July 22, 2017

The Honorable Jane Nelson, Chair
Texas State Senate Finance Committee
P. O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711-2068

Dear Chairwoman Nelson,

On behalf of the more than 50,000 physician and medical student members of the Texas Medical Association, I want to commend you for filing legislation designed to increase the pay of our classroom teachers, further reward long-serving teachers, and reduce health care expenses for active and retired teachers and their dependents.

As a product of the Texas public schools, I agree with you completely when you say, “Quality teachers are the key to a good education, and a good education is more precious than gold.” None of the outstanding physicians who serve Texans today would have earned our degrees without dedicated classroom teachers who taught us, encouraged us, and guided us.

But just as TMA lauds this goal, we find ourselves at a crossroad of concern about funding this proposal with a $405 million deferral of payments to Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs). Granted, we recognize and applaud that your statement of intent notes that “MCOs will be made whole in September 2019” and that “[t]his approach will not result in reduced provider rates or a disruption to benefits and services for Medicaid members.”

And just as we tell our children when they are learning to drive— “we trust you but not the drivers around you.” We find ourselves concerned as well with Senate Bill 2 by Sen. Larry Taylor, which establishes a public education tax credit scholarship and educational expense assistance program funded with an additional $270 million in deferred payments to Medicaid (with no provision for repayment).

Therefore, as we stand at this crossroad of concern, the members and staff of the Texas Medical Association also stand at the ready to work with you and your colleagues to safeguard our state’s Medicaid funding and seek alternative funding options for a physical and fiscal healthier Texas.

Sincerely,

Carlos J. Cardenas, MD
President

PS: TMA would like to schedule a meeting and/or conference call with you on Monday? Whatever time works best for you will work for us. Your office can reach out to Darren Whitehurst for coordination.

We need more former public school teachers like you in Austin!