



July 6, 2010

Good Afternoon,

My name is John Asbury. I'm a pediatrician from Temple and here representing the more than 48,000 physicians and medical student members of the Texas Medical Association, the Texas Pediatric Society and the Texas Academy of Family Physicians.

We understand the very difficult budget decisions the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) will have to make in order to prepare the agency's 2012 – 2013 Legislative Appropriations Request and we appreciate the opportunity offered today to speak to our concerns, as you consider the substantial budget reductions that must be made.

The state faces major challenges including:

- Addressing infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV
- Reducing the state's infant mortality rates and unintended pregnancy
- Responding to the heavy burden of chronic diseases, especially diabetes and other conditions associated with obesity
- Preparing for and responding to disasters such as H1N1 and natural disasters such as hurricanes, and
- Ensuring patient safety and access to quality mental health services.

DSHS has a critical role in addressing these challenges. DSHS not only funds and directs programming in these areas, but also provides the framework for how the state will prioritize and address these challenges. DSHS programs and funding decisions have an impact on all of our patients and it is essential that DSHS strategies and programs complement how we as physicians care for our patients.

However, I am not here today to offer budget recommendations on specific programs, but rather to encourage you to make your budget decisions very judiciously and with long range consideration of how these decisions will protect the state's vital public health and prevention programming.

Short-sighted cuts to critical public health programs can end up costing more and these costs are usually dispersed to others. For example, cutting core prevention activities like HIV screening or medications, tuberculosis control, infectious disease surveillance, or testing and treatment for STIs, may mean higher costs later on for Medicaid, or other publicly-funded systems. We ask you to consider how these services would be provided if these programs are downsized or eliminated as there are no other entities in place to provide for these public health services across the state.

We know that federal funding plays an important role in many of the DSHS screening and other prevention programs. Making cuts to programs that would threaten federal funds that help pay for these public health services is seriously short-sighted from both a fiscal and public health point of view.

We urge you to recognize the importance of maintaining the budgets for programs that are based on well established public health science and practice. When it comes to preventing serious public health threats such as infectious diseases, tobacco use, or preterm births, science tells us that public health prevention programming is not only improving the health of Texans, but is also helping to reduce medical care costs.

And just as you use public health science as a foundation for public health programming, we ask that you avoid creating new systems or procedures. Relying on trusted sources such as national guidelines or allowing input from public health and medical experts and stakeholders help ensure procedures are effective, streamlined, and consistent.

Federal health care reform legislation offers new opportunities for public health improvements and the promotion of prevention and wellness programming. We understand that laying the groundwork for the public health reforms is a challenge for the state, but it is also a tremendous opportunity for Texas -- as long as immediate budget cuts don't jeopardize the goal of establishing a long-term strategy for prevention and wellness.

We request that you keep our organizations at the table during the decision making process. Keep medicine informed and offer opportunities to work with TMA, TPS, TAFP, and the county medical societies. Our members have a shared goal with DSHS in improving the health of all Texans. And we stand ready to assist as you move forward with the budget process.

Thank you for your time.