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Consumer Groups Call on Texas Governor Greg Abbott to Appoint a Strong Insurance Commissioner Who Will Protect Consumers

In a letter sent today, Texas consumer organizations Texas Watch and TexPIRG and the national consumer organization Consumer Federation of America urged Governor Greg Abbott to appoint a new Texas Insurance Commissioner with a strong track record of helping consumers and taking action against abusive insurance companies.

“As the Texas Department of Insurance’s chief executive and administrative officer, the Commissioner is in charge of protecting and ensuring the fair treatment of consumers, and ensuring fair competition and competitive markets in the insurance industry,” said Ware Wendell, Executive Director of Texas Watch. “We need the Texas Department of Insurance to step up and help consumers. The Governor should choose someone who puts consumers first.”

Currently Texas consumers are struggling and dealing with significant economic hardship. The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects have thrown millions of Americans out of work, closed businesses and venues, and killed over 195,000 Americans while infecting millions. During this crisis consumers need protection against unscrupulous insurance companies more than ever. For example, consumers are driving far less due to the pandemic and closures, and yet they are paying excessive auto insurance rates based on pre-pandemic conditions. While many auto insurers have provided relief in the form of premium refunds, [they are inadequate compared to the massive profits that insurers have recently earned.](#)

In late August the current Commissioner Kent Sullivan said that he would resign his position in September and return to the private sector. For years the Department has been criticized by consumer advocates for failing to take effectively help consumers.

“Texas needs a leader who will put consumer well-being first by standing up for consumer rights and taking a tough stance against insurers who violate them, and who will quickly respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact,” said Bay Scoggin, Director of TexPIRG. “They should not hesitate to change policies when they need to, and make sure that insurance is affordable for all Texans. Insurance companies have gotten away with excessive rates for too long, and the new Commissioner should be unafraid to challenge those rates and make sure that markets are competitive.”

The consumer groups also provided a short list of three possible candidates: Doug Slape (Chief Deputy Commissioner of the Texas Department of Insurance), Melissa Hamilton (Public Counsel at the Texas Office of Public Insurance Counsel), and Birny Birnbaum (a national advocate and

expert on insurance and consumer protection and former Chief Economist at the Texas Department of Insurance).

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