

**TESTIMONY OF RENÉ LARA
ON BEHALF OF THE TEXAS FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
REGARDING SB 221 BY SENATOR JUDITH ZAFFIRINI
March 22, 2005**

The 51,000 TFT/AFT members we represent statewide include public school nurses. They are a critical part of school staff because child safety depends on the availability of a professional who can deal with illness and other medical emergencies at a school campus. That is why our organization supports the goal of providing schoolchildren a nurse at every campus and notifying parents when that is not the case.

The draft Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 221 by Senator Zaffirini would authorize a child to self-administer medication at a school for severe allergic reactions known as anaphylaxis, under very specific conditions. Self-administration of medicine is already allowed in the case of asthma medication. In addition, we have been advised that SB 221 would make it easier for Texas to obtain federal funding under the Asthmatic Schoolchildren's Treatment and Health Management Act of 2004.

Before we authorize little children to self-medicate, however, not only the student's physician but also the school nurse ought to approve the self-medication. A doctor prescribing medication for a child whose parent is present is not necessarily aware of that child's behavior in a school environment. Very young children may be incapable of telling time, for example. They may lack the maturity to comply with prescriptions or they might just be forgetful.

We applaud Senator Zaffirini for her efforts to provide schoolchildren access to adequate medical care, not only under this bill but also under the CHIP and Medicaid programs.

Texas, representing the 11th largest economy in the world, ought to be able to provide health insurance to all our children and to provide a school nurse in every campus. We should not take the easier but less safe road, which is to rely on unlicensed personnel for the diagnosis of illness or the administration of potentially dangerous medication to children. You may encounter proposals that would require regular school employees to take on medical tasks such as giving insulin injections to kids. This approach would create bigger problems than it seeks to address.

Thank you for your time.