



Physicians Caring for Texans

**House Public Health Committee
Testimony by Gerald R. Callas, MD
House Bill 1418 by Rep. Dade Phelan
March 20, 2019**

Thank you, Chairwoman Thompson and members of the Public Health Committee, for allowing me to testify in support of House Bill 1418 by Representative Phelan. My name is Ray Callas, and I'm an anesthesiologist from Beaumont. As a member of the board of the Texas Medical Association, I am here today representing its nearly 53,000 physician and medical student members.

First responders are critical in providing first aid, protecting civilians, and saving countless lives during disasters. The nature of their profession requires fast action and mental acuity amid stressful environments, and often concerns over their vaccination status have low priority. However, if not up to date with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-recommended vaccinations,ⁱ first responders risk exposure to and infection by potentially serious or even deadly diseases. During Hurricane Harvey, many first responders did not know their vaccination status. Also, some responders had to wait because a run on vaccines caused shortages, such as the limited supply of tetanus vaccine in Beaumont. Unprotected first responders risk their own safety; and, when it comes to communicable diseases, may also pose risks to their families' and others' safety.

In order for our first responders to be better prepared in the future, House Bill 1418 seeks to ensure emergency services personnel receive up-to-date information about their immunization status when they seek certification or recertification. First responders already can store their immunization information in Texas' statewide immunization registry, ImmTrac2. HB 1418 would provide first responders their immunization status information from ImmTrac2 at the time of certification or recertification. Or, if the applicant's information is not in the registry, he or she would be given information about the registry and the specific benefits of vaccination to protect against various biological threats.

First responders are already required to be certified and periodically recertified in emergency services. Through this system, HB 1418 provides our first responders an efficient reminder about staying up to date on their vaccines so they are consistently aware, protected, and ready for when the next disaster strikes. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony, and I welcome any questions.

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