

**Testimony of Janet Realini, MD, MPH
Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition**



**House Public Health Committee
House Bill 279 by Howard
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Janet Realini, MD, MPH
February 28, 2017**

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 279 by Representative Donna Howard. The Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition (TWHC) and its 67 healthcare, faith, and community-based member organizations are dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Texas women, babies, and families by ensuring access to preventive healthcare for all Texas women. Access to preventive and preconception care—including health screenings and contraception—means healthy, planned pregnancies and early detection of cancers and other treatable conditions.

Preserving the Women's Health Advisory Committee (WHAC) will allow this committee to continue its important work guiding the development of the state's new women's health programs, Healthy Texas Women (HTW) and the Family Planning (FP) Program. These programs serve as the primary state-funded safety net for low-income women in need of essential preventive services such as well-woman exams, cancer screenings, and contraception. Access to preventive healthcare is critically important to the health and well-being of women and babies, and to the fiscal health of our state. As our state seeks strategies to combat high maternal mortality rates and the threat of Zika transmission, the need for these services has never been greater.

Texas' women's health programs underwent consolidation and significant restructuring as a result of Sunset recommendations of the 84th Legislature. Prior to the programs' launch, HHSC had important decisions to make regarding key program components, including covered benefits, cost reimbursement structure, and program rules. Each of these decisions will impact the hundreds of thousands of women receiving services through HTW and the Family Planning Program. **The WHAC has served as an important body for guiding decision-making about program design, sharing information with the public, and providing a forum for stakeholders to weigh in on the programs' development.**

Much of the effectiveness of the WHAC has been due to the expertise of its membership. The members of the WHAC represent a wide range of women's health providers, including Federally Qualified Health

Centers (FQHCs), obstetricians and gynecologists, Title X providers, hospitals, and specialized family planning clinics. Due to this broad provider representation, the WHAC's recommendations have been based on members' on-the-ground experience with women's health programs in Texas. This experience will continue to enable WHAC members to recommend administrative and programmatic changes designed to maximize access to care.

WHAC meetings have also played an important role for the general public, allowing stakeholders to receive program updates from HHSC. These meetings have provided information on issues including provider enrollment, benefits packages, and rule changes. Public comment periods have been an opportunity for stakeholders to make recommendations, seek clarification on program components, and raise issues they have experienced with the rollout of the programs.

The need for the WHAC will be just as acute in 2018 and 2019. Though HTW and the Family Planning Program officially launched in July of 2016, the programs are still in their early developmental stage. Several providers are still rolling out their programs and services, and all providers in the state are still adjusting to the programs' new components. The WHAC provides an essential public forum for working through the challenges of the programs, as well as for identifying ways to improve their effectiveness and reach. The need in the state is substantial, with nearly 1.8 million women in need of state-supported preventive health services.¹ The next biennium will be a critical time for monitoring and improving our state's women's health programs to ensure they are meeting the needs of vulnerable Texas women.

Due to the relatively recent launch of HTW and the FP Program, the state has limited data on the number of women being reached, the impact of new benefits packages, and the average cost per client. Continuing the WHAC will enable the state to maintain an important forum for monitoring the growth of the state's women's health programs and confronting any barriers to women's healthcare access.

The TWHC thanks the Public Health Committee for its ongoing commitment to the health and wellbeing of women and families in Texas. Your support for HB 279 will help ensure the success of the state's women's health programs, leading to improved outcomes for women, babies, and families across the state.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or if we can provide further information, please contact me at (210) 223-4589 or email me at JRealini@hf-tx.org.

Respectfully submitted,



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Chair, Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition

¹ Frost JJ et al., *Contraceptive Needs and Services, 2014 Update*, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2016, <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/contraceptive-needs-and-services-2014-update>.

Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition Steering Committee Members

Texas Medical Association
 District XI (Texas) American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
 Texas Academy of Family Physicians
 Texas Association of Community Health Centers
 Methodist Healthcare Ministries
 Teaching Hospitals of Texas
 Women's Health and Family Planning Association of Texas
 Texans Care for Children
 Center for Public Policy Priorities
 Healthy Futures of Texas

Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition General Members

Access Esperanza Clinics Inc.	National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
Amistad Community Health Center	North Harris Montgomery Advanced Practice Nurse Society
Austin Advanced Practice Nurses	North Texas Alliance to Reduce Teen Pregnancy
Austin Physicians for Social Responsibility	North Texas Nurse Practitioners
AWHONN Texas	Panhandle Nurse Practitioner Association
Brazos Valley Nurse Practitioner Association	People's Community Clinic
Cardea	Port Arthur Housing Authority
Center for Community Health, UNTHSC	SALVERE (Striving to Achieve Literacy via Education, Research, and Engagement)
Central Texas Nurse Practitioners	San Antonio Metropolitan Health District
Children's Hospital Association of Texas	San Antonio Nurses in Advanced Practice
Coalition for Nurses in Advanced Practice	Schneider Communications
Coastal Bend Advanced Practice Nurses	South Plains Nurse Practitioner Association
Coastal Bend Wellness Foundation	South Texas Family Planning & Health Corp.
Consortium of Texas Certified Nurse Midwives	Southeast Texas Nurse Practitioner Associates
Department of Ob/Gyn of UNTHSC and the ForHER Institute	St. David's Foundation
El Paso Area Advanced Practice Nurse Association	Texas Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley	Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Fort Worth Region Nurse Practitioners	Texas Council on Family Violence
Gateway to Care	Texas Health Institute
Good Neighbor Health Center	Texas Hospital Association
Hill Country Advanced Practice Nurses & Physicians Assistants Association	Texas Medical Association Alliance
Houston Area Chapter of NAPNAP	Texas Nurse Practitioners
Houston Area Nurse Practitioners	Texas Nurses Association
League of Women Voters of Texas	Texas Pediatric Society
Legacy Community Health Services	Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry
March of Dimes - Texas	The Contraceptive Initiative
Mental Health America of Greater Houston	University Health System
National Council of Jewish Women—Texas State Policy Advocacy Network	Women's & Men's Health Services of the Coastal Bend, Inc.