



August 13, 2014

The Honorable Charles Schwertner
Chair, Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Re: Increasing Access to Healthcare Coverage

Dear Chairman Schwertner:

All Texas counties have an interest in providing for the medical needs of the poor. Under the Indigent and Health Care Treatment Act of 1985, counties lacking a hospital district or public hospital have a duty to provide healthcare for indigent residents, and are required to spend up to 8 percent of the county's general tax levy for this service.

Public hospitals and hospital districts, like those found in the highly-populated urban counties we serve, have this same duty to provide indigent health services, but must continue to provide services even if the cost to provide indigent health care exceeds 8% of the general tax levy.

We write not to complain about this fiscal burden or duty, but to urge your committee to use this interim to find a Texas way forward to fund and increase access to healthcare coverage for low-wage working Texans.

Evidence abounds as to this need. More than 1.9 million Texans between the ages of 18 -64 are uninsured with incomes between 0-138% of the federal poverty level. Of these, nearly 1.3 million have incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level, making them ineligible for low-cost health insurance. The current cost of uncompensated care provided to Texans by public and private providers is over \$4 billion a year. The cost to Bexar County providers in 2010-11 was \$422 million; to Dallas \$690 million; El Paso \$158 million; for Harris \$920 million, Tarrant \$419 million and for Travis County \$270 million (Billy Hamilton: Smart, Affordable, and Fair: Why Texas Should Expand Medicaid Coverage to Low-income Adults, 2011 uncompensated care costs).

As Texas County leaders, we believe a uniquely Texas solution can be found. We again ask for your and your committee's help in developing this solution. As Judge Emmett has said, "Healthcare defines us a society. Leaving people without healthcare is not good for them, our community, or our society." (Harris County Healthcare Alliance, Designing Healthcare in Texas 2014 Conference.)

Sincerely,



Nelson W. Wolff
Bexar County Judge



Clay Lewis Jenkins
Dallas County Judge



Veronica Escobar
El Paso County Judge



Ed Emmett
Harris County Judge



B. Glen Whitley
Tarrant County Judge



Samuel T. Biscoe
Travis County Judge

Cc: Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Senate Finance