CITY OF HOUSTON

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The Honorable Charles Schwertner, Chair, The Honorable Carlos Uresti, Vice Chair, and the Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services:

As Mayor of Houston, I write to oppose proposed legislation that prohibits local public entities from partnering with affiliates of abortion providers. I am familiar and have worked with almost all of you from my 27 years in the Texas House. However, in my role as Mayor of the largest city in Texas, I am asking that you examine how this legislation could affect public health efforts in Houston.

This legislation would prevent municipalities from contracting with organizations like Planned Parenthood to address a public health crisis, such as Zika, HIV, or STD outbreaks. This is not a fictional situation used to raise a point; this is a real-world action with very real consequences.

Since 2015, the City of Houston reported 33 travel associated cases of Zika. The collective efforts of our city and county helped eliminate many risk factors and thankfully no airborne cases were reported. However, the same cannot be said about our friends in Cameron County, which should underscore the seriousness of this public health issue.

The Houston Health Department targeted door-to-door sweeps armed with educational materials about minimizing exposure to risk while the Solid Waste Department cleared almost 40,000 illegally dumped tires and other debris over the summer to remove potential mosquito breeding sites. With a task so big, we could not afford not to do all we could with our available resources.

Limiting the number of partners to help fight this virus is unwise and would have consequences. For example, Scott County, Indiana experienced an HIV outbreak after the local Planned Parenthood health center closed. Vice President Pence, then serving as Governor of Indiana, changed his policy position on needle exchange programs because of this outbreak. It pains me to think Texas would not heed his example.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee for over two decades, I am well aware that decisions about state family planning dollars are the purview of the Legislature.

However, restricting a local government's ability to fulfill the health care needs of its community is not the role of the state and jeopardizes the health care outcomes of Texas communities.

This legislation could be devastating to our cities, where many residents already face daunting challenges in accessing affordable and quality health care. In the state with the highest uninsured

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rate in the country, cities and counties are already asked to perform in a difficult healthcare environment. Local elected officials, such as City Council Members and County Commissioners, understand the best local resources to respond in a crisis.

We should not wait until a crisis to learn this lesson.

Sincerely,

Sylvester Turner
Mayor, City of Houston