



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

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April 1, 2019

The Honorable Dade Phelan
House Committee on State Affairs
Texas House of Representative
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768

Dear Chairman Phelan:

I write today to oppose HB 1929, which prohibits local governmental entities from partnering with trusted health care providers and from advocating on behalf of women's health interests. In the state with the highest uninsured rate in the country, an acknowledged maternal mortality crisis, and over half of all births paid for by Medicaid, every resource we can mobilize to supplement the health of our citizens is essential.

Local governments and health officials must have the ability and authority to partner with trusted health care providers and other qualified nonprofit organizations to address the health needs of our citizens. By restricting local resources, the state would threaten the health and well-being of our citizens.

This is especially true in a crisis situation. Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast is the second largest safety-net provider in Harris County. If there were an outbreak of Zika virus, or similar communal disease, this legislation would prohibit the City of Houston from partnering with one of the principal medical providers in the area. This represents a critical threat to the public health of the Gulf Coast region.

But even for non-emergency situations, this bill is unnecessary. Community-based health care providers offer preventive exams, lifesaving cancer screenings, immunizations, contraceptive services, education and counseling, HIV testing, and STI testing and treatment.

In many instances, they focus on a particular, at-risk or hard to reach population. Without these critical partnerships, Texans may delay or go without this vital care. Policies that ignore local control ignore reality. Residents in cities and counties already face significant challenges in accessing affordable and quality health care.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the United States hit a record high in 2017, establishing a “steep, sustained increase” over the last four years and a discouraging trend after decades of decline that aligns with Texas STD data and the observations of Houston experts.

Chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis reached a combined 2.3 million reported cases, according to a 2018 release by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This represents a nearly 10 percent increase in one year, and surpasses 2016 by more than 200,000 cases. Chlamydia, the most commonly diagnosed sexually transmitted disease in America was up 22 percent.

In 2018, Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast provided 69,000 tests for STI & HIV in the greater Houston metro area, a 19% increase over 2017. We need more providers in Houston and Harris County providing STD testing and treatment to address our high rates of STDs, not less.

Texans are looking to their elected officials for real solutions that will improve the lives of working families and everyday citizens. We are committed to driving economic growth, ensuring the safety and security of our communities, and increasing opportunity for all. Access to affordable health care is critical to those efforts and politicizing health care only undermines them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sylvester Turner', written in a cursive style.

Sylvester Turner
Mayor