DADE PHELAN

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

June 13, 2022

The Honorable Dan Patrick
Lieutenant Governor of the State of Texas
Post Office Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711-2068

Dear Lieutenant Governor Patrick,

As Texans continue to mourn with the families and community of Uvalde, the Texas House has begun its work to both fully examine the circumstances surrounding this horrific tragedy and identify steps that can be taken to better ensure that such senseless acts of violence never occur in our state again.

Like you, I believe our respective chambers have the obligation to take immediate, concrete action with the goal of making our schools as safe as possible before the start of the upcoming school year. Your recommendation to dedicate $50 million toward outfitting local school law enforcement with bulletproof shields is a worthwhile goal to that end, and you have my full support in that endeavor.

I also believe our state is best served by a multi-faceted response -- one that includes strategies to improve mental health outcomes and strengthen school security for students and teachers, which our chambers have worked in stride to improve and enhance for multiple sessions. Outlined below are several additional actions I believe we can reasonably take before the start of school this fall, and I urge your consideration and support of these efforts.

Mental Health

Over the last decade, the Texas Legislature has made significant investments in our mental health system, increasing funding by more than 34% since 2015. As such, we have a robust infrastructure in place which can be leveraged to address remaining gaps in the system. We have an immediate opportunity to ensure that Texas children and adolescents have access to services that cannot only

detect and treat mental illness before a crisis, but also target interventions for high-risk populations. With additional funding, the initiatives below can be scaled up to address additional need going into the 2022-2023 school year:

- **Expand Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHATT) statewide** - TCHATT provides telemedicine services to schools to help identify and assess children and adolescents with behavioral health needs and provide access to mental health services, with parental consent. *Cost estimate: $37.5M additional per year. (Current services funded at $25M per year to serve 40% of the state.)*

- **Implement Pediatric Crisis Stabilization and Response Teams (PCSRTs) in each region to ensure children, youth and families have access to crisis intervention** - PCSRTs are designed to respond immediately to a mental health crisis and provide a bridge to engage in ongoing care, thereby reducing pressure on foster care systems and hospital emergency rooms. *Cost estimate: $10.5M per year, plus $3M in start-up costs for six full teams and six half teams ($1.1M per team, plus $275,000 per team in start-up costs)*

- **Increase the number of Multisystemic Therapy (MST) across the state** - MST is an evidenced based, targeted intervention and has been proven to reduce the risk of violence by over 75 percent. *Cost estimate: $575,000 per team per year, plus $100,000 in first-year training. There are currently seven MST teams in Texas, and the state needs 140 teams to meet the statewide need. Estimate that five to seven teams could be implemented in fall 2022 and 10-14 additional teams for spring 2023. Adding MST as a Medicaid benefit could offset general revenue costs.*

- **Expand Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) teams across the state** - CSC is designed to treat youth experiencing a first episode of psychosis. Psychosis, when untreated, makes a person 15 times more likely to commit homicide. *Cost estimate: $475,000 per team, per year. Texas currently has 37 teams across 23 program sites serving the state. Estimate adding two additional CSC teams, including a dedicated team for the San Antonio area with capacity to serve Uvalde. Adding CSC as a Medicaid benefit could offset general revenue costs.*

- **Increase community mental health bed capacity and allow payment of market rates** - Hospitals across the state are experiencing increasing demand for inpatient capacity to care for children in need of mental health treatment. Expansion of pediatric mental health beds is necessary to address the growing number of acute cases in children. *Cost estimate: $30M per year.*

School Safety

While the Texas Legislature has made significant strides in recent sessions to improve school safety, the senseless act of violence that occurred at Robb Elementary in Uvalde has made it clear there is more to be done. I am proposing the following strategies for your immediate consideration, each of which will provide for additional school safety resources and training in the immediate weeks and months:

- **Provide funding for Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT)** – The state should provide for all law enforcement cadets and active-duty licensed peace officers to receive this training, with priority being given to all school resource officers. The ALERRT Center at Texas State University is a nationally-recognized leader in providing research-based active shooter training for law enforcement. Governor Abbott directed the deployment of active shooter training to all school districts in his June 6th letter to Dr. Peter Blair, Executive Director of the ALERRT Center. *Cost estimate: $7 million will provide the ALERRT Center with the resources to begin providing the materials and training to all active-duty law enforcement annually (on a three-year cycle) and cadets training for a career in law enforcement. Priority should be given to ensuring active school resource officers receive the training immediately.*

- **Provide funding for the Texas School Safety Center** – This will ensure every school district in the state has access to training and assessments conducted by the Center. In his June 1st letter to Dr. Kathy Martinez-Prather, Governor Abbott directed the Center to ensure that every school district School Safety and Security Committee has reviewed their emergency operations plan and addressed campus security needs .Governor Abbott also directed that every district School Behavioral Threat Assessment Team is trained and has reviewed their campus procedures. *Cost estimate: $7 million will provide the Texas School Safety Center the resources necessary to conduct these reviews, and ensure that every district in the state has access to training and instruction by the end of 2023.*

- **Provide funding to school districts to allow for the purchase of silent panic alert technology** – This technology connects directly with law enforcement and provides real-time coordination between first responder agencies. The technology called for in legislation known as "Alyssa's Law" has passed in Florida and New Jersey, and is or has been considered in other states, including Texas. *Cost estimate: Similar to the State of Florida, a funding model of $2,000 per campus would provide Texas' nearly 9,350 public school and charter campuses the resources to purchase panic alert technology at a cost of roughly $18.7 million.*

I agree that funding can and should be made available for the items detailed above – in addition to your proposal for bulletproof shields – by way of budget execution. The option of using surplus appropriations to the Foundation School Program will be more than sufficient to cover the cost of all of these actions and will not impact funding for any school district in the process.

The coming year will bring many debates and policy discussions about how our state approaches the issues of school safety, mental health, police training, firearm safety, and more, and I look forward to working with you in this important mission to make Texas a safer place. It is my fervent hope that our chambers can come together earnestly to do what is right for the State of Texas and the community of Uvalde, beginning with the initiatives that you and I have now both proposed.

Sincerely,



Dade Phelan
Speaker of the House

cc: Governor Greg Abbott