

Dear Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding SB 1000. I am the mother of a three-year-old son [REDACTED] who is diagnosed with Autism. I am also a former special education teacher in the public school system, and I am opposed to SB 1000 for a multitude of reasons.

As both a parent of a child with Autism and a special education teacher, I understand the dire need for appropriate services in our state's special education programs. However, rather than improving and developing the current programs, SB 1000 sends tax-payer money to private schools. Public tax dollars should be spent funding public schools, not private schools. There is much work to be done to improve special education programs in Texas public schools, and it is a shame that valuable time and resources are being spent on a proposal that diverts money and attention away from our public school system.

Shifting tax dollars to private unregulated institutions would do more harm than good. "A qualifying school that accepts funding under this subchapter is not an agent or arm of the state or federal government." This would exempt these "qualifying" schools from responsibilities under the Texas Public Information Act and can be a potential problem when it comes to accountability concerns. These vouchers will also not make anyone accountable to FAPE, a free appropriate public education, one of the key parts of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

If we can not afford to place our children in full-time private school now, vouchers will not enable us to do so. Vouchers will only help a limited amount of people, mainly wealthy families, while undermining our public schools. The only people that will benefit from this bill are those that can already afford extensive private therapy.

The Legislature should be working to provide all students with Autism the opportunity to receive an excellent education. Appropriate and excellent programs should already exist within each district. If these services do not exist, why aren't we working to correct and create these necessary programs instead of finding yet another way to funnel tax dollars into private enterprises? If Senator Shapiro is legitimately concerned about helping *all* children with Autism, it would only make sense to fully fund the public schools, allowing them to provide the necessary resources that our children with Autism need in order to be successful.

The Special Education Initiatives are an appropriate alternative to vouchers and take into consideration the importance of providing help for all of our students, including those with Autism and special needs. The focus in these bills is to help all students with disabilities instead of draining precious resources out of the public schools. I am in strong support of this valuable package of special education initiatives.

Please help those of us that have no other option but to educate our children with Autism in our public school system by voting against SB 1000 and in favor of the bills proposing improvements in special education. The special education initiatives are a necessary and vital alternative to vouchers.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
(mother to [REDACTED] 3 years-old, diagnose with Autism)

March 26, 2007

The Senate Education Committee
P.O. Box 12068
Capitol Station
Austin, Texas 78711

Re: Statement In Opposition of Texas Senate Bill 1000 for educating children with autism

Dear Senators:

I oppose Senate Bill 1000 to create an Autism Services Accessibility Program (ASAP) in Texas.

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Dear Senators:

Hello my name is [REDACTED] I am a parent from the [REDACTED] Independent School District. Why are we here? Why am I here? I am the father of a special needs child. My son happens to be autistic.

I had thought to move into a "richer" school district but, was talked out of that by a friend. Would a richer school district provide better services than what he receives now...no. Would a private school provide him with better services?, better yet....would a private school provide any services at all. Sadly, only with a huge price tag otherwise the answer is no. I could have sent my son to a private school but, that would have caused more damage than good because private schools might not accept him nor would they meet his needs in the first place. Vouchers provide only partial assistance. My son is now receiving the best service a child with challenges can have. *Modified curriculum, comprehension training, band instruction, occupational therapy, Speech therapy, only to name a few.* You see a private school will take a voucher, seems innocent enough. However a private school does not guarantee a better education, it only purports to be better.

In the [REDACTED] Independent School District, a child could be accepted into a voucher program, although acceptance to a private school is not guaranteed. Vouchers exert an enormous financial drain on many of our public schools that accept all students seeking an education. They are like a tear in the fabric of our goals to educate our children. These self-serving private schools are just that self-serving. Private schools do not abide by the Law. Private schools are not bound by TEA and IDEA, and neither parent nor student has any recourse to challenge denial of service. A private school will invoke the right to discriminate against any student including disabled students. These private schools are a business and business is interested in only one thing profits. Profits at our expense.....with no guarantee of a better education. We the parents, teachers and administrators also have an interest in profits, that is.... profits that cannot be counted in dollars and cents. And for us the greatest reality is to insure that our children receive the best that our public education system can provide. If you have seen people who advocate "TEXANS FOR SCHOOL CHOICE" then you have been erroneously misled. Do not be deceived.....private schools do not promise a choice. The final decision is not in the hands of the parents, rather it is in the hands of private business. So I ask you, do parents have a choice in a voucher program?, absolutely not. It is time to end this pillage of our public education system, and work instead to provide the resources that will STRENGTHEN TEXAS PUBLIC EDUCATION SO THAT ALL CHILDREN WILL HAVE AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TO AN EDUCATION. Let it be known that we will not go silently into the night!.....we will aggressively defend what rightfully belongs to our posterity and ourselves. **SO SAY WE ALL"**

