

News

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*****Public health officials to testify in public hearing before senate panel at UTHSCD April 24.

DALLAS--City, county and state public health officials are scheduled to testify before a State Senate Subcommittee in Dallas April 24, and submit their viewpoints on a package of proposals designed to strengthen the operations of local health departments that utilize state funding.

The public hearing to be held at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas, 5323 Harry Hines Boulevard, is the fourth in a series of hearings being conducted statewide by the Public Health Subcommittee.

Among those officials scheduled to attend from counties in the North Central Texas region are directors of the health departments in the cities of Fort Worth and Dallas and in Dallas and Tarrant Counties. Dr. Robert Bernstein, commissioner of the State Department of Health, has also notified the subcommittee that he plans to attend the meeting.

Sen. Gene Jones of Houston, subcommittee chairman, explained that the 66th Legislature had instructed the panel to closely analyze and refine a raft of proposals that are contained in the "Steering Committee Study of Local Health Departments" completed by the State Department of Health in 1978, before making recommendations to the members of the 67th Texas Legislature.

The statewide hearings are specifically designed to give a forum to directors, nurses and other personnel of local departments, whose operations will be strongly influenced by legislative recommendations.

From among the numerous complexities involved in the operations of local health departments, the subcommittee has focused its review and efforts within two major categories:

--First, the development and refinement of a basic slate of public health programs that should be expected of a minimal sized health department, and the make-up of a minimal sized staff to deliver that level of service.

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--Second, the formulation of a uniform funding mechanism to channel the state supporting funds to local participating health departments to most effectively bolster their operations, including adjusting factors based on the "ability-to-pay" factor of the different communities.

Jones said the study is vital to the "total health care picture in Texas because in the past decade we have had a concentration of effort and financial support for the regional health systems, during which time the 68 state participating local health departments have been to some extent neglected." About 81 percent of the state's population resides in the 75 counties within the jurisdiction of the 68 departments, Jones noted, which underscores the importance of strengthening their base of operations.

With the prospect that a substantial portion of the 314d funds contributed by Congress to the state which are used for support of the locals might be eliminated because of President Carter's budget cuts, it is imperative that the state health dollars are spent most effectively, the subcommittee chairman noted.

City and county health officials invited to testify before the panel include: Dr. Marjorie Sewell, Dallas County Health Department; Dr. E. Lowell Berry, Dallas City Health Department; Dr. W.V. Bradshaw, Fort Worth Health Department; and the Tarrant County Health Department.

Also, Dr. Lanie Benson, Wichita Falls-Wichita County Department; Dr. Mack Hill, McKinney-Tollin County Department; Dr. Joe Hillhouse, Paris-Lamar County Health Department; Dr. Will Miller, Corsicana-Navarro County Health Department; and Dr. Mary Jo Tonelli, Denison-Sherman-Grayson County Health Department.

From the Denton City-County Health Department, Dr. James Jones; Greenville-Hunt County Health Department, Dr. C.C. Sheldon.

Senator Bill Braecklein of Dallas will chair the hearing, to begin at 9:30 a.m., in the Zale Lecture Hall (Room DI.600).

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