



Physicians Caring for Texans

Senate Health and Human Services
Senate Bill 969 by Sen. Lois Kolkhorst
Testimony by John T. Carlo, MD
Texas Medical Association
March 31, 2021

Madame Chair Kolkhorst and esteemed members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the 55,000 physician and medical student members of the Texas Medical Association in *support* of Senate Bill 969. TMA commends Senator Kolkhorst's strong legislation to tackle the data and reporting issues seen during the COVID-19 pandemic that caused relentless backups and delays – and ultimately held back Texas from having a timelier public health response.

Texas knew COVID-19 was coming, but on March 4, 2020, when the first reported case was announced, we had no idea of the year looming ahead of us. The pandemic stretched our modest public health resources invariably thin. As case numbers rose, many physician offices were unable to connect with their local health departments, which were crippled with archaic fax systems for reporting confirmed cases of COVID-19. Reporting thousands of cases via fax machine slowed down the entire response process, from being able to quickly notify patients of their positive result, to timely isolation, to effective contact tracing, and ultimately to preventing the continued transmission of the virus. TMA appreciates this bill's reporting measures via electronic data submission and not via outdated, slow faxing.

TMA also appreciates SB 969 creating a standardized information-sharing method to better streamline data sharing, communication, and collaboration among local health authorities, hospitals, and laboratories. We also support the bill's provision for sharing reportable disease information to the public during public health disasters. Quality, timely, accurate data are key to an effective public health response and communication, especially epidemiological data. To this end, TMA is excited to see the bill establishing the Office of Chief State Epidemiologist within the Texas Department of State Health Services.

TMA appreciates the efforts of this committee to bolster Texas' infectious disease and disaster preparedness. We thank Senator Kolkhorst again for her work on SB 969 and believe this bill will no doubt save future Texans' lives when the next pandemic inevitably hits. Thank you to this committee for the opportunity to express our support, and I am happy to answer any questions.