



CITY OF HOUSTON

Housing & Community Development Department

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April 11, 2025

The Honorable Bryan Hughes – Committee Chair
Senate Committee on State Affairs
Sam Houston Building, 380
201 E 14th St
Austin, TX 78701

RE: ADDRESSING SENATE BILL 2487

Honorable Chairman Hughes and Members of the Senate Committee on State Affairs,

On behalf of the City of Houston, I appreciate the opportunity to provide and share this written testimony on **Senate Bill 2487** (SB 2487), “*Relating to procedures for and certain facilities providing crisis and mental health services*”, introduced by Senator Tan Parker. The City of Houston, as a leader and model for the nation on addressing homelessness, would like to offer our insights and work together with the state legislature to inform future legislative actions to address homelessness in Texas.

Since 2011, Houston and Harris County have housed over 32,000 people, and due to our strong dedication and commitment between the city, county, and its partners and a concerted effort to leverage these partnerships and available resources, including federal dollars, in providing public services, shelters, and rehousing of homeless individuals and families. In November 2024, Mayor Whitmire launched a City-wide effort to end street homelessness in the City of Houston and this effort has enlightened City leaders about the difficulty of compassionately dealing with homeless individuals with mental health and addiction issues. This past January, the City endured a winter storm and freeze that claimed the life of homeless individuals which we believe was directly linked to chronic mental health issues. This experience has clarified the City’s desire to have law enforcement play a larger role in compelling people to treatment, particularly chronically homeless individuals that are a harm to themselves, but may not be in a critical situation.

There is a clear need for this legislation in Houston. Having the ability to compel to treatment for individuals showing mental illness and meeting the definitions shown in the draft bill would substantially improve mental health care for chronically homeless individuals in our City.

The City of Houston **supports** SB 2487; however, we would also like to propose a list of potential amendments that we believe would complement and better our successful homelessness model/program.

Potential Amendments to SB 2487

Increase funding for homelessness programs and services

- The bill mandates a county with 1.2 million people to establish a “crisis service center”, which will provide comprehensive crisis and mental health services, 24/7 every day of the week.
- Compliance with the bill’s language will require additional personnel, coordination, and services that counties/cities may not currently have. We recommend revising the fiscal note and exploring potential funding streams.
 - These are serious responsibilities that would require additional funding from an already strapped homelessness response system to provide the needed assistance and operations throughout the city/county.
 - We ask that the legislature add funding options to the bill, such as a grant of funds to assist in establishing crisis service centers, the ability to consider a crisis service center as a “community amenity” within a LIHTC project, or some other categorization that would allow other funding streams to be eligible expenses for building crisis service centers.

Add a larger list of potential reasons to compel a person to treatment

- We recommend the bill be amended to expand the list of potential reasons to compel a person to treatment, such as:
 - The person shows severe emotional distress
 - The individual is chronically homeless and has entered and exited the homeless system multiple times
 - The person is unable to recognize their mental health status

Expand the term “peace officer” within the bill to describe the particular individuals who would be able to make decisions regarding compelling to a mental crisis facility.

- Allow EMS and EMS professionals to make decisions and compel individuals to mental crisis facilities

Expand the term “mental health professionals” within the bill to describe the particular individuals who would be able to make decisions regarding compelling to a mental crisis facility.

- Changing the definition of mental health professional by adding psychologists, LPCs, social workers and those who have the necessary licenses listed in the chapters and code.
 - This would allow entities to quickly obtain/provide the required evaluation and assistance

Conclusion

The City of Houston is dedicated to addressing the root causes of homelessness, balancing compassion with enforcement, and working closely with local and state partners. We acknowledge that the success of our initiatives and programs will help support a legislative framework that allows cities the flexibility to adopt solutions that meet the unique needs of their communities.

Finally, I want to extend our availability as a resource to the committee. If you are interested in learning more about our programs or would like to tour our facilities, we welcome the opportunity to meet with you individually. Together, we can build a more resilient, compassionate Texas where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

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