



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

March 19, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
PO Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Governor Abbott:

Texas has recently been the epicenter of the nation in rural hospital closures. This can largely be attributed to the financial strain associated with diminishing reimbursements, dwindling revenues, and the ever-increasing cost of care. The closure of a hospital in a rural community is dramatic as it often eliminates the only access to healthcare for many miles around and further impacts the local economy when businesses relocate to areas with access to healthcare. Additional rural hospital closures are something that rural Texans cannot afford, especially during these unprecedented times.

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the circumstances that the 163 rural hospitals in Texas will face will test their staffing, equipment, and financial capacity and I fear will only hasten the closure of many struggling facilities. The lift that will be placed upon these facilities in preparing for, and treating, this pandemic is substantial, and it is one that most rural hospitals are not readily able to address unless drastic measures are put into place.

The State Office of Rural Health (SORH), located within the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), is a focal point within the state for rural health. As such, the SORH has been in constant communication with stakeholders and leaders of rural hospitals during these times to assess the situation and to assist in any way that is possible; however, there is only limited assistance that the SORH can provide with current resources.

TDA respectfully requests additional emergency funding in the amount of \$40,750,000 (163 x \$250,000) to assist rural Texas hospitals in preparing for, and addressing, the current COVID-19 pandemic. This funding will not only help the facilities serve their communities in a more effective manner during these times, it will undoubtedly alleviate some of the financial strain that will potentially shutter numerous rural hospitals. Additionally, in the event the number of urban cases needing medical care outnumber available beds, rural hospitals sufficiently equipped and staffed may be able to provide relief to their urban counterparts.

Thank you for your leadership during this crisis and your consideration of this urgent request. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,

Sid Miller
Commissioner