

Copy of Letter to Governor Perry from the Texas Big City Mayors

February 6, 2009

The Honorable Rick Perry
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Governor Perry:

Mayors from the largest cities in Texas meet on a regular basis to discuss issues that are common to major urban areas. Over the past several months our meetings have focused on the important issue of homelessness in urban areas and the growing need for state support for homeless services and housing in our cities.

Each night, more than 44,000 Texans are homeless. The majority of homeless individuals reside in urban areas, according to HUD's 2007 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, and 75% of sheltered homeless persons access homeless residential services that are located in central cities rather than in suburban or rural areas. It is critical for us to address this problem by providing housing and services that assist these vulnerable individuals and families in getting back on their feet.

In addition to the profound toll that housing insecurity exacts on families, individuals and neighborhoods, homelessness is expensive to Texas taxpayers. Independent studies in Bexar, Travis and Tarrant County, for example, all point to a response system that cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars each year. Worse, too many of the responses—like Emergency Room-delivered health care—perpetuate the problem, rather than offer meaningful and proven solutions.

While each urban area has its own unique service delivery system, we can all agree that supportive housing coupled with supportive services is the most effective way to assist homeless individuals and families live more stable and productive lives.

We have developed three legislative proposals that would assist the large urban areas in providing critical services to homeless individuals and families.

First, the Mayors of the 8 largest urban areas in Texas (Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Austin, Arlington, El Paso and Corpus Christi) request that the State provide \$25 million annually in funding for supportive services, work and housing retention services that help the most vulnerable homeless individuals and families in Texas access and retain housing.

The funds will be used to leverage local initiatives that provide housing and supportive services to homeless individuals and families. Uses include support for the operation of homeless assistance centers and supportive services for residents of permanent supportive housing.

A portion of these requested funds (a maximum of 10% of the total allocation) will go to the balance of the state also impacted by the need for homeless services. In the eight urban areas noted above, the remaining funds shall be allocated according to the overall population of the cities.

Oversight and intergovernmental coordination will be provided by the Texas Interagency Council on Homelessness. The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) will serve as the fiscal agent. Funds will be distributed to the lead agency within each urban area as identified by the largest city in each urban area. The Texas Homeless Network will serve as the lead agency for the balance of the state.

Second, the Mayors agree that assisting with the re-entry of individuals back into the community will help to address homelessness among the mental health mental retardation (MHMR) priority population. We seek to create strategic partnerships with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to better link the re-entry population from our prisons, and the operational and service subsidies that come with them, to supportive services.

Third, we are requesting that the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and the Department of Public Safety collaborate to issue an official Texas ID Certificate for everyone discharged from a Texas jail or prison prior to their release date.

We, the Mayors of the eight most populous cities in Texas, respectfully request your assistance and guidance to achieve these important legislative goals. We look forward to working with your office and the leadership of the Texas Legislature to secure the tools needed to serve the most vulnerable within our cities and the State.

Sincerely,

Mayor Tom Leppert
City of Dallas

Mayor Bill White
City of Houston

Mayor Mike Moncrief
City of Fort Worth

Mayor Phil Hardberger
City of San Antonio

Mayor Will Wynn
City of Austin

Mayor John Cook
City of El Paso

Mayor Robert Cluck
City of Arlington

Mayor Henry Garrett
City of Corpus Christi