Thank You,

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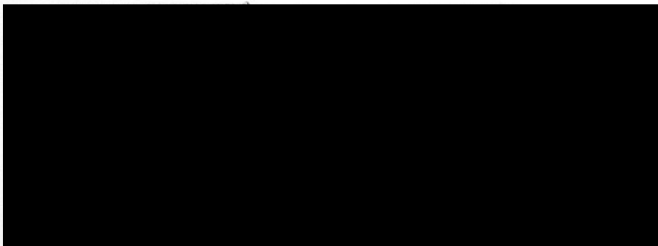
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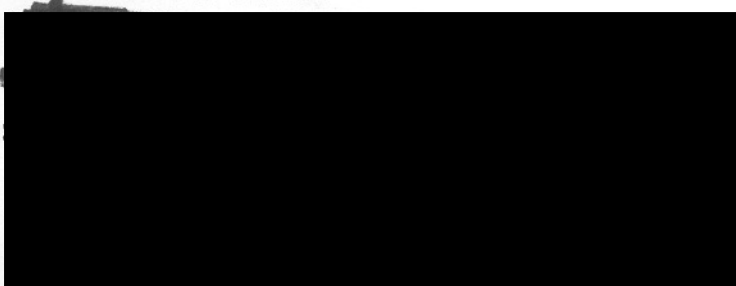
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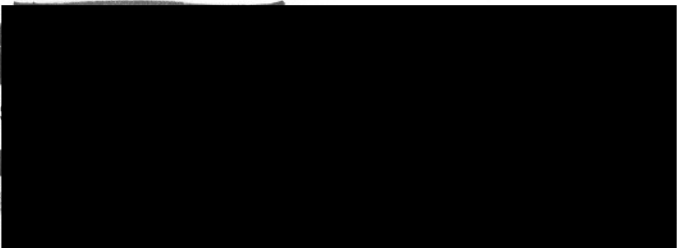
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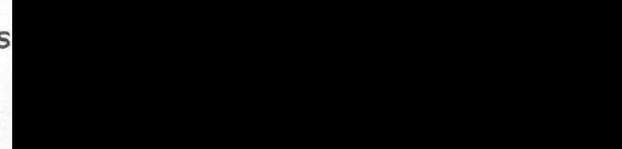
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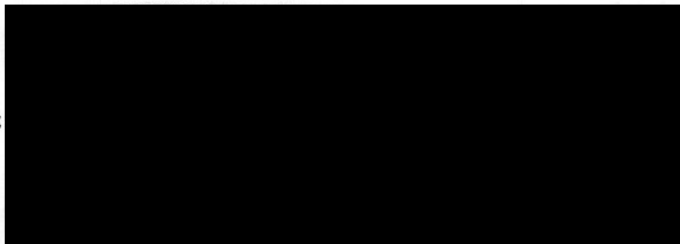
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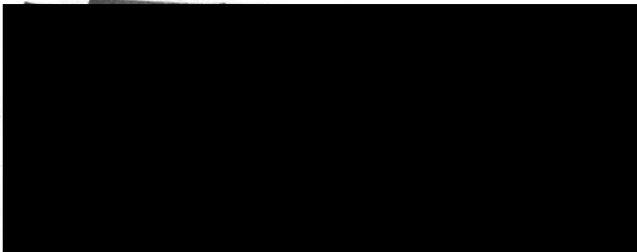
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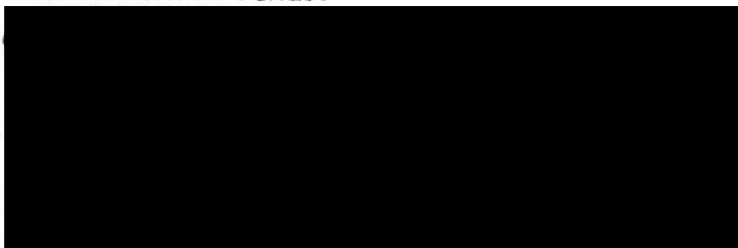
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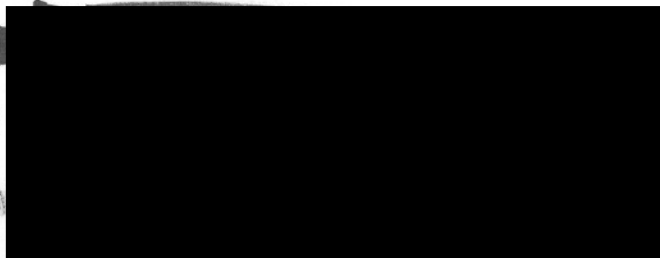
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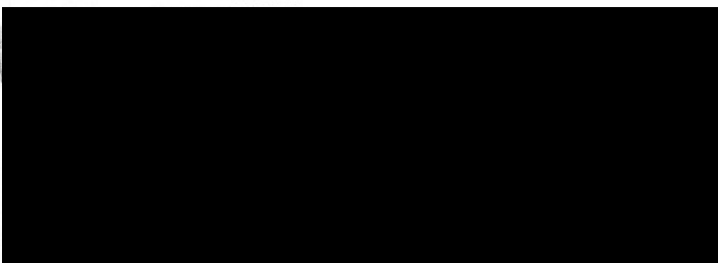
