



## CHARLES SCHWERTNER

STATE SENATOR • DISTRICT 5

COMMITTEES: HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES, CHAIR • ADMINISTRATION  
BUSINESS & COMMERCE • FINANCE • STATE AFFAIRS

May 26, 2016

Commissioner Charles Smith  
Texas Health and Human Services Commission  
Brown-Heatly Building  
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.  
Austin, Texas 78751

Commissioner Smith:

The Senate Committee on Health and Human Services recently met to discuss the state's ability to effectively respond to challenges posed by the Zika virus. After receiving testimony from the Department of State Health Services, recognized medical experts on the virus, and local health departments, it is clear that parts of Texas are at substantial risk for local transmission of the Zika virus, which can have potentially devastating effects on pregnant women and their unborn children. It is also clear that more work needs to be done to ensure the state is prepared to respond appropriately and effectively should Texas residents contract the Zika virus. While I appreciate the work of the Department of State Health Services to develop an initial state Zika Plan, I believe a more robust strategy is necessary to guide the response of state and local authorities faced with a local transmission of Zika, or a larger scale outbreak.

The lack of a clear commitment from the Federal Government to assist the states in combating the Zika virus, coupled with the uncertain timeline of Texas receiving additional federal funds, only further complicates the challenge faced by Texas in responding to the threat posed by the Zika virus.

In light of these realities, I urge you to work with local health departments and elected leaders in high-risk counties to formulate a clear and concise plan of action for how each county or region intends to respond to the Zika virus.

More specifically, I request that you:

- Identify what funds and resources at the Health and Human Services Commission and the Department of State Health Services could be used to support Zika response activities should local transmission occur;

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- Work with leaders of other agencies such as the Texas Division of Emergency Management to determine if they are capable of contributing additional funding to Zika response measures;
- Identify counties with an elevated risk for local transmission;
- Request to review a local health authority's plan to respond to local transmission for all authorities located in counties with an elevated risk. If a local health authority does not have a plan, request that they create one;
- Identify what resources local authorities would utilize to effectively respond to local transmission in these high-risk areas based on their response plan;
- Update the state Zika Plan to incorporate more detailed contingency plans that will be enacted in the event of a local transmission, including different actions that should occur based on the level of severity of the spread of Zika; and
- Identify strategies to expand laboratory testing capacity for pregnant women suspected of having Zika.

The detrimental effects of Zika are both abundantly clear and gravely concerning, and I'm concerned it's only a matter of time until Texas' first local transmission case of the Zika virus is diagnosed. I look forward to working closely with you and our local partners to protect the health and safety of all Texans and ensure that the state of Texas takes a proactive approach in its response to the Zika virus.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Schwertner".

Charles Schwertner  
State Senator

Cc: Commissioner John Hellerstedt