



CITY OF HOUSTON

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Mayor

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May 20, 2021

Texas Senate
P.O. Box 2919
Austin, TX 78768

Re: Opposition to House Bill 1925

Members of the Texas Senate,

The City of Houston rises in opposition to House Bill 1925 and wants to express a warning to other political subdivisions who will likely be targeted by the provisions of this legislation.

To be blunt, the Governor and the Legislature are upset at the City of Austin's policy on public campaign. In the course of this Legislative Session, the voters of Austin have overwhelmingly repealed this local ordinance and are in the planning stages of implementing new housing policies.

House Bill 1925 does not recognize this reality. Instead of targeting Austin, it creates a statewide policy sweeping up programs across the State of Texas.

The City of Houston recognizes that encampments are an issue that needs to be addressed. In our experience, this bill doesn't solve or effectively manage this issue. As we mentioned in earlier testimony, the solution needs to have both a carrot and a stick. This bill should include funding and resources to help house and transition these individuals out of encampments, otherwise it will just push these individuals elsewhere, waste critical law enforcement resources, and not solve the problem.

Although homelessness in the greater Houston area has decreased significantly since 2011, there has been a densification of homelessness, especially in highly visible, public places leading to the development of encampments.

The City of Houston is at the forefront in developing strategies to not just manage but solve the problem of encampments effectively and holistically. This issue is not about the visibility of encampments, but rather the public health and safety issues created by encampments, especially those living within the camps.

House Bill 1925 is overly broad, going far beyond addressing the public health and safety issues created by encampments. Instead of partnering with those on the ground, doing the immensely difficult work, this bill allows the Attorney General of Texas recover expenses

including court costs, attorney's fees, investigative costs, witness fees and deposition costs from the municipality under Section 364.003.

We believe those provisions to be ill-conceived and heavy-handed approach will set Houston back significantly in its nationally and internationally recognized efforts to house members of the homeless population.

Seeing the extremely minimal actions this Legislature has taken to help the uninsured, specifically in rejecting Medicaid Expansion, we urge members of the Texas Senate to vote down this harmful legislation. We have come to expect Texas being the worst in the nation in the percent of residents without insurance, but setting up the Attorney General to sue us over local policies that address homelessness is an even worse level of harm.

Sincerely,

Bill Kelly
Director of Government Relations
Mayor's Office, City of Houston