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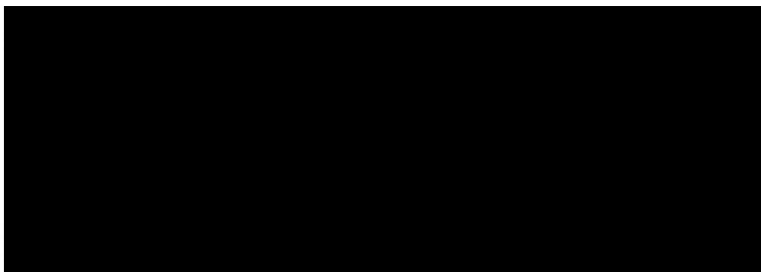
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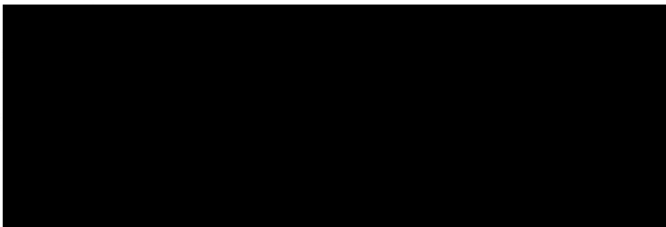
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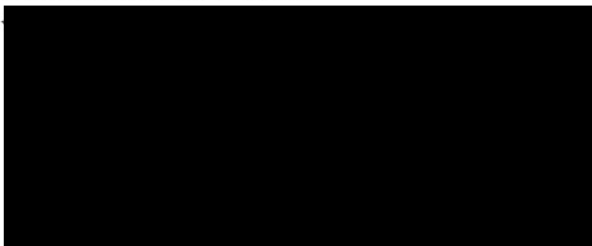
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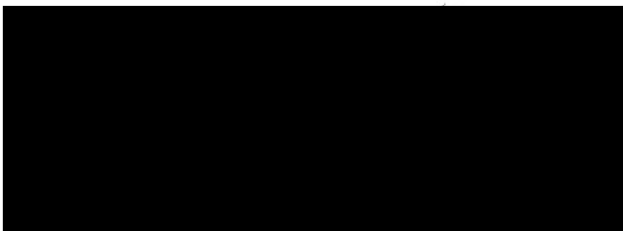
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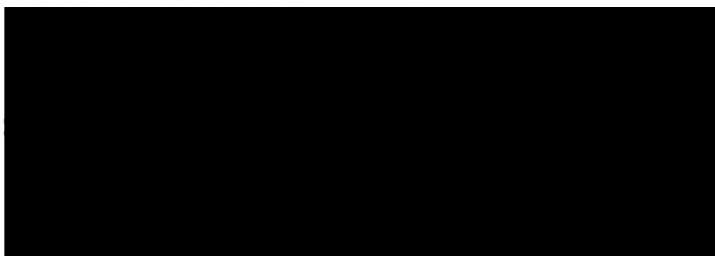
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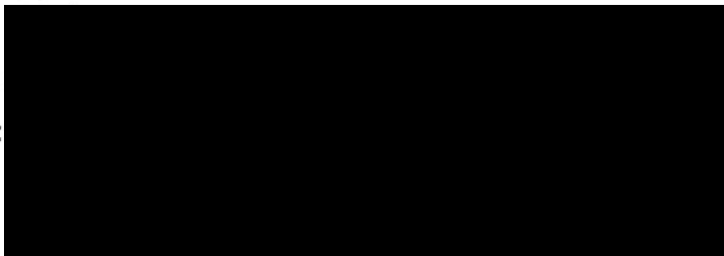
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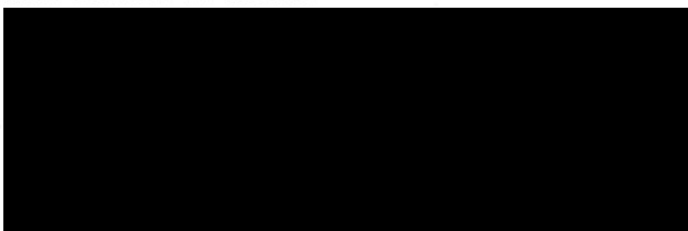
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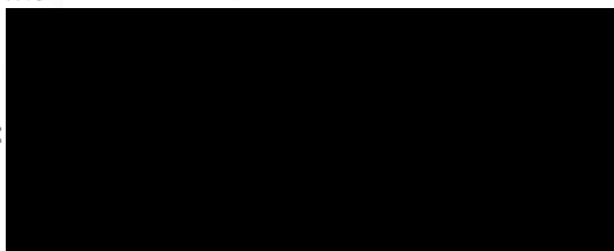
