



TARRANT COUNTY

March 10, 2023

The Honorable Joan Huffman
Chair
Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Greg Bonnen
Chair
House Appropriations Committee

RE: Request for a Tarrant County Hospital Study

Dear Chairs Huffman and Bonnen:

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to providing mental health services in the State of Texas. Senate Bill 1, House Bill 1, and the supplemental appropriations act include historic increases in funding for mental health services, specifically state mental health facilities. This session's appropriation act includes new and remodeled mental health hospitals across the state, but no facility is included to address competency restoration in Tarrant County. We respectfully request the inclusion of \$15.5 million in funding for a study and planning grant for a Tarrant County State Hospital.

The number of inmates awaiting competency restoration in county jails across the State has grown to crisis levels. The Tarrant County Jail's challenges are demonstrative of the statewide issue: approximately 300 inmates are awaiting competency restoration and 190 of those inmates are on the waitlist to have their competency restored at a state facility. Some of those inmates have been on the state waitlist since 2020, costing Tarrant County taxpayers tens of millions of dollars.

Having a local facility for inmates in need of competency restoration will lead to better outcomes and a safer community. A Tarrant County State Hospital would make available local forensic beds dedicated to competency restoration, without the long wait and hours-long travel distance that currently exists to receive treatment at another state facility. Tarrant County is in a fifty-three (53) county catchment area for the North Texas State Hospital, and a new facility in Tarrant County would add additional capacity for that fifty-three (53) county area spanning from Grayson County to the panhandle.

Tarrant County has developed innovative mental health programs to meet the needs of our community: Taxpayers fund 136 psychiatric beds in the JPS Health system (with more in development through the 2018 bond package); a mental health jail diversion center; and a mental health law liaison program. Tarrant County is also the State leader in jail-based competency restoration. Despite the state funding Tarrant County receives for jail-based competency restoration, and despite serving twice the number of people for which we are funded, Tarrant County still has a significant number of people awaiting transfer to a state hospital for competency restoration.

Tarrant County is the largest county in the state without a state hospital, which is desperately needed for our community. Please include funding for a study and planning grant for a Tarrant County State Hospital in this biennium's appropriations act.

County Judge Tim O'Hare

Roy C. Brooks
Commissioner, Precinct 1

Gary Fickes
Commissioner, Precinct 3

Alisa Simmons
Commissioner, Precinct 2

Manny Ramirez
Commissioner, Precinct 4