

Sept. 8, 2021

The Honorable Dan Patrick
Joint Chair
Legislative Budget Board

The Honorable Dade Phelan
Joint Chair
Legislative Budget Board

Dear Lt. Governor Patrick, Speaker Phelan and Distinguished Members of the Texas Legislative Budget Board:

It is with extreme gratitude that we extend our appreciation for the recent state assistance in identifying and supplying critical bedside staff necessary to provide acute medical care to the rush of COVID-19 patients Texas hospitals have seen over the last two months. The current staffing assistance has been promised through Sept. 30, and at least 6,800 of the 8,100 have been recruited and placed. We understand this number changes daily as state officials work to fill requests. Our hospitals continue to see new COVID-19 admissions and continue to juggle high patient censuses daily.

Our ability to treat patients are only as good as the clinical bedside staff we have on hand. While COVID-19 hospitalizations appear to be leveling off just shy of the record admissions we experienced in the spring, current COVID-19 hospitalizations remain at concerningly high levels that test the capacity of our facilities. All COVID-19 related care must take place in real time while hospitals also handle their core functions; these include planned care (cancer surgery, knee replacements and other procedures), urgent care (for people experiencing stroke, heart attacks or serious accidents), and the special care given by hospitals at the beginning and end of life. Texas hospitals are already idling or delaying procedures when appropriate to extend staffing capabilities, but COVID-19 hospitalizations continue to place further strain on hospitals.

We write today to urge you to continue providing the upfront financial support of the state staffing program beyond Sept. 30. Thankfully, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has extended its Public Assistance Program to Dec. 31, 2021. The program provides 100% reimbursement of the costs associated with safely reopening and operating medical facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Proceeding with a hard stop of the state staffing program on Sept. 30 would require the Texas Department of State Health Services to begin demobilizing staff this week. This would occur at a time when hospitals are still being tested with record levels of patients and before it's clear what impact the return of school children, school district employees, college students and college employees to campuses will have on daily COVID-19 infection and hospitalization rates.

Hospitals are unlike other businesses in Texas. The Federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act, signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1986, requires hospitals to see any patient who presents at any time of the day or night regardless of the person's ability to pay. Providing life-saving care to all Texans is a privilege that our hospitals do not take lightly. Texas hospitals continue to meet the need daily without time for rest or recovery. The state's support of this mission is key to our success.

On behalf of our approximately 600 members, we implore you to continue providing state staffing assistance beyond Sept. 30 so Texas hospitals can continue providing critical, acute care services to those in need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Hawkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being more prominent than the last name "Hawkins".

John Hawkins
Senior Vice President, Government Relations
Texas Hospital Association