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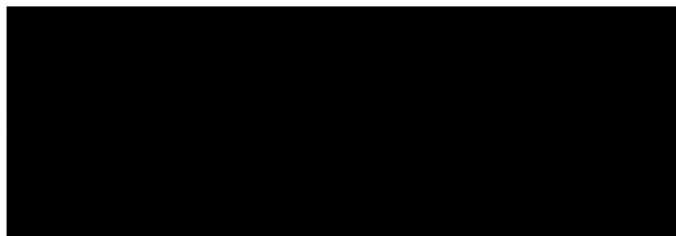
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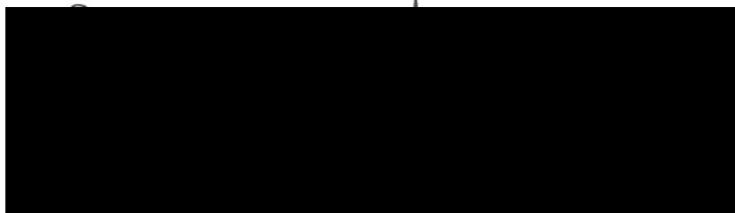
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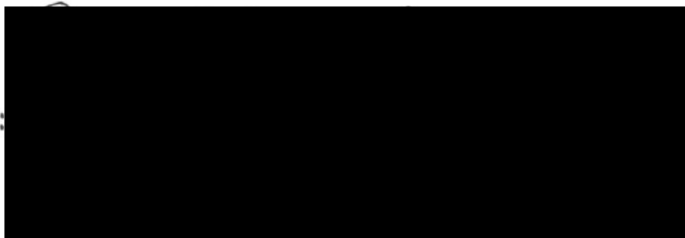
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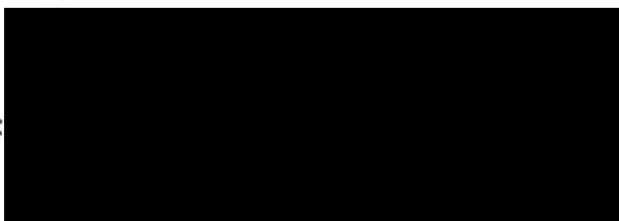
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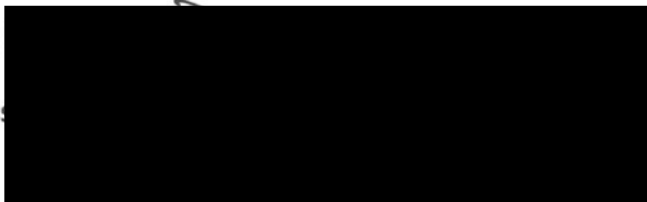
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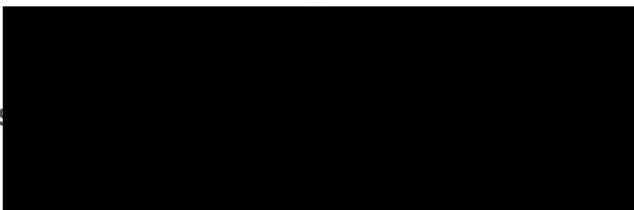
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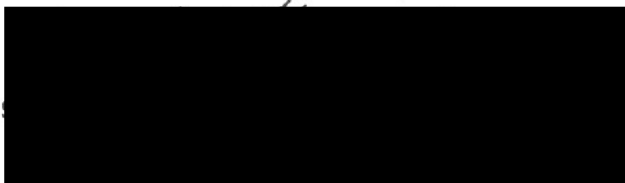
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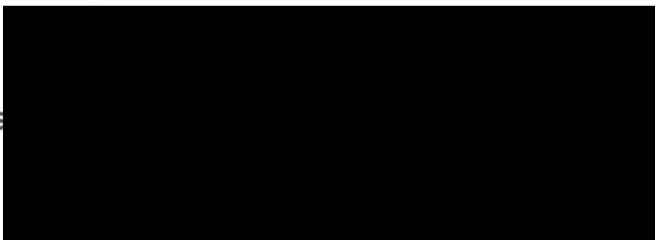
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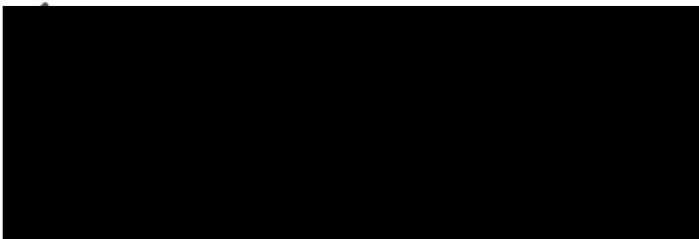
