



House Subcommittee on Disease Prevention and Women's and Children's Health
Testimony of the Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition
In Support of House Bill 1786
April 17, 2025

The **Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition (TWHC)** is grateful for this opportunity to provide written and oral testimony in **support of House Bill 1786** by Representative Donna Howard. This bill would reinstate the Women's Health Advisory Committee (WHAC), a decommissioned Texas Health and Human Services (HHSC) committee that oversaw the establishment and implementation of the state's women's health programs.

TWHC is a group of 77 healthcare, faith, and community-based member organizations - dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Texas women, babies, and families by ensuring access to preventive healthcare for all Texas women. Access to preventive and preconception care – including health screenings and contraception – means healthy, planned pregnancies and the early detection of cancers and other treatable conditions.

In alignment with this mission, we wish to reiterate our support for HB 1786 - as it would help HHSC tackle the significant logistical problems currently faced by WHP providers, and it would ensure that Texas women have adequate access to women's healthcare services across the state. HB 1786 provides an opportunity for Texas agency staff and healthcare providers to collaborate and address the root causes of Texas' maternal mortality crisis.

In 2015, the 84th Regular Texas Legislature chose to consolidate the the state's family planning programs from three (the Expanded Primary Health Care Program, the Texas Women's Health Program, and the Family Planning Program), into two (the Healthy Texas Women Program, and the Family Planning Program).¹ The Women's Health Advisory Committee (WHAC) was created by an amendment to SB 200 that same year, to provide HHSC with recommendations on the development of the new family planning programs. It was composed of healthcare providers from separate geographic areas of the state who have experience in operating women's health programs. Unfortunately, the WHAC was dismantled in 2017, due to a pre-set committee expiration date.² Yet while the committee overseeing Texas' family planning programs came to a close, the logistical problems faced by these programs have not gone away - and need to be addressed.

Today, Texas has three limited-benefit programs that provide critical preventive health care to low-income Texas women (and some men) - the Healthy Texas Women Program (HTW and HTW Plus),

¹ Ura, Alexa. Two State Women's Health Programs to Consolidate in July, The Texas Tribune, 23 Sept. 2015.

² Novack, Sophie. Governor Greg Abbott Vetoes Women's Health Committee Despite Ongoing Crises, The Texas Observer, 15 June 2017.

the Family Planning Program (FPP), and the Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening program (BCCS). They provide life-saving services including birth control, chronic disease testing and treatment, cancer screenings, postpartum mental health treatment, and referrals to other healthcare programs for more complex concerns. The programs play an essential role in Texans' healthcare, as roughly 1 in 4 Texas women are uninsured and rely on safety net programs to access basic healthcare services.³ HTW, FPP, and BCCS providers are often the only healthcare providers that uninsured Texas women see, and the demand for their services is great. 288,716 patients received services from HTW, FPP, and BCCS providers in Fiscal Year 2023. Out of these patients, roughly 105,000 received birth control, and 32,000 received mammograms.⁴

Greater support and dedicated oversight of Texas' women's health programs is much needed, as Texas is currently facing a perfect storm in terms of maternal health.

Our state holds a significantly high maternal mortality rate of 28.2 deaths of birthing mothers per 100,000 births. Texas also has a high rate of cesarean section procedures for first-time mothers (comprising 27.8% of all first-time births in the state) and a high rate of preterm births (with 11.1% of Texas live births being preterm).⁵ Additionally, a 2024 report conducted by Texas' Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee (MMMRC) found that the majority of pregnancy-related deaths in Texas are preventable, and 25% of the pregnancy-related deaths in 2020 occurred between 43 days and one year postpartum.⁶

At the same time, Texas does not currently have enough resources to support the women who are most at risk for these adverse birth and pregnancy outcomes. Maternity care deserts, or areas without access to birthing facilities or maternity care providers, are growing in the state. According to March of Dimes' 2023 Maternity Care Deserts Report for Texas, 46.5% of our counties are defined as maternity care deserts, compared to the national average of 32.6%. 4.1% of all Texas babies are born in maternity care deserts, and 20.4% of patients in Texas claim to have received no or inadequate prenatal care.⁷ And finally, 5.8 million of our citizens live in some type of contraceptive desert, which are defined as counties where the number of healthcare centers offering the full range of methods is not enough to meet the needs of the county's number of women eligible for contraception.⁸

³ "Uninsured Women: Texas, 2011-2021." PeriStats, March of Dimes, Apr. 2025.

⁴ Texas Women's Health Programs Report Fiscal Year 2023, Texas Health and Human Services, Aug. 2024.

⁵ 2024 March of Dimes Report Card for Texas, March of Dimes, 2024.

⁶ Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee and Department of State Health Services Joint Biennial Report 2024, Texas Health and Human Services, Sep. 2024.

⁷ Where You Live Matters: Maternity Care in Texas, March of Dimes, 2023.

⁸ Kreitzer, Rebecca J et al. "Affordable but Inaccessible? Contraception Deserts in the US States." *Journal of health politics, policy and law* vol. 46,2 (2021): 277-304. doi:10.1215/03616878-8802186.



**Texas Women's
Healthcare Coalition**

PROMOTING ACCESS TO PREVENTIVE
HEALTHCARE FOR ALL TEXAS WOMEN

Since the closure of the WHAC in 2017, women's health program providers have turned to us, the Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition (TWHC), to host regular meetings, facilitate discussions between providers and HHSC staff, and provide technical assistance on logistical issues. While TWHC is happy to support the women's health programs and its providers, we believe more could be done if the WHAC was reinstated and served this role as mediator once again.

TWHC staff can say firsthand that the HTW, FPP, and BCCS providers across Texas are facing significant challenges in their ability to enroll patients into the women's health programs, maintain the staffing and resources needed to accommodate growing patient demand, troubleshoot administrative issues with agency systems, and receive reimbursements from the state for the program services they provide. By passing HB 1786 and reinstating the WHAC, this committee would allow women's healthcare providers to make their voices heard, and put them in the best position to take care of women all across Texas.

TWHC is eager to help with these issues, and we are happy to provide any additional information on this topic.

Respectfully,
Rachel Wolleben
Policy Coordinator
Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition