



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

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March 7, 2019

The Honorable Jane Nelson
Texas Senate
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Senator Nelson:

I would like to personally thank you for your continued work on the issue of mental health. It has become painfully apparent that we need to do more as a society to address the mental and behavioral needs of our children. The statistics, according to Mental Health America of Greater Houston, tell quite a story:

- One out of every five of our youth aged 13-18 has a mental health condition.
- One out of every ten has a behavior or conduct disorder.
- 11% percent have a mood disorder, such as depression.
- *Nearly one of every eight Texas high school students attempted suicide in 2017.*

Mental illness is a serious public health concern. We need to fight mental illness like we fight cancer — early intervention is critical.

I wholeheartedly support your bill, Senate Bill 10, filed to address this mental health crisis among our children. I was heartened to see that it passed out of committee unanimously, and subsequently pass the full Senate. SB 10 will help identify children with mental health needs and intervene with treatment *before* they become a danger to themselves or others.

Overall, people suffering from mental illness are no more likely to become violent than the general public. However, about 900 Texas youths experience a first episode of psychosis each year, which is characterized by hallucinations and delusions. Those with *untreated* psychosis are 15 times more likely to commit homicide, and 24 times more at risk of suicide or other forms of mortality. Half of all mental health conditions manifest by age 14. Intervention is most effective at this early stage when symptoms are less severe and more treatable, and we are more likely to prevent symptoms from escalating into more dangerous conditions.

With Texas facing a severe shortage of mental health professionals, SB 10 would help address gaps in our system by tapping the expertise of our academic health-related institutions. It would establish a mental health consortium to foster collaboration between publicly-funded higher educational institutions. This consortium would have the goal of improving early identification

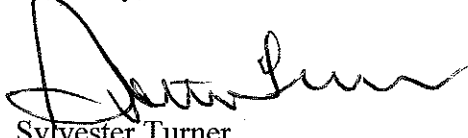
and intervention, addressing the shortage of mental health professionals, promoting and coordinating mental health research, and bolstering judicial training on juvenile behavioral health. SB 10 would also incentivize the use of telemedicine and other cost-effective approaches to mental health care delivery.

Further, SB 10 would create the Child Psychiatry Access Program (CPAP), a statewide system of regional hubs designed to leverage the primary care system for consultation and referral. These hubs would be located at academic medical centers. Nearly 30 states have already successfully implemented CPAP programs. In a few years, each hub should be able to address the primary care needs of half a million children and youth at a cost of just \$2 per child.

Some conservative groups have come out in opposition to the bill, saying the spending is outside the “core function” of state government. But if protecting the welfare of our children isn’t considered part of state government’s “core function,” what is?

In recent years, Texas has improved mental health care policies for adults. Now it’s time we gave more attention to our children. Perhaps more of them will make it to adulthood, and perhaps we will have fewer adults suffering from chronic mental health issues with early, coordinated intervention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sylvester Turner', written over a horizontal line.

Sylvester Turner
Mayor