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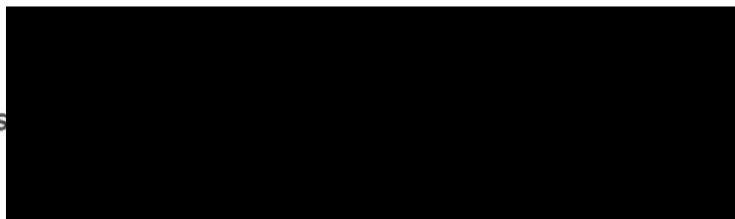
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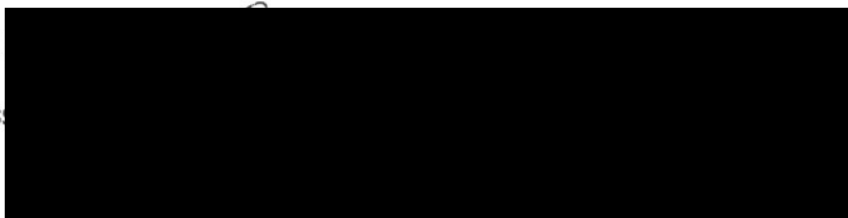
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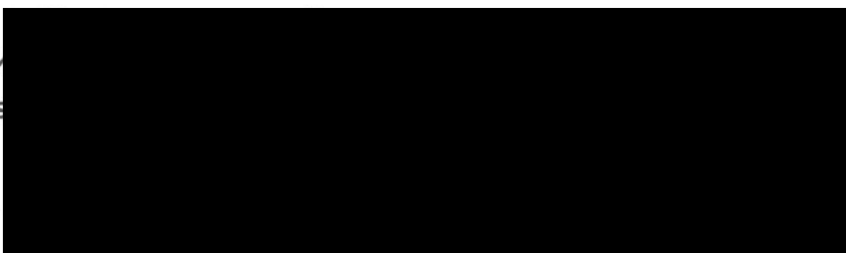
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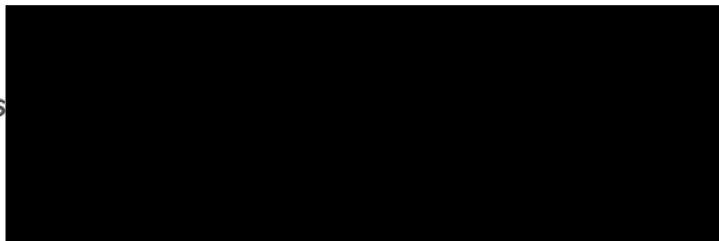
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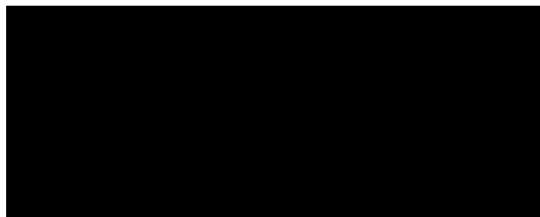
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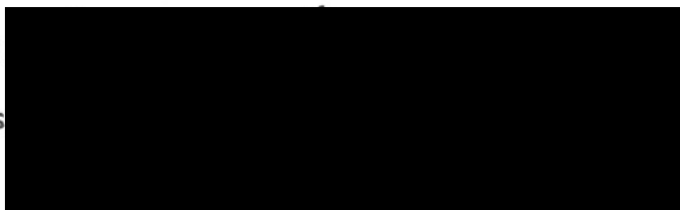
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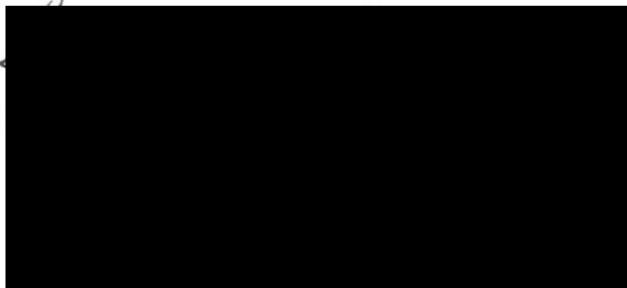
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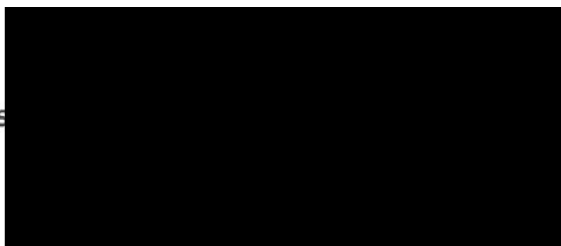
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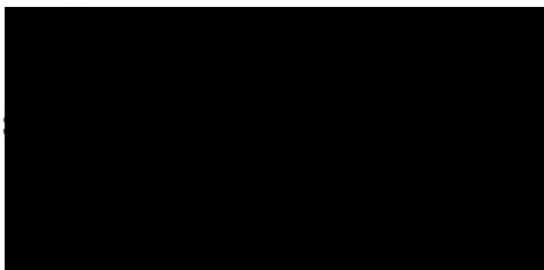
