



The Senate of The State of Texas

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January 17, 2019

The Honorable Lina Hidalgo
Harris County Judge
1001 Preston Street, Suite 911
Houston, Texas 77002

Dear Judge Hidalgo:

I write you today with great urgency regarding the current state of the Harris County Jail. As I am sure you are aware, there was another suicide earlier this week in the facility which is under the supervision of Sheriff Ed Gonzalez. This brings the tragic uptick in suicides to a total of five since January 2017. It is apparent that mismanagement by the current jail administration continues to be an epidemic that jeopardizes the safety and well-being of our fellow citizens who find themselves housed in the Harris County Jail.

Another issue of great concern is the number of inmates currently being housed outside of Harris County while they await their day in court. Currently, over 400 individuals are being detained in private, for-profit facilities, some of which are located three hours from Houston. This outsourcing not only separates individuals from their families and support systems, but also prevents them from having direct access to their constitutionally-afforded legal representation.


In addition, the most recent inspection exposed the unsanitary and unhealthy conditions that exist inside the facility. The photographic evidence I have seen from that inspection is appalling. The Harris County Jail was deemed non-compliant in five out of six inspections since Sheriff Gonzalez began supervising the facility.

These shortcomings have caused me to consider legislation that would create a mechanism for the State of Texas to intervene in the management and operations of jail facilities that have demonstrated an inability to provide the protection and safety that all citizens of Texas deserve. I am currently working with the Jail Standards Commission and other state agencies to find a solution to address this persistent problem.



I urge you and your colleagues to promptly evaluate these issues surrounding the operation of the Harris County Jail and take immediate action to correct the widespread mismanagement of the facility. I remain committed to working with you, the Commissioners Court, Sheriff Gonzalez, District Attorney Kim Ogg and our judiciary to bring the Harris County Jail into compliance with acceptable standards and practices.

Sincerely,



John Whitmire

cc: Commissioner R. Jack Cagle
Commissioner Rodney Ellis
Commissioner Adrian Garcia
Commissioner Steve Radack
Sheriff Ed Gonzalez
District Attorney Kim Ogg
The Honorable Maria T. Jackson
The Honorable Darrell Jordan
Brandon Wood