the same job - would be “defunding the police.”

Another example raised by Rep. Johnson was the overtime that local law enforcement receives when working major events. Under Mayor Turner, Houston has hosted the Super Bowl, NCAA Final Four, the 2017 and 2019 Major League Baseball World Series, and various other events.

Requiring that money spent in overtime to raise the baseline budget for the next fiscal year is non-sensical. No business expects to generate or expend revenue absent a major event. Why does HB 1900 tie the hands of local budget writers after their community successful hosts these events?

When Congress approved and President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan, Mayor Turner's first comments about where the city needed resources was with an additional police cadet class and raise for Houston firefighters. This makes the draconian de-annexation consequences in HB 1900 look unnecessary and unwise.

Working together with law enforcement, the City of Houston has worked to increase public safety by promoting youth employment opportunities, providing access to mental health and substance use, and improving the physical environment with clean air and quality parks. All of these inarguably improve public safety but cannot be funded under HB 1900 until public safety funding is increased.

Senate Bill 23 is not perfect, it is thoughtful and considers real world consequences and needs. House Bill 1900 seeks to address the complex issue of public safety with a "one size fits all" approach that penalizes local communities. Technically, it is one size fits eleven. For reasons the author failed to explain except to say he "felt like it," the restrictions in this bill apply to Plano and Corpus Christi but not to Amarillo or Irving.

The consequences laid out above and the lack of reasoning behind it does not create good public policy. The City of Houston urges Senators to support Senate Bill 23 and apply it to the entire state. House Bill 1900 is not needed, not logical, and not workable.

Sincerely,

Bill Kelly  
Director of Government Relations