

May 17, 2017

Dear Chairman LaFleur and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

The undersigned organizations are writing to express our opposition to the deep cuts to the Louisiana Department of Health included in House Bill 1 as passed by the House of Representatives. The cuts are irresponsible and will have real and harmful impacts on the lives of your constituents and the state as a whole.

The cuts to LDH in the House budget put the health of all Louisianans at risk, but especially the most vulnerable. Children with behavioral disorders, seniors receiving home health care, and pregnant mothers at risk of contracting the Zika virus are just a few examples of Louisianans who could suffer under the cuts.

The \$237 million decrease in state general funds for LDH is the equivalent of 13 percent of the department's discretionary state funding. The cut also would lead to the loss of an additional \$500 million in federal funding for Louisiana. A loss of three-quarters of a billion dollars means elimination of entire health programs, not just trimming around the edges. Not only would the cuts made by the House end vital health programs, they also would lead to a substantial loss of jobs and economic activity.

The state legislature has the responsibility of ensuring the general health and welfare of the people of Louisiana, and we believe that haphazardly cutting funding from the Louisiana Department of Health is a dereliction of duty. If the Senate does not reverse the cuts made in the House, the Legislature could end up being responsible for an uncontrolled Zika outbreak, increased suicide among children whose therapy services are eliminated, and the deaths of elderly individuals who can no longer afford their medicine. Children may lose access to primary care at school-based health centers. All of those consequences could be avoided by the simple decision to not leave money in the bank that should be invested in vital health services.

Revenue projections show the state has the ability to make these critical investments in fiscal year 2018. We believe it is unacceptable to allow Louisianans to suffer simply because some believe the projections may not be accurate. Ultimately, the legislature controls both how much revenue the state brings in and how much it spends, so the responsibility of crafting a budget that is both adequate and balanced falls upon the body.

We urge you to protect the health and welfare of the state by fully reversing the unnecessary and crippling cuts to the Louisiana Department of Health.

Sincerely,

Jan Moller, Louisiana Budget Project

Sherry Guarisco, Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families

Joseph Kimbrell, Louisiana Public Health Institute

Susan Meyers, Advocacy Center of Louisiana

Carmen Weisner, National Association of Social Workers, Louisiana

Alma Stewart, Louisiana Center for Health Equity

Susan Todd, 504HealthNet

Sarah Omojola, Southern Poverty Law Center

Carol DeVille, League of Women Voters of Louisiana

Lydia Kuykendal, American Cancer Society – Cancer Action Network

Rev. Fred Kammer, SJ, Jesuit Social Research Institute

Cashuana Hill, Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center

Lynda Woolard, Independent Women’s Organization

Cindy Bishop, Checkmate Strategies

Michelle Erenberg, National Council of Jewish Women, New Orleans

Dr. Alecia Cyprian, Southeast Community Health Systems

Noel Twilbeck, Crescent Care

Tamara Pierre, Priority Health Care

Diem Nguyen, New Orleans East Louisiana Community Health Center

Angela Adkins, Louisiana NOW

Matthew Valliere, CareSouth Medicaid & Dental

Mark A. Brown, Premier Rehab of Southwest Louisiana, LLC

DeAdrian Alexander Ficklin, Provision Rehab, LLC

Yuvonka A. Brown, Journey Rehab

Deano Thornton, Winn, Grant, Bienville, and Lincoln Community Health Centers

Tim Young, Open Health Care Clinic