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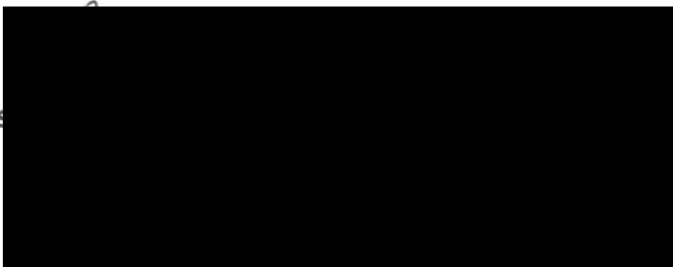
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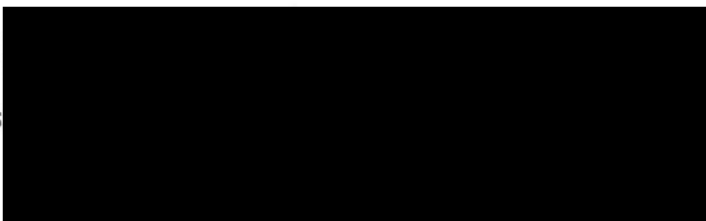
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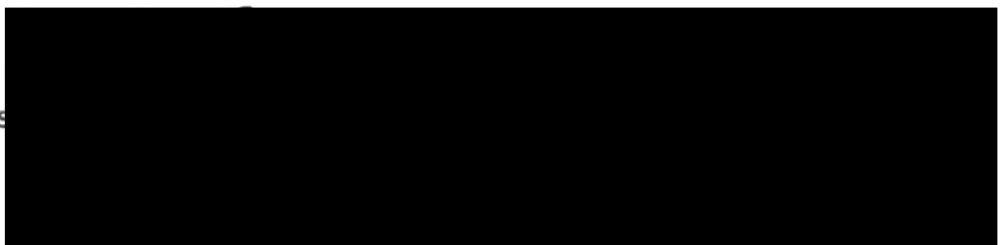
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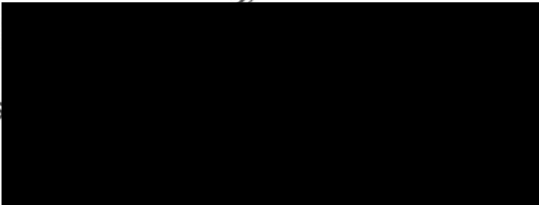
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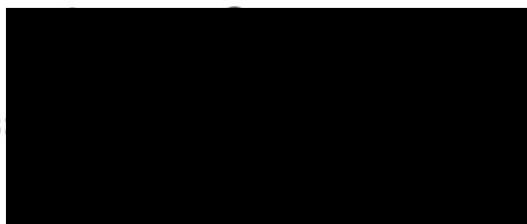
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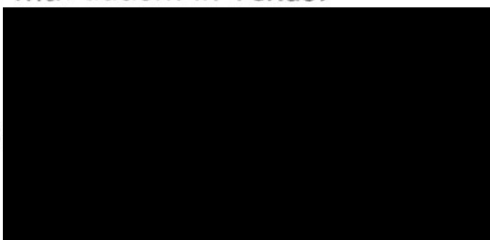
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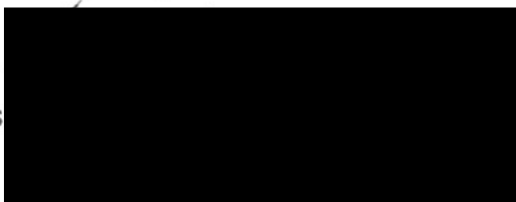
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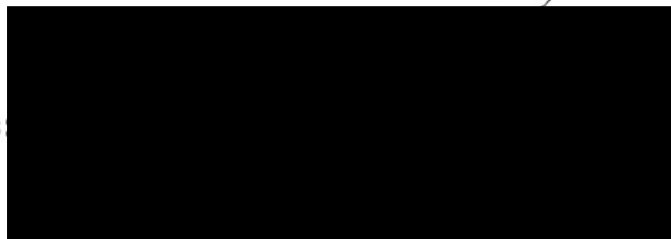
