



**Senate State Affairs Committee
Testimony by Valerie Smith, MD
Senate Bill 29 by Sen. Brian Birdwell
March 20, 2023**

Honorable Chair Hughes, Vice-Chair Paxton, and Committee Members:

My name is Dr. Valerie Smith, and I'm a pediatrician in Tyler, and constituent of Sen. Hughes, testifying on behalf the Texas Medical Association and Texas Pediatric Society. Thank you for the opportunity to respectfully testify **in opposition to** Senate Bill 29.

Without question, our society thrives when individuals can freely engage in commerce and education. Closing schools and businesses can not only be detrimental to our economy, but also can have negative health consequences. Ideally, we'd never need mask mandates or closures; avoiding them begins with a robust public health infrastructure to respond to disease outbreaks. TMA and TPS know this very well, as our physicians worked throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to provide evidence-based guidelines for hospitals, businesses, and schools, on how to keep their doors open while minimizing the risk of disease. Our work reflected the delicate balance of knowing when a disease is more harmful than the disease interventions. These interventions – along with encouraging vaccination – were essential to saving lives and preventing hospitals from being overrun with patients. While we sincerely hope we never again face another pandemic spike, more deadly COVID-19 strains could develop. By prohibiting government entities from ever using these measures to stop the spread of COVID-19, we would remove tools from our toolbox we may need in the future.

Another deadly outbreak of COVID-19 might be isolated locally or regionally, so limiting local government action could hinder response. These entities may need some of these measures to prevent hospitals and physician offices from being overrun, unable to care for patients.

No closure or mandate is taken lightly. Either should be judiciously and rarely applied. However, by prohibiting governments from ever utilizing these tools to respond to a COVID-19 outbreak, we are stripping the state of resources it may need for an unknown future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify; I am happy to answer any questions.