



**House Public Health Committee
Feb. 27, 2019**

Written testimony submitted on behalf of:
Texas Medical Association
Texas Pediatric Society
Federation of Texas Psychiatry

By: Uchenna Umeh, MD

On behalf of the Texas Medical Association, the Texas Pediatric Society, and the Federation of Texas Psychiatry, we would like to offer our support of House Bill 10. We appreciate the leadership of Chairwoman Thompson and the House Public Health Committee to better integrate physical and mental health care across the state through the initiatives included in HB 10.

My name is Uchenna Umeh, MD, and I am a pediatrician based in San Antonio with more than 30 years of experience. My patients and their stories continue to demonstrate the need for a strong and integrated behavioral health system throughout the state. I have seen firsthand how mental health conditions like depression can impact children and adolescents. Unfortunately, I have also witnessed the impacts of unaddressed mental health conditions, including some patient stories that will stay with me for the rest of my life. My experiences lead me to focus my career on doing all that I can to educate young people about mental health and suicide.

Our groups wholeheartedly support the enhanced children's mental health access and treatment through the provisions of HB 10. The Texas Behavioral Health Research Institute has the potential to leverage existing capacity in our state's medical schools to craft innovative, Texas-specific solutions. As you are aware, Texas is home to some of the nation's top universities with broad expertise in mental health and substance use conditions. As physicians, we know that many Texas universities and medical schools are key access points for patients to receive innovative, evidence-based treatments. The Institute would create the formal infrastructure needed to disseminate essential knowledge to the broader mental health and substance use workforce and fund grants for community-based projects to directly treat more Texans.

HB 10 would also lay the groundwork for true collaboration between research universities, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, and nonprofit mental health and substance use-focused organizations. These collaborative efforts would expand the capacity of our current workforce through stronger institutional alignment and strategic planning, including those impacting our youth in public schools. We strongly support HB 10's statewide plan to address

behavioral health issues in schools. When all components of the state's behavioral health system operate cohesively with a shared vision, all Texans benefit.

Physicians strongly support a greater statewide focus on academic mental health and substance use research, and recognize the promise of new research opportunities presented through HB 10 and the Institute. We strongly support HB 10's creation of a behavioral health research and treatment grant program and the Crisis Addiction Grant Program that would offer community-based programs funds to expand upon existing mental health and substance use services for Texans needing treatment.

With our state's current focus on preventing maternal mortality and morbidity, we have the opportunity to focus attention on addressing issues for pregnant and postpartum women. While we have made strides in screening efforts for postpartum depression (PPD), there is still a significant gap in providing treatment for women after a positive screening through primary care and obstetric and gynecological visits. Through HB 10's child-psychiatry access line infrastructure, primary care physicians or obstetricians-gynecologists (OB-Gyns) could easily connect with experts in the field for teleconsultation on PPD. This connection would allow the current workforce to treat women in a clinical setting they can already access.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer support and additional potential policy opportunities for HB 10. Thank you for your consideration.