



March 30, 2021

Dear Governor Abbott, Lt. Governor Patrick and Speaker Phelan,

As the leading business organizations in Texas representing a broad and diverse group of Texas businesses, we collectively support bipartisan policies that result in more Texans obtaining access to quality and affordable health care coverage.

Texas suffers from the highest uninsured rate and number of uninsured individuals in the nation. Even though most Texans without health insurance are employed, they lack the ability to access employer-based coverage, Medicare, Medicaid, and other subsidized individual insurance available to families with incomes over the poverty level. These individuals are uninsured because they earn too little money – or too much money – and fall into a coverage gap leaving them without viable options for health insurance coverage. It is past time we address this situation with a sensible and stable solution.

We believe covering more Texans can be accomplished through a thoughtful waiver-based program drawing on innovative solutions adopted from states like Arizona, Arkansas, Iowa, Indiana, Montana, and adhering to the following principles:

- **FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY.** Several recent studies have shown that a waiver-based coverage program could be done with minimal impact on the state budget. It would also enable the annual re-allocation of as much as \$3 billion in local property taxes that are currently spent on health care to the uninsured, primarily in public hospital emergency rooms.
- **MAKE TEXAS EVEN MORE COMPETITIVE.** Texas is a beacon for employers because of its innovative spirit, business investment, low taxes, low regulations, and affordable housing. One of the few areas in which we lag behind other states is access to health care coverage. A waiver-based program addresses that problem head-on with minimal impact to the state budget while making billions of new federal dollars available to the state.
- **PROTECT COMMUNITY-BASED HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS.** Later this year, an agreement with the federal government providing \$2.5 billion in annual funding for regional and local health initiatives expires. Without some means of replacing this lost revenue, rural hospitals will face unsustainable financial hardship and community mental health centers could lose as much as 1/3 of their funding. Waiver-based coverage can work to help close the gaps in uncompensated care costs for these facilities while increasing access to services for many Texans.
- **SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN, PREGNANT WOMEN, THE ELDERLY, AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.** A waiver-based coverage program will produce as much as \$6 billion in additional temporary federal funding for existing programs targeted to vulnerable Texans.



- **LOWER HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUMS.** All Texans pay for the costs of uncompensated medical care through their health insurance premiums and higher overall medical costs. One of the most straightforward ways to lower health care costs for everyone is by shifting care models from expensive and avoidable emergency care to cost-effective care built around prevention, timely disease interventions, and chronic care that is well-coordinated and reliable.
- **REDUCE WORKER ABSENTEEISM.** Several recent studies have shown that providing coverage to low-income workers makes it easier for them to secure and maintain employment because they are healthier and at less risk of missing work because of an illness or injury. This is especially true for many already hard-hit pandemic essential workers who cannot get health insurance through their jobs—workers at restaurants, retail and grocery stores, childcare centers, and home-health agencies.

A strong Texas economy depends on a healthy workforce. The pandemic has reinforced how our economy is tied directly to the health of our communities and to the health of all Texans. It is time we implement bipartisan solutions to address this complex problem.

Sincerely,

Arlington Chamber of Commerce
Austin Chamber of Commerce
Dallas Regional Chamber
El Paso Chamber of Commerce
Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce
Greater Houston Partnership
San Antonio Chamber of Commerce
United Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce