



**Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Senate Bill 424 by Van de Putte  
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Chairwoman Nelson and members of the Committee, I am Alison Little of Texans Care For Children. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today. Texans Care for Children is a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated exclusively to the children of Texas. We look to our broad base of community-based experts—our partners who together represent thousands of Texas children—to inform our work and help us in developing our legislative agenda. These partners have empowered Texans Care to mobilize coalition groups to work together towards common solutions to the difficult conditions many Texas children and youth face and to assist local communities in advocating for their own children’s needs. Our areas of focus are: family economic security; infant, child and maternal health; children’s mental health; child welfare; and juvenile justice and at-risk youth.

**SB 424**

We greatly appreciate Sen. Van de Putte’s commitment to investing in measures that will support the health of Texas children. Texans Care strongly supports the idea behind SB 424, but opposes the bill as it currently stands. The bill would create a joint study to conduct research on existing and recent school-based flu vaccinations in Texas and provide recommendations to the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Texans Care has four concerns about the bill.

Our primary concern with the bill is the inclusion of vaccine manufacturers in the advisory group to provide recommendations to TEA and DSHS. These agencies’ decisions, which will rely on information provided by the advisory committee’s recommendations, will affect more than four and a half million students.<sup>1</sup> It is essential that neutral sources provide information regarding the full range of costs, benefits, and risks of the vaccines. It is especially important for DSHS and TEA to receive neutral information regarding vaccine risks to pregnant students, immune-compromised family members living in households with school children, and young children with asthma.<sup>2</sup> Since vaccine manufacturers have a conflict of interest regarding public health goals and profit goals, Texans Care believes that it is

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/research/pdfs/enrollment\\_2007-08.pdf](http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/research/pdfs/enrollment_2007-08.pdf), p. vi.

<sup>2</sup> [www.immunize.gov/vis](http://www.immunize.gov/vis)

inappropriate for them to be members of the committee that will provide recommendations to TEA and DSHS.

Second, Texans Care recommends specifying the collection of data regarding practices to safeguard against adverse effects in the vaccination programs. It is essential to know how local programs safeguarded against rare but long-term and/or serious adverse effects associated with vaccines, such as damage to the fetus of a pregnant student, breathing problems, Guillain-Barré syndrome, Reye syndrome, harm to students or their family members with weakened immune systems or long-term health problems.

Third, among the data specified regarding best practices and how barriers were overcome, Texans Care recommends specifically adding the collection of data regarding the methods used to secure parental opt-ins to the vaccine programs. The successful implementation of a school-based vaccination program would hinge on having a smooth way to handle parent consent and refusal. The study proposed in SB 424 is an ideal mechanism to collect data on how existing programs have managed this issue as the basis for recommending best practices for parental consent in a larger vaccination program.

Fourth, Texans Care recommends adding funding strategies for vaccination of uninsured children to the data specified to be collected. With more than 1 in 5 of Texas children lacking health insurance,<sup>3</sup> this population will be large in any mass vaccination campaign. Although the bill specifies the collection of data regarding “the management of insured vs. uninsured students,” Texans Care believes that it is also crucial to collect information about any funding strategies used at a local level to fill the gap for students who do not have health insurance and who are outside of areas where the vaccine is provided through the Vaccines for Children's Program (VFC) via DSHS or a local health department. For instance, half of the population of uninsured children qualify but are not enrolled in CHIP and Medicaid,<sup>4</sup> and it would be useful for potential future expansion of the program to have information about any localities who used the vaccine program as an opportunity to help parents enroll in these programs in adequate time to use the benefits to pay for the vaccination.

Thank you again for your time and attention regarding our concerns about SB 424. We look forward to continuing to work on it with you and Senator Van de Putte. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the staff of Texans Care For Children at 512.473.2274.

Respectfully,

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.texanscareforchildren.org/innerpage.php?pageid=99>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.texanscareforchildren.org/files/CHIP\\_and\\_Medicaid\\_one\\_pager.pdf](http://www.texanscareforchildren.org/files/CHIP_and_Medicaid_one_pager.pdf)