



City of Austin

P.O. Box 1088, Austin, TX 78767-1088

March 17, 2021

The Honorable Lois W. Kolkhorst
Chair, Senate Committee on Health & Human Services
via email to Avery.kostik_SC@senate.texas.gov

Re: City of Austin Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 73

Chair Kolkhorst and Members of the Committee on Health & Human Services:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 73 by Senator Borris Miles, which would establish a separate provider type for local health departments for purposes of enrollment as a provider for and reimbursement under Medicaid.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a robust public health infrastructure to address health disparities, provide services to vulnerable populations, and protect the health of the general population. Local health departments play a crucial role in the state's health care delivery system and improve health outcomes in communities throughout the state.

Many APH programs that enhance access to health care, increase the quality and cost-effectiveness of care, and improve population health not only benefit the health of the individuals served but also increase the whole community's resilience during disease outbreaks. Many of these programs address health care disparities in populations disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, such as Community Diabetes Initiative, which focuses on reducing health disparities related to diabetes, especially in the Hispanic/Latinx and African American communities, the Maternal Infant Outreach Program that works to address and eliminate racial disparities in birth outcomes and improve maternal and infant health in the African American community, and permanent supportive housing services to provide intensive community-based services to individuals with history of chronic homelessness and multiple health conditions.

Reimbursing local health departments for services already being provided would significantly help departments continue to provide critical services to a particularly vulnerable population and provide a more robust response to future public health crises.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and your genuine commitment to improving public health in our state. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Hayden-Howard
Director, Austin Public Health