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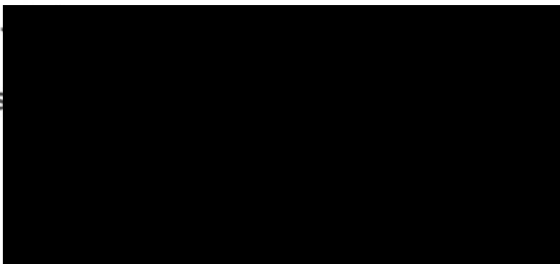
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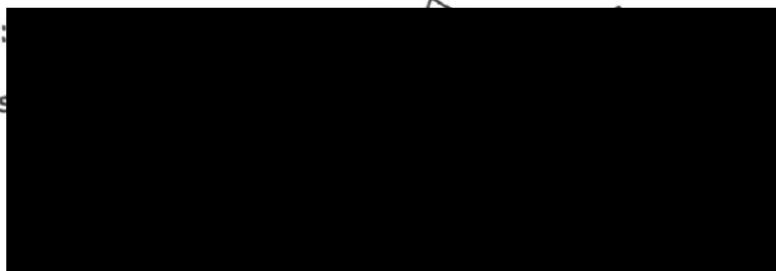
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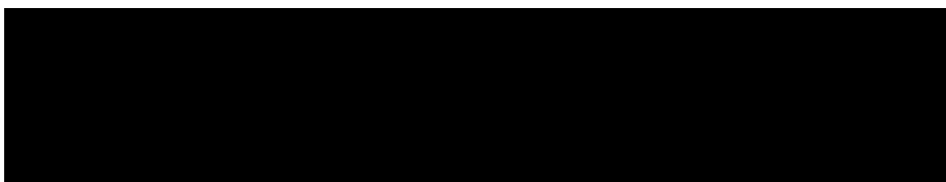
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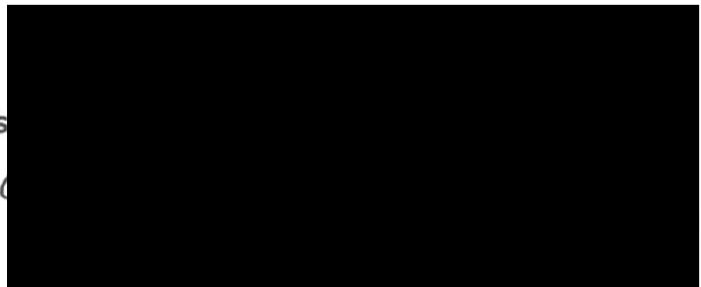
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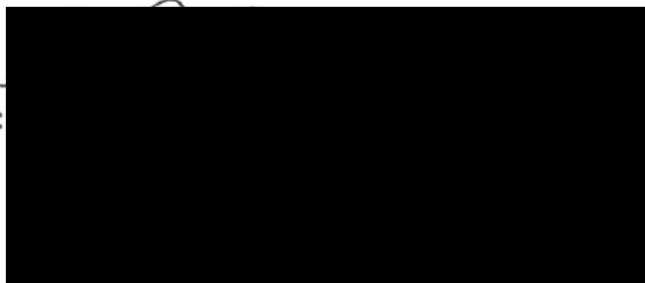
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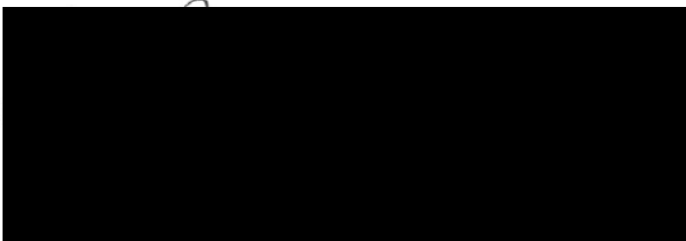
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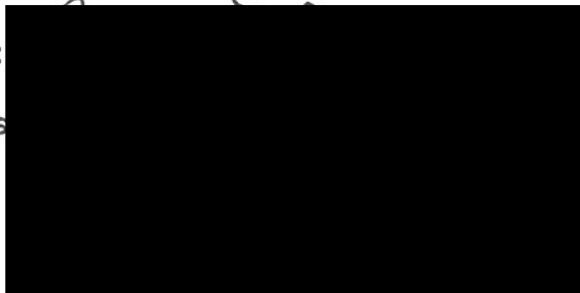
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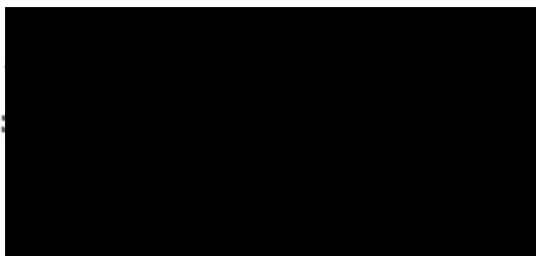
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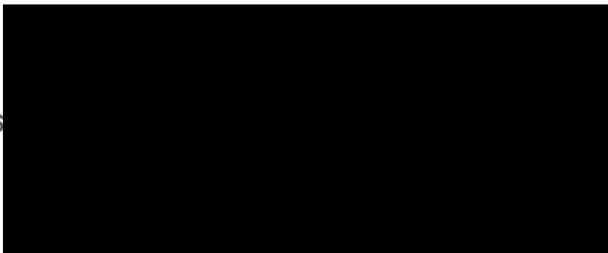
