

TEXAS PUBLIC HEALTH COALITION

House Committee on Public Education Senate Bill 684 by Sen. Bob Deuell May 7, 2013

Good afternoon Chair Aycock and members of the committee. I'm John Carlo, MD, chief executive officer of AIDS Arms in Dallas, a non-profit service organization serving persons with HIV. I'm also the incoming chair of the Texas Medical Association Council on Science and Public Health. Today I'm testifying in support of Senate Bill 684 by Sen. Bob Deuell, MD, on behalf of the Texas Public Health Coalition. The coalition consists of more than 20 organizations dedicated to improving public health in Texas.

We believe keeping the fitness assessment in Texas' schools is important for the physical health of our children, and for the fiscal health of our state. We know school administrators are challenged by the many courses and activities they must fit in each school day. SB 684 helps schools meet this challenge by reducing the number of times students must take the fitness assessment. This change helps schools while ensuring Texas still gets the invaluable fitness assessment data from students. We believe it's a fair and good approach and we thank Senator Deuell for his leadership and work on this bill.

Our state is facing a childhood obesity epidemic. One third of our adolescents are overweight. The current school fitness assessment provides essential data to allow families, schools, and communities to target limited resources to help reduce and prevent obesity. Fitnessgram data are available to students and their parents. Understanding a child's cardiovascular endurance, body mass index, and muscle strength is important for families to support a healthy lifestyle and physical activity.

Leaders at all levels of government recognize the magnitude of the childhood obesity epidemic and the need to reverse the epidemic using rich data. Districts use these data to target interventions in their district. School districts understand that healthier students miss fewer days of class and do better in school. Comptroller Susan Combs recently launched the website www.reshapingtexas.org. This website maps the Fitnessgram measurements for all public school districts in Texas, and provides a platform for schools and communities to share best practices to address the epidemic.

In 2011, Sen. Jane Nelson authored Senate Bill 226 which gives the Texas Education Agency authority to correlate fitness assessment data with student academic achievement. While this analysis has not been done yet, we believe it could help develop targeted interventions for children to stay fit and healthy. That is why we also strongly support the dedication of state funds to help the state and all school districts make better use of fitness data. And that is also why we believe keeping the tests at all school districts, as required by SB 684, is so important. One day soon, we would hope to see an even more robust fitness assessment system.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for considering this legislation. I also want to thank Senator Deuell for his time and effort on this bill. It maintains fitness testing in Texas schools, while reducing the burden to schools. All, in all, it ensures Texas has critical data needed to fight Texas' costly obesity epidemic. We believe this is a fair compromise. We look forward to the opportunity to work with you on this legislation.