



August 21, 2020

Legislative Budget Board - Board Members:

The Honorable Dan Patrick, Joint Chair
The Honorable Dennis Bonnen, Joint Chair
The Honorable Kelly Hancock
The Honorable Dustin Burrows
The Honorable Joan Huffman

The Honorable Giovanni Capriglione
The Honorable Jane Nelson
The Honorable Mary González
The Honorable Larry Taylor
The Honorable Oscar Longoria

Delivered via email

Re: Texas Health & Human Services Commission's Five Percent Budget Reduction Plans

Dear Legislative Budget Board Members:

On behalf of Every Body Texas (formerly the Women's Health and Family Planning Association of Texas), I am writing to share our concerns regarding the five percent reduction plan proposed by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) for the remainder of this biennium. Cuts to critical women's health programs will reduce the ability of our network of 35 providers—including federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), public health departments, hospital-based clinics, and free-standing family planning clinics—to serve nearly 200,000 clients at more than 160 service sites throughout Texas during state fiscal year 2021. As the rates of unemployed and uninsured Texans rise across the state as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we need more funding for safety net healthcare services—not less—and we urge state leaders to address the state's revenue shortfall through the use of the Economic Stabilization Fund or available federal funding to meet the needs of Texans.

HHSC's five percent reduction plan clearly stated that client services that benefit long-term health care for families and children with disabilities were prioritized—as were services directly impacting short-term mortality over long-term health benefits—so it was surprising to learn that the women's health services that play a critical role in supporting maternal and family health were not prioritized.¹ The Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force has repeatedly recommended increasing access to healthcare services before and between pregnancies—the types of services offered by Healthy Texas Women and the Family Planning Program—to improve birth outcomes and reduce maternal mortality and morbidity, concluding in its most recent report: "Increasing access to care for all reproductive aged women is important. The management of acute and chronic health conditions and preventive care are essential for healthy

¹ Texas Health and Human Services Commission, Five Percent Biennial Budget Reduction Plans (Letter dated June 15, 2020).



pregnancies and long-term health. Healthier women are healthier mothers, and healthier mothers lead to healthier infants and families."²

In addition to providing critical healthcare services, Healthy Texas Women and the Family Planning Program save the state millions in General Revenue each year by reducing unintended pregnancies that would otherwise result in costs to Texas Medicaid. HHSC's most recent report on its women's health programs estimated that Healthy Texas Women and the Family Planning Program saved \$140 million in General Revenue in 2019 alone.³ While cuts to women's health programs may reduce HHSC's budget in the short-term, we know from recent experience that it will not be long before the impact of reduced access to these services will be observed—including decreases in contraception use and increases in unintended pregnancy and Medicaid-covered births.

In recent years, the Texas Legislature has exhibited a commitment to rebuilding women's health programs and ensuring that Texans have access to this critical healthcare.⁴ Moving forward with HHSC's five percent reduction plan would undo the hard-won gains of recent sessions and harm the very people most impacted by the global health and economic disaster caused by COVID-19. As members of the Legislative Budget Board tasked with developing budget and policy recommendations for legislative appropriations, we urge you to continue your support for critical women's health programs that ensure the health and safety of hundreds of thousands of Texans—and to direct HHSC not to implement cuts to women's health programs.

Sincerely,

Kami Geffray
Chief Executive Officer

CC: Members of Senate Finance Committee
Members of House Appropriations Article II Committee
Office of the Governor Director of Policy and Budget Sarah Hicks
Office of the Governor Policy Advisor Heather Fleming
Legislative Budget Board Director Jerry McGinty
HHSC Executive Commissioner Cecile Young
HHSC Chief Financial Officer Trey Wood

² Texas Department of State Health Services, *Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force and Department of State Health Services Joint Biennial Report* (September 2018).

³ Texas Health and Human Services, *Women's Health Programs Saving and Performance Report Fiscal Year 2019* (May 2020).

⁴ Legislative Budget Board, *Overview of Women's Health Funding* (April 2019).