

On behalf of our more than 480 member hospitals, the Texas Hospital Association is pleased to submit comments to the House Committee on Appropriations regarding House Bill 161. THA is grateful that HB 161 provides funding to the Department of State Health Services specifically for the purpose of surge staffing. As the members of this committee are aware, Texas hospitals have worked tirelessly to provide compassionate, high quality care to their patients during this public health emergency. Providing that care would not be possible without state-provided staffing assistance.

Hospitals not only treat COVID-19 patients, but also care for mothers delivering babies, infants in neonatal intensive care units, patients experiencing psychiatric emergencies, trauma victims and provide every type of care in between. Although staffing assistance is crucial to help hospitals care for COVID-19 patients, staffing shortages are also experienced across all specialties due to the strain brought on by the pandemic. Facilities with few COVID-19 patients, specialty hospitals and other facilities with significant staffing vacancies have been unable to access staffing assistance due to reimbursement limitations set forth by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Unfortunately, these facilities, such as behavioral health hospitals, have lost nurses to staffing agencies and have been unable to receive any assistance, even while treating COVID positive patients in their facilities. As drafted, HB 161 does not allow any staffing support or appropriation to these facilities. THA urges the committee to consider the comprehensive and unprecedented needs of the hospital community and to support hospitals that may not be directly treating COVID-19 patients but are experiencing staffing shortages due to the pandemic.

In addition, Section 7 of HB 161 would require hospitals to comply with the state hospital price transparency law (SB 1137, 87th R.S.) in order to receive money from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission has not yet enacted rules implementing the state hospital price transparency law. One of the provisions of the law requires HHSC to develop and implement a mandatory form that hospitals are required to utilize to post their charge information. Because there are not yet rules implementing the law, it is impossible for any Texas hospital to be in full compliance with SB 1137. THA is concerned that, as drafted, HB 161 will make it practically impossible for any hospital to receive funding without violating Section 7 of the proposed legislation. To ameliorate this concern, THA proposes to condition compliance upon implementation of rules enacting SB 1137 by the Health and Human Services Commission. THA is happy to provide language to the members of this committee.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We look forward to working with you on this important issue for not only hospitals, but all Texans.