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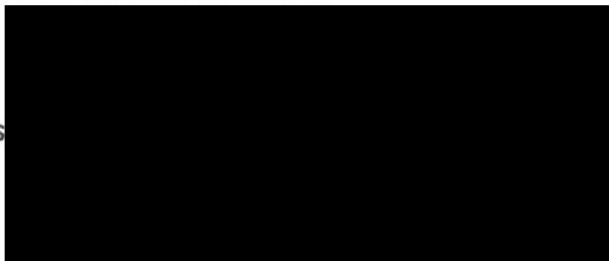
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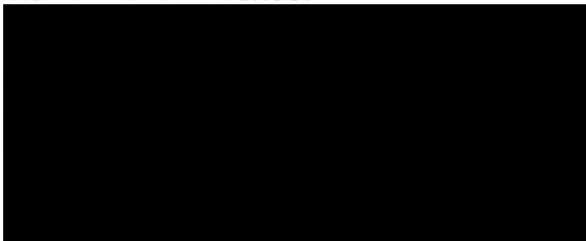
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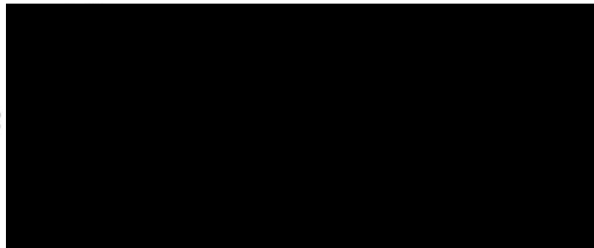
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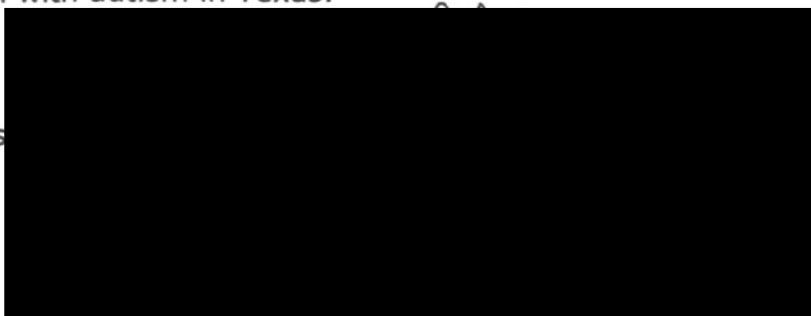
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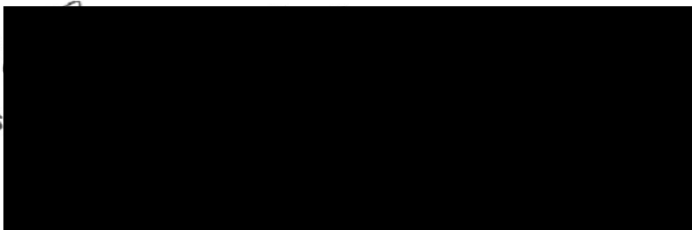
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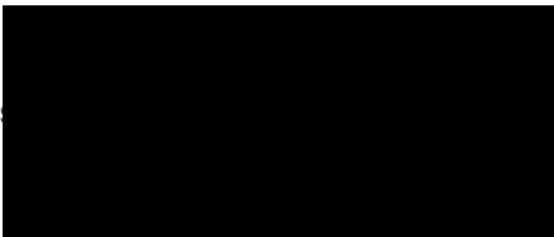
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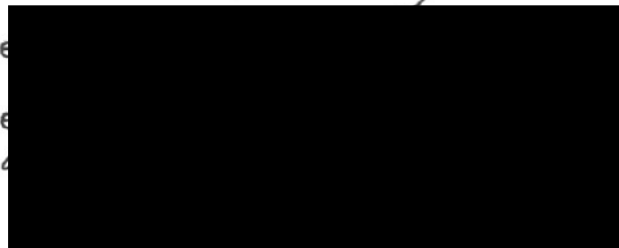
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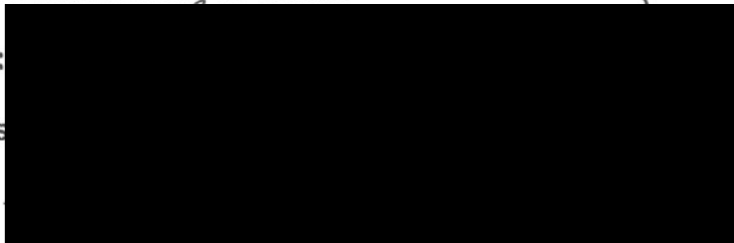
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