

September 30, 2021

To: Members of the Texas House Committee on Appropriations

Dear Chair Bonnen, Vice Chair Gonzalez, and members of the House Committee on Appropriations,

Thank you for your continued service to make Texas the best place to live, work, and do business for all Texans this legislative session.

As you and your colleagues on the Texas House Committee on Appropriations deliberate uses for the state's allotment from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), **the Dallas Regional Chamber (DRC) and the co-signed organizations urge you to consider appropriating \$238 million in federal ARPA funds to provide for the construction of a state behavioral health hospital in Dallas.**

A 2014 report commissioned by the state revealed significant need for psychiatric hospital capacity statewide, spurring the adoption of an ambitious state plan in 2017 to add more than 650 beds across Texas. Since, the Texas Legislature has approved more than \$1 billion to renovate existing facilities and build new hospitals, including \$45 million in planning and land acquisition funds for a facility in North Texas during the most recent regular session.

The approval of planning and land acquisition funding is welcome progress for Dallas, which remains the largest metropolitan service area in the state without a psychiatric health hospital.

Presently, the Terrell State Hospital serves the psychiatric health needs of 25 counties in one of the most populous areas of the state. With demand for mental health services surging in North Texas as the result of rapid population growth, a declining supply of service providers, and adverse mental health impacts stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, patients must often wait days or even weeks for treatment.

With the third called session of the 87th Texas Legislature underway, state lawmakers have a meaningful opportunity to address this pressing need in North Texas at no cost to the state.

Of note, the construction of a state behavioral hospital falls squarely in line with the permissible uses of ARPA funds. In fact, federal guidance encourages states to leverage aid to support public health expenditures, including behavioral healthcare.

Should funding be allocated, the construction of a behavioral health hospital in Dallas could begin swiftly. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission has already engaged UT Southwestern Medical Center (UTSW) as an experienced partner in hospital construction and joint planning of an approximately 200-bed psychiatric hospital has begun with the support of the 87th Legislature's appropriation. In addition to recent experience in designing and constructing its award-winning William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital, UTSW offers the multi-disciplinary physician expertise needed to operate a psychiatric hospital, while advancing patient care through research and training more behavioral healthcare providers, including physicians as one of the largest psychiatric residency programs in the country and the only forensic psychiatry training program in the state.

There is broad-based support for this project and the services it will provide across a variety of stakeholders in North Texas, including the business community, healthcare providers, public safety and law enforcement, philanthropy, and non-profit organizations.

The one-time allocation of \$238 million in federal funds for a behavioral health hospital will come at no fiscal consequence to the state while addressing a dire need for the people of North Texas. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Dale Petroskey
President & CEO
Dallas Regional Chamber

Clay Jenkins
County Judge
Dallas County

Jon Roth
Executive Vice President & CEO
Dallas County Medical Society

Business

Arlington Chamber of Commerce
Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce
Dallas Citizens Council
Downtown Dallas, Inc.
Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce

McKinney Chamber of Commerce
North Dallas Chamber of Commerce
North Texas Commission
Plano Chamber of Commerce

Healthcare

Dallas County Medical Society
Dallas Medical Resource
Metrocare Services

North Texas Healthcare Alliance
Parkland Hospital

Philanthropy & Non-profit

Austin Street Center
Bachman Lake Together
Big Thought
The Bridge Homeless Recovery Center
CitySquare
Children At Risk
Communities Foundation of Texas
Dallas CASA
The Dallas Foundation
Faith Formula Human Services

Friendship-West Baptist Church
Grant Halliburton Foundation
Jubilee Park & Community Center
Mental Health America of Greater Dallas
MDHA (Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance)
Momentous Institute
NAMI North Texas
United Way of Metropolitan Dallas
YMCA of Metropolitan Dallas