



Physicians Caring for Texans

**House Public Health Committee
Testimony by Gerald R. Callas, MD
House Bill 1256 by Rep. Dade Phelan
March 20, 2019**

Thank you, Chairwoman Thompson and members of the Public Health Committee, for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1256 by Representative Phelan. I'm Ray Callas, an anesthesiologist from Beaumont. I serve on the board of the Texas Medical Association and am here representing TMA and its nearly 53,000 physician and medical student members.

When Hurricane Harvey struck the Texas coast, first responders rescued more than 120,000 people,ⁱ clearly exemplifying the maxim of "Texans helping Texans." Just as they are saving and protecting lives, first responders themselves need to be protected and provided everything they need to do their job safely. This includes protecting them from potentially serious or even deadly infectious diseases, such as tetanus and hepatitis B, both of which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend disaster responders be immunized against.ⁱⁱ Unfortunately, during the disaster, many first responders found themselves unaware of their vaccination status or waiting to be caught up on their vaccinations because of vaccine shortages.

House Bill 1256 could potentially help us avoid this from happening again by granting first responder employers direct access to first responders' immunization records on the Texas statewide immunization registry during a disaster. The registry, ImmTrac2, is managed by the Department of State Health Services and provides one centralized system for Texans to provide written consent to store their immunization records securely and confidentially at no cost.ⁱⁱⁱ Knowing their vaccination status could not only help first responders be better prepared and protected but also may prevent potentially costly and unnecessary overvaccination.

An effective emergency/disaster response relies heavily on the capabilities and timeliness of our first responders. TMA supports House Bill 1256 and Representative Phelan's efforts to make Texas ready for the next inevitable disaster. TMA looks forward to working with this committee to potentially save time, money, and lives. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.

ⁱ Federal Emergency Management Agency, Historic Disaster Response to Hurricane Harvey in Texas (news release). Sept. 22, 2017. www.fema.gov/news-release/2017/09/22/historic-disaster-response-hurricane-harvey-texas.

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Immunization Recommendations for Disaster Responders. www.cdc.gov/disasters/disease/responderimmun.html (accessed March 18, 2019).

ⁱⁱⁱ Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), ImmTrac2 Registry Home. www.dshs.texas.gov/immunize/ImmTrac/ (accessed March 18, 2019).