TEXAS MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Physicians Caring for Texans

March 15, 2011

The Honorable Pete Gallego
House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence
PO Box 2910
Austin, TX 78701

Re:

		House Bill 1548 by Sheets
House Bill 108 by Brown	House Bill 597 by Madden	House Bill 2097 by Giddings
House Bill 470 by Anderson	House Bill 1011 by Bonnen	House Bill 2118 by Coleman

Dear Chairman Gallego:

The Texas Medical Association is concerned about drug use and addiction. That's why TMA appreciates the effort of Texas lawmakers to raise awareness about emerging drugs that are being used for nontherapeutic purposes. The representatives' bills demonstrate a statewide approach that will offer guidance so that local officials and law enforcement can uniformly address the presence of these drugs in their communities.

The products are sold in convenience stores or online. This can dangerously mislead minors and the general public into believing these products are safe. But physicians see the serious consequences of these drugs in their offices.

Mephedrone or "bath salts"
Nationally, poison control centers received 292 calls about the bath salts in 2010. One-and-half times that number of calls were taken during the first six weeks of 2011 alone. The products are stimulants and therefore can result in acute physical symptoms including increased blood pressure and chest pain. Serious psychological effects including hallucinations and severe paranoia have also been reported.

Salvia
In addition to similar synthetic products, the plant-derived salvia divinorum also poses a serious public health risk. According to a national survey, nearly 6 percent of high school seniors reported using salvia at least once in the last year. The survey showed a higher percentage of salvia users than users of Ecstasy, cocaine, or LSD. This is despite the serious health consequences that have been widely reported, such as hallucinations.

Synthetic cannabinoids
Products such as cannabinoids are marketed under names such as "Spice" or "K2," and are easily targeted to youth because they are cheap and accessible. But these products pose a serious health risk for anyone who uses them. In fact, more than 3,000 calls on these products have been made to U.S. poison centers since 2010.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue. TMA recognizes Representatives Anderson, Bonnen, Brown, Coleman, Giddings, Madden, and Sheets for their leadership in identifying these substances as a serious health threat. TMA supports legislative efforts to provide penalties for using these products which are unhealthy for Texas children, teens and adults. There are no known medical uses for these drugs and products. Many countries already have taken action to address the wide access to these drugs. TMA acknowledges the need to take a comprehensive approach to these drugs including informing the public and the medical community about the problems caused by these drugs.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey L. Levin

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Chair, Council on Science